

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT, MAY 2013**

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### **Introduction**

The International Studies Major had 573 declared students at the end of the 2012-13 academic year, making it one of the College of Letters and Science's largest undergraduate majors. In our mission to educate globally competent students, the International Studies Major is central to the University's strategic mandate. Our mission has become particularly vital to the University since the publication of the 2009 reaccreditation study, "For Wisconsin and the World: A Great Public University," which urges the training of students' "global competencies."

The International Studies Major provides students with a range of courses on global political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues from which students may combine a broad liberal arts education with a specialization in one of four options: global security, global environment, global political economy and policy, and global cultures. Historically, students have supplemented these specialized options with study of a particular region and languages. One of the Major's strengths is that it allows students to integrate comprehensive knowledge and specialized training. The Major builds a foundation for students to pursue a variety of post-graduation pursuits, including graduate training, professional schools, employment in the international business world, and service or work for globally oriented organizations in the private, non-profit, governmental, and nongovernmental sectors.

With the end of the Cold War, as tensions between East and West faded and as global flows of people, culture, technology, and capital accelerated, scholars and policymakers soon understood that the world was more than a series of discrete interactions and relations between states. Rather, a wave of post-Cold War transnational interactions and contacts in the fields of security, diplomacy, economics, health, development, human rights, migration, the environment, and culture that many characterized in the 1990s as "globalization" presented new problems for which the original frames of International Relations proved unsuitable. Although we contest the idea that globalization is something unique to the post-Cold War era—indeed, we believe that historical continuities are as important as ruptures—we also recognize the central importance of a new interpretive framework for understanding global relations. Across many campuses in the United States (and Europe), International Studies programs emerged to allow students to work with varied literatures and research and to provide them with practical training in languages and encourage applied learning through study abroad and internship programs. Since then, a second wave of Global Studies programs has developed, with origins drawing at least as much from the humanities as from the social sciences.

The International Studies Major is like no other major or unit on campus. It is not a department but a stand-alone major within the College of Letters and Science. Organizationally, the Major has three .5 FTE faculty members, a .25 FTE faculty director, a .25 FTE associate director, an advising staff totaling 1.36 FTE, and a .25 FTE administrative staff member. The College of Letters & Science pays for only a portion of this staffing, with other funding coming from the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates and the Division of International Studies.

We also have a steering committee composed of social science and humanities faculty from the College of Letters & Science and the School of Medicine and Public Health. Our advisors, who, for all intents and purposes, are the face of the Major, work each year with 800 plus students: declared majors, prospective majors, and students seeking various certificates and information through our office.

As noted in our 2008 report, because of our uniqueness, it is important to highlight two important issues:

1. the International Studies Major remains almost entirely dependent on resources and curricular decisions made in other departments. Therefore, our assessment plans and reports cannot address the quality of other departments, but rather the coherence and structure of the Major.
2. as noted in the 2006 assessment report, we continue to stress periodic, rather than annual activities. Because we have few resources and fewer staff to conduct large-scale activities—indeed, these activities are conducted almost entirely by the director and several staff—we limit ourselves to periodic assessment, on the order of once every several years.

### **Changes since last LAR**

Our most recent complete LAR (2008) detailed the development of IS 301: Introduction to International Studies, a gateway course to the Major. The course was designed to give a comprehensive overview of international studies topics and issues from interdisciplinary perspectives. The exceeding popularity of the course—which typically closed before many majors and potential majors could enroll—led to its reconfiguration in 2005 as a large lecture course with up to five teaching assistants. The course has since been renumbered as IS 101 to reflect its level more accurately, and remains in high demand. In spring 2012, IS/Political Science Professor Scott Straus offered the course as a seminar limited to a small number of students, which proved highly successful, while a graduate lecturer offered the traditional larger section to satisfy demand. This arrangement worked well, and we will explore doing this again in the future. In the fall semester, the course enrolls a far higher number of students (up to 500).

Three notable developments since the 2008 PAR merit specific mention here. The first is the addition of two additional faculty to the Major. The 2012-13 academic year marks the full implementation of the MIU award the Major received in 2010,

which allowed us to bring two new .5 FTE faculty to campus (Stephen Young, split with Geography; Erica Simmons, split with Political Science). Both have proven quite successful, earning outstanding teaching evaluations and developing a following among our majors. Young, who joined the faculty in fall 2011, has already won several teaching awards, and Simmons, who joined us this past semester, is sure to follow in this track.

The second important development is the merger in 2012 of three separate units into the Global Studies Coalition. The Global Studies Coalition includes the International Studies Major, a unit of the College of Letters and Science; the Global Studies research center, a unit of the Division of International Studies; and the Development Studies Ph.D., a unit split between the College of Letters and Science and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. This merger has not been without its difficulties, which involve three separate sets of reporting lines, but overall it has brought significant advantages to all three units. We have currently proposed a restructuring of the Development Studies component of the coalition (approved by the CALS APC in May 2013 and under review by L&S) that promises to further smooth both day-to-day and long-term operations in the interest of all three units.

A third development involves the closing of our Global Commons/Global Environment option in the major. This was a successful track that served a small number of majors. However, with the addition of the Environmental Studies major in the Nelson Institute—which requires its students to double-major—there were too many redundancies in the option, which would have allowed students to double major in the Nelson Institute and IS by counting many of the same courses twice. Students who began the option before academic year 2012-13 are allowed to continue, but no new students are being enrolled.

### **Purpose; Learning Objectives and Goals Assessed**

At its most fundamental level, the International Studies Major seeks to expose students to the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization and to explore its impact at home, here in Wisconsin and in the United States. It does so in two ways:

The current assessment addresses the Major's educational goals:

- The first is interdisciplinarity. Students majoring in International Studies take courses from diverse disciplines such as political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, agriculture and applied economics, history, business, geography, art, languages, journalism/communications, and regional studies. The list of departments offering courses that fulfill requirements in the major is extensive and crosses colleges. The majority of our students take double majors in another discipline (often in one of those listed above). Our gateway course, IS 101 (Introduction to International

Studies) is taught on a rotating basis by several faculty who represent different departments and disciplines in the social sciences.

- The second is a focus on building skills required to be competitive in the global, professional workforce. To provide students with a competitive edge, we encourage our majors to combine interdisciplinary world-focused studies with regional studies (e.g., Middle East, African, East Asian, South Asian, etc.). The University of Wisconsin-Madison has nine highly reputed, federally recognized area-specific national resource centers (the most of any campus in the country). The university remains a leader in language training for both mainline (e.g., French, German, Spanish) and less commonly taught languages (e.g., Hindi, Twi, Thai). While this area emphasis is still important to our students, we have seen in recent years many students opting for an alternate route: building skills in the sciences (e.g., health-oriented areas or environmental studies), business (e.g., the international business certificate), or economics. A strength of the major—in many ways because of its interdisciplinarity—is its flexibility. Students may tailor their studies to suit their intellectual interests and professional goals.

The Major's targeted learning outcomes are an essential element in this process:

- an ability to think analytically and critically
- the capacity to write effectively, clearly, and persuasively
- an ability to identify and evaluate the quality of information sources that may be applied to
- discussions of issue or problem-solving
- knowledge of research and methods used in the social sciences and humanities
- foreign language skills to achieve a level of basic communication and to learn about other cultures
- the development of cross-cultural competence through study abroad, internship, or other
- internationally focused opportunities
- engagement in global/international issues and involvement in ethical action

### **Assessment Strategy**

In spring 2013 a team consisting of the director, associate director, and one advisor conducted a series of assessments designed to ascertain how well the curriculum is helping students meet the demands of the major and our desired learning outcomes. This involved the use of two separate techniques of analysis:

1. Surveys of graduating students: an e-mail solicitation was sent to our list of graduating students requesting their participation in an on-line survey, with 82 responses;

2. Focus-group meeting: through WISMA, the Wisconsin International Studies Major Association, and our list of graduating students we solicited participation in a focus group during the final week of classes, with a particular emphasis on graduating seniors.

## **Key Findings**

The focus group was among the most enlightening aspects of this assessment. The turnout was small, but the discussion was highly productive. The conversation yielded three significant findings, which are anecdotal, but suggestive and, we believe, representative.

1. The academic preparation offered by the major is excellent. Students particularly appreciated the wide range of offerings that satisfy the major requirements: the idea that a major would allow for courses from a broad array of departments and disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities, was a major asset. Students felt quite well prepared to enter specialized graduate training.
2. However, students also felt unprepared for other careers. They felt as if they were not marketable outside of academe—which they admitted was a common complaint among many majors in the social sciences and humanities. One student also indicated that she felt as if the academic focus of the major was screening out some potential majors through a selection bias, in which the academic orientation and reputation of the major was excluding practice-oriented students. Two students also indicated a desire for the major to focus on locally practicable careers that would make use of their IS educations. They felt as if they could go into an international internship or work for an internationally oriented agency in Washington, D.C., but would like to be able to work in Wisconsin or Chicago while drawing on their skills developed through the major curriculum.
3. One student indicated that some other campus programs with close potential links to IS had a better practical focus. Key among these is the Global Health Certificate program, in which she was also enrolled. There was a strong consensus that a track in global health would be a useful addition to the major that would complement, but not replicate, the certificate program.

The online surveys yielded interesting quantitative and qualitative data. A copy of the questionnaire is attached. Among the highlights are the following:

1. 76% of respondents are double majors, but only 1 of them majored in a hard science; the rest were predominantly in Political Science, Economics, and Foreign Languages.
2. Only a quarter of respondents took a capstone course as seniors, but of them 75% found it highly valuable.
3. Almost all respondents saw flexibility and variety of courses as one of the things they liked best about the major.

4. Some saw incoherence as a problem with the major, while others cited a lack of career preparation as a problem.
5. Students almost unanimously acclaimed advising as a major asset in the major. Students indicated a desire for greater access to individual advising and less of a need for group or peer advising.

## **Impact**

The International Studies Major is a tenuously coherent major. Its greatest strength is also its most significant weakness: its rigorous interdisciplinarity relies on the curricula of other departments and programs for its survival. While access to courses has improved since our last LAR, many faculty who teach courses essential for our majors have no mandate to serve IS students, so curricular planning and programming can be haphazard.

Each option in the Major has a 600-level capstone course associated with it. Though not required, these courses should provide our majors with an integrative learning experience. Students who enroll in them cite them as highly valuable to their major. Yet because the Major has only three half-time faculty and limited resources to hire lecturers, it is difficult to offer these courses without tight enrollment limits and with high visibility and predictability.

As an interdisciplinary program, advising is the backbone of the major. We are far more advisor-centered than department-based majors, and our 1.36 advisors are always overbooked. Expansion of our advising capacity would allow us to better serve our students and bring greater coherence to the major experience.

Finally, we have recently added a part-time career advisor to the program's assets. Yet the career advisor is pulled in many different directions, working for several units at once, so there is no single point of contact or ready information on IS career advising at the moment. We have also begun a career seminar designed to introduce our majors to possible real-world application of their skills. This course has been an important success, but with so few staff it is difficult to offer it to enough students to allow it to serve their needs effectively.

Our plans for the coming year will address some of the shortcomings revealed in the survey and focus group. We plan to study the following:

- The number of students and faculty interested in human rights issues (including global health issues) has increased. The curriculum sub-committee wants to consider the feasibility of adding a global health and human rights option. We will need to gather information about the number of courses, the regularity with which they are taught, and the number of faculty teaching in this area to ensure that we can deliver a rigorous program of study.

- The development of programming (speakers, films, reading groups, clubs) directed to our students by the academic advisors. The intent is to foster a sense of community or belonging to a major among our students, with the longer-term goal of fundraising. But just as important is non-academic programming: that is, featured speakers who work with NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, or other agencies or industries relevant to our students, and not merely faculty from campus or other universities.
- How to secure more resources for the Major, in particular our need for more faculty, academic staff, or lecturers to teach designated International Studies courses, the introductory course and the capstones. In an era of tight resources, we need to explore with the College of Letters and Science and the Division of International Studies how best to meet the expanding student interest in the Major, particularly as the University highlights global competence in its strategic plan.
- A significant revision of Honors in the Major. We have drafted a proposal that focuses not only on academic excellence, but which has practical application outside of the academy as well: for example, a research project that might be oriented toward an internship rather than a thesis. The Honors Program has resisted this, but we plan to make a stronger case for our position in light of the data we have gathered from our graduating students suggesting a need for exactly this sort of programming.