

## THE CALL FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY: IS ANYBODY LISTENING?

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In time of war, the need for students to be aware of their place in the global community becomes obvious both to those who educate them and to the students themselves. In times of peace, however, when we are less drawn to events well beyond our back door, an appreciation for the need of education to include the exigencies of people in other parts of the world is less forthcoming.

The role of the University in encouraging, developing, and sustaining an awareness and appreciation of the international dimension of American lives is obviously critical. With the coming of the Persian Gulf War, "teach-ins" and other events to focus attention on various aspects of this international crisis have begun. But such an international focus should not just be catalyzed by wars; in a sense, that is too late. Then what are the prospects for developing an increased international awareness among students in American institutions of higher education?

Addressing this question was the task undertaken in April, 1990 by a group of faculty at the University of Southern Maine. Recognizing the importance of increased attention to international issues, the Provost of the University established an Advisory Committee on International Academic Programs in 1989 to advise the Administration on ways that international education and services could be expanded and improved. In one of its first acts, this Committee decided to assess the level of interest and need among students for an increased international focus in USM's various curricula.

Planning new endeavors in internationalization would have been little more than preaching to the choir were there not some sense of what the larger interests in internationalization might be. For this reason a Student Global Interest Survey was created and administered by the Committee. (The Questionnaire follows this article.)

### THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

The University of Southern Maine is a 10,000 student metropolitan university with campuses in Portland, Gorham, and Lewiston, Maine. An amalgam of higher education institutions dating back to 1878, USM is the second largest of the seven campuses in the University of Maine System. It has seven academic units and offers three associate, thirty-seven baccalaureate, and eleven graduate and professional degrees.

Located in the largest city and largest county in Maine, USM has the most diverse student body of any of the universities in the state. Fifty-seven percent of the students are women, and the average age of the student body is 26, reflecting the large proportion of "nontraditional" students enrolled in programs. Most students hold jobs, and many support themselves and their families. Commuters comprise nearly ninety percent of the student population.

USM has a growing and active international component as well. Exchange programs exist with universities in the U.K., Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, the U.S.S.R., Brazil, and Japan and a small number of foreign students are enrolled at the University.

### METHODOLOGY

Questions were generated primarily by the first author of this paper, and refined based on feedback from the Advisory Committee members. As with any survey, there was a necessary trade-off between the brevity needed to make administration of the survey manageable and the completeness desired to identify and analyze information. The questionnaire ultimately developed consisted of 10 principal questions, plus information about certain characteristics of each respondent. The questions were all designed to be answered on a computer-scannable form that could be read by the University's testing service.

In drawing a statistically valid random sample of students in a University such as USM, a significant challenge exists since so small a proportion actually live on campus. For this reason, it was decided to base the sample on the one point of interaction common to all students: the classroom. A listing of all courses being offered by USM in the Spring, 1990 semester was obtained and randomly ordered. When enough courses had been contacted to generate a sample of 600 students (based on registered enrollments), the questionnaire was distributed. Faculty members were overwhelmingly cooperative in allowing their class time to be used for the survey.

The Global Interest Survey assessed opinions among a random sample of 491 students (268 women; 205 men). Traditional students, i.e. those 22 or younger and matriculated, comprised about 41% of the sample. Mature matriculated students, defined as above age 22, made up about 48% of the sample. The remaining 10% were special students who were not matriculated. The sample thus drawn was generally representative of USM's population in major characteristics.

### FINDINGS

The survey addressed interest level and commitment among students for the creation of a university atmosphere which would promote international awareness and knowledge of membership in a global community. The questions were analyzed to identify the students' attitudes towards international education. Simple frequency distributions were examined, and responses were compared with the following characteristics of respondents: gender, age, status (matriculated vs. non-matriculated), number of completed credit hours, year at the University, student's major area of interest.

The questions asked in the survey, and a discussion of the responses follows.

#### FINDINGS

##### 1. SHOULD THE UNIVERSITY MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL EFFORT TO PROMOTE AN INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS?

Sixty-one percent of the students were in very strong or strong agreement that the university should make development of global awareness a priority. Thirteen percent of students disagree with this view. Women were somewhat more likely to be strong advocates of this effort toward internationalization than men, none of the other sample characteristics had any significant influences on responses.

##### 2. HOW MUCH EXPOSURE TO AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE DO STUDENTS CURRENTLY RECEIVE THROUGH COURSEWORK WHICH FULFILLS MAJOR, CORE OR ELECTIVE REQUIREMENTS?

Half of the students sampled (53%) said that fewer than 5% of the courses they'd taken had an international focus as a primary perspective. Thirty percent reported that between 5 and 25% of the courses they had taken had a global emphasis. Sixteen percent report that a substantial part of their coursework offered a global perspective (more than 25% of the courses they'd taken).

Coursework is a source of an international perspective at USM since over half the students suggested that 5% or more of the courses they were currently involved with offered this point of view. However, coursework would seem to be under-utilized as a means of conveying this perspective since half of the students reported that a very small part of their course exposure (5% or less) included this orientation.

With respect to age, older students are more likely to have taken courses with an international focus.

##### 3. WHY SHOULD USM INTERNATIONALIZE CURRICULUM? HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING AS REASONS FOR PROMOTING GLOBAL AWARENESS?

- The Interdependent Nature of the Contemporary World
- The Reality and Press of the Nuclear Age
- Demands of the Job Market
- An Intrinsic Role in Becoming a Better Educated Person

The ranked order of importance of these items follows with mean student rating for each item on a scale of 1 (High in importance) to 5 (Low in importance) in parentheses:

1. The world has become an interdependent, global community. To be effective in it, students need this awareness. (1.8)
2. Having an international awareness is essential to being an educated person. (2.0)
3. A global or international focus provides skills useful in the work place or profession. (2.3)
4. We live in a nuclear age. (2.6)

Fourteen percent of the students thought an international curricular focus was important only if it had bearing on a student's major.

Of these justifications, only the first, "the interdependent and global community status of the world" showed a significant relationship with any of the independent variables. Older students accounted for a significant amount of the positive rating of this justification.

##### 4. HOW MANY ELECTIVES WHICH EMPHASIZE AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE WOULD STUDENTS TAKE ON THE BASIS OF PERSONAL INTEREST?

Fifteen percent of the students suggested they would take "as many courses as possible" offering a global perspective; 65% said they would take between 1 and 5 courses. In other words, 80% of USM students would take at least 1 global interest course based solely on personal interest. Twenty percent of those surveyed said they would not take any electives specifically because of this orientation. None of the explanatory factors contribute in a significant and independent way to a tendency to favor enrollment in this type of elective.

##### 5. HOW MANY CONVOCATION EVENTS, THE EMPHASIS OF WHICH IS LATIN AMERICA, DID STUDENTS ATTEND?

The USM Convocation is an annual series of events (lectures, seminars, exhibits, etc.) that is focused on a single theme or topic. From 1989-91, the convocation focused on three regions of the world: the Soviet Union, Latin America (the subject during 1990), and China. Sixty-six percent of students surveyed did not attend a single convocation event; about a third attended at least one; twenty percent saw two or more of the events. Again, none of the factors assessed reach a statistically meaningful level, although there is an indication that matriculated students are somewhat more likely to attend these events.

Respondents were asked to indicate interest in participating in on-campus curriculum development efforts, on-campus efforts to support international political concerns, on-campus support of international students and off-campus exposure to other cultures.

The next group of responses indicate students' interest in various specific "internationalization" efforts:

## 6. ON-CAMPUS CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Forty percent of the students surveyed suggested they would be strongly interested in completing an internship with an international company.

## 7. ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONCERNS

A third of the students expressed a strong interest in supporting groups which focus on global environmental concerns. Fully one fourth of this group of students have a strong interest in supporting groups addressing nuclear age concerns.

## 8. ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

About one fifth of students would strongly seek out interaction with USM students from other cultures; 17% said they would be willing to tutor foreign students.

## 9. OFF-CAMPUS EXPOSURE TO OTHER CULTURES

Forty percent of student respondents would like to study abroad. Over half (55%) surveyed would like to live or travel in a foreign country. Older students tended to be slightly more interested in supporting environmental groups, while women were more interested in joining nuclear age concern groups. Gender and matriculation status influenced student interest in completing internships with international companies, and both male students in general and non-matriculated students were more likely to demonstrate an interest in an internship with an international company. Male students were also somewhat more likely to express an interest in working with a government agency. Interest in other levels of involvement either on or off-campus did not vary systematically as a function of other student traits examined, which suggests that support for internationalizing USM is not limited to any one particular group.

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*Below is a sample of questions from the STUDENT SURVEY at USM that served as a basis for this report.*

In answering the following questions, please bear in mind that the term "INTERNATIONAL" is used to convey the sense that the university as an institution, and the students, faculty and staff as individuals, must have an awareness of their relations to the world beyond the borders of the United States and a capacity to shape them.

1. The university should make a substantial effort to insure that students have an international awareness upon completion of a USM degree.
  - 1) very strong agreement, 2) strong agreement, 3) agree somewhat, 4) agree only if it bears upon content of student's major, 5) disagree
2. What percentage of the courses that you have taken had as their primary focus an international dimension?
  - 1) less than 5%, 2) 5-25%, 3) 26-50%, 4) 51-75%, 5) 76% or more

In addition to the analysis of the individual questions, a summary measure was calculated which reflects a respondent's average score on each of the measures assessing interest in an international effort. This measure, called HIGHGLOBAL, summarized other measures of general interest in internationalizing the university and interest in participation in individual courses and activities which enhance global awareness. Those students with a liberal arts major that reflects an international perspective (i.e., history, economics, political science, foreign languages, and geography) were more likely to have an overall HIGHGLOBAL score, but none of the other factors entered explain variations in this score.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, there was remarkably strong support for much greater attention to international issues among the somewhat older, nontraditional student body at USM, a University with only a modest tradition of international connections. Support for additional activities with an international dimension, the desire to take more courses in which they could learn about international issues, was spread across the entire sample. While women and older students seem to be slightly more "international" in their orientations, no single group dominated the responses to any of the questions.

The survey also helped identify weaknesses in the University's capacity to meet the students' desires for more international awareness. In particular, it is clear that students are primarily interested in learning about international issues through the curriculum and not just through special events, such as convocations. While USM's international convocations are a useful vehicle, our survey indicates that there is no easy substitute for curriculum reform in an internationalization effort.

The survey was extremely useful to the faculty and administrators seeking ways to improve the University of Southern Maine's international role. Perhaps most importantly, it convinced us that we were not just preaching to the choir, but rather that we will surely find a large and sympathetic audience for our efforts.

3. Of those courses with an international focus, what percentage were taken to satisfy core requirements?  
1) less than 5%, 2) 5-25%, 3) 26-50%, 4) 51-75%, 5) 76% or more
4. Of those courses with an international focus, what percentage were taken to satisfy requirements for your major?  
1) less than 5%, 2) 5-25%, 3) 26-50%, 4) 51-75%, 5) 76% or more

**Why is it important that the USM curricula include courses offering an international focus?  
Rank order your responses from 1 to 5 (1 = very important to 5 = unimportant)**

5. The world has become an interdependent, global community. To be effective in it, students need this awareness.
6. We live in a nuclear age.
7. A global or international focus provides skills useful in work place or profession.
8. Having an international awareness is essential to being an educated person.
9. Courses with this focus are only important if offered as part of requirements for major.
10. Other Reasons \_\_\_\_\_
11. Based on personal interest, how many courses with an international focus would you take as electives:  
1) as many as possible, 2) 2-5, 3) 1, 4) none, too many other course requirements, 5) none, not a personal interest
12. How many '89-'90 convocation events have you attended (i.e. lectures, films, convocation ceremony, etc.):  
1) as many as possible, 2) 5-8, 3) 2-4, 4) 1, 5) none

For each of the following options, describe your level of interest in participation:  
1 = presently active/active in the past, 2 = strong desire to be involved,  
3 = moderate interest, 4 = some interest, 5 = no interest

13. Study or internship in another country
14. Enroll in electives with international focus
15. Tutor or mentor foreign students enrolled at USM
16. Attend lectures or films
17. Intern or work with international company
18. Join international student clubs
19. Join groups focusing on global environmental concerns
20. Join groups focusing on nuclear age concerns and social responsibility
21. Support special activities with foreign students
22. Extended travel or residence in another country
23. Work with government agencies, e.g. overseas military state department
24. Other
25. Based on present knowledge, what departments or programs within USM are the best source of courses offering an international focus?
26. If you were to study in another part of the world, what region/country would you prefer?