

CHAPTER THREE

Honors Internationalization at Washington State University: A Comprehensive Experience

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INTRODUCTION

The interconnected nature of the world economy, including the need for international cooperation in science, politics, the environment, justice, and all aspects of social development, is the reality in which higher education—and not least educational programs catering to the best and brightest—find themselves. The impact of globalization on the United States continues undiminished, and accordingly, honors programs must equip their students with the critical skills and practical knowledge needed to succeed in this global environment to the benefit of themselves, their local and national communities, and the world at large. The fundamental

nexus driving the Washington State University (WSU) Honors College is the realization of the importance for honors undergraduates of global citizenship as they prepare to live in and engage with a complex, integrated world.

According to international education scholar Hans de Wit, higher education has always been “international”; for example, travelers throughout the Middle Ages sought “learning, friends and leisure” in university cities (5). After World War II, however, the passage of the Fulbright Act, designed to “[foster] bilateral relationships in which citizens and governments of other countries work with the U.S.,” marked the beginning of intentional internationalization on college campuses throughout the U.S., and WSU was a part of that trend (“History”). Before 1950, then Washington State College (WSC) offered a smattering of courses with international content. The first course, which was on international trade, appeared in the 1910 catalog, and a course on international law followed in 1911. After World War I, a few more courses with international content populated subsequent catalogs, but it was not until the availability of Fulbright awards in the 1950s that WSC became more institutionally attentive to its role in international education. Although the first international student advisor was named in 1954, a formalized Office of International Programs was not established to “administer and coordinate international programs undertaken by the university to strengthen its perspective and role in international affairs” until 1966 (*Washington State University Bulletin*).

The establishment of the honors program in 1960 was one of the first attempts at WSU to structure an internationally focused undergraduate experience. Originally headed by Dr. Vishnu N. Bhatia, who concurrently served as the Director of International Education until his retirement in 1993, the program had always perceived “internationalization” as a core mission. A new honors curriculum implemented in 2008, however, brought a renewed focus on integrating global perspectives and experiences. This chapter will provide an overview of the process of honors internationalization at WSU, focusing on early efforts that evolved into more comprehensive internationalization. By analyzing key components of

honors internationalization as they evolved over time at WSU, we will offer programming models that could be adapted at other honors programs and colleges. While we hope the curricular features and history discussed in the following pages will be inspirational, it is likely that some will be more feasible or relevant than others to any particular honors program or college.

INTERNATIONALIZING THE HONORS CURRICULUM

When the WSU Honors Program was established in 1960, its purpose, as outlined in its founding documents, was to promote genuine intellectual curiosity to “abide long after graduation . . . to prepare students to become active and thoughtful citizens capable of assuming leadership roles in their professions and communities.” The mission statement undoubtedly reflected most honors mission statements then and since. In 1961 the task of building the program was given to Dr. Vishnu N. Bhatia, a visionary scholar and international educator. An immigrant from India who had obtained his PhD in pharmacy in the U.S., Bhatia was very much a man with a worldly outlook. He was Director of the Honors Program until his retirement in 1993. In 1973 he also became Director of International Education and was thus excellently positioned to shape the honors program curriculum and strengthen the international dimension he had envisioned from the beginning.¹

The honors curriculum that was in place at WSU from 1960 to 2008 was essentially a classic honors curriculum. Students were required to complete at least forty honors credits, and the curriculum attempted to mandate a fairly strict sequence for fulfilling the requirements. In their first and second years, students enrolled in six credits of English language and literature, three or four credits of math, nine credits of social sciences, and eight credits of physical sciences. During their junior and senior years, students took eleven credits of core honors courses, consisting of six credits of upper-division Western and Eastern civilizations, a three-credit arts course, and a two-credit honors seminar on a variety of specialized topics. Students also completed three credits of independent study, often in the form of individual contract-based summer reading

where a student would team up with a professor and read a selection of books, culminating in a paper or oral examination.

The original honors curriculum's notable international component was a foreign language option. Instead of completing three social science courses (a total of nine credits), the foreign language option required only two such courses (six credits), however, with the added requirement of the completion of four semesters of a single foreign language. Barring recognition of the value of speaking a foreign language and its fundamental importance as a gateway to understanding the nature of our interconnected world, let alone the multifaceted skills it affords as we negotiate it—that might seem a bad deal for the uninformed. Four semesters of a foreign language, including the clearly hard labor needed to master it in any practical sense, will typically involve twelve-to-thirteen credits. As with all requirements, however, substitutions and transfer courses were possible, including courses from study abroad experiences. Hence, as always, students may hit several flies with one swat, and the actual completion of the requirements could take a variety of paths and most likely be smoother than they may have seemed.

Although the original curriculum had only a single international element, Bhatia significantly enhanced the honors commitment to internationalization when he created the “Honors Program Certificate of Completion with International Emphasis.” Students could obtain the certificate by either completing the equivalent of five semesters of a foreign language or by study abroad in an approved program, regardless of the length of the overseas program. Obviously, more students would qualify by the latter than by the former. Bhatia's new honors certificate option highlighted the importance of international study, and many students went on to earn the honors certificate with international emphasis.

Another element of Bhatia's efforts to internationalize the honors program was his focus on developing international partnerships that would benefit WSU students. Bhatia had a clear vision for the development of overseas partners for WSU. He wanted to avoid WSU becoming the umpteenth partner university of notable institutions in Germany or England, for example; thus he instead

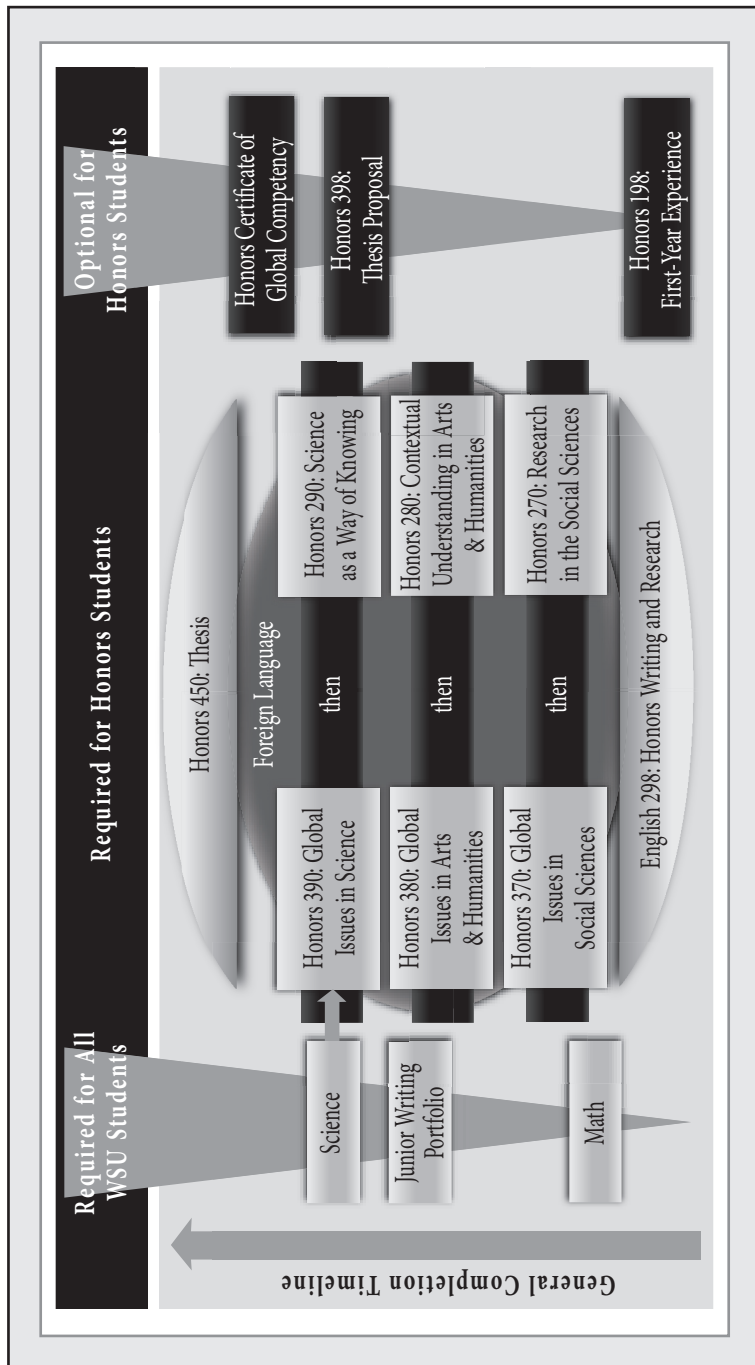
pursued partnerships in which WSU would gain a more prominent position. Hence, he developed enduring relationships leading to exchange and other study abroad opportunities in Denmark with the University of Copenhagen; Aarhus University; Copenhagen Business Academy; and D.I.S., Denmark's International Study program, which is a high-quality provider program. Bhatia's affinity for Denmark resulted in more than a thousand students studying abroad there during his tenure. He also initiated exchanges with Aberystwyth University and Swansea University in Wales.

The elements of internationalization described above were embedded in a traditional curriculum that catered to a more neatly categorized worldview with its more pronounced foundation in English language and literature, its clearly demarcated social science courses identified in separate fields of study, its rather categorical division into Western and Eastern civilizations, and its emphasis on the more classical notion of mentorship-education in small seminars on specialized topics and independent study.² In contrast, the new honors curriculum introduced in 2008 contextualized science, arts and humanities, and the social sciences within a global framework that enabled honors students to integrate classroom exposure to the critical issues affecting the world today with international experiential learning and self-reflection.³

The revised WSU honors curriculum (see Figure 1) was introduced in the same year that the honors program became the honors college.⁴ It has as its core eighteen credits of required honors courses prefixed in the honors college. The required honors courses (see left-hand side and bottom of Figure 1) build upon the original curriculum's traditional foundational requirements in mathematics, science, and a research-based English composition class. Optional honors course offerings (see right-hand side of Figure 1) include a one-credit first-year experience and a one-credit thesis proposal course.

The core of the new honors curriculum is illustrated in the center of Figure 1. All honors core courses emphasize global perspectives. The six required three-credit honors core courses are structured in three strands: Social Sciences (Honors 270 and 370),

FIGURE 1. WSU HONORS CURRICULUM, 2008–PRESENT



Arts and Humanities (Honors 280 and 380), and Science as a Way of Knowing (Honors 290 and 390). The 200-level courses may be completed in any order, but a 200-level course must be completed before taking the comparable 300-level course. Significantly, the core courses are not identified according to academic field (e.g., history, sociology, psychology), which occasionally causes some need for documentation for students pursuing graduate schools or for those who wish to use the honors course to cover a major requirement. Ideally, however, the course sequences provide coherent knowledge and understanding within each strand's area, culminating in examination of global dimensions of science, social science, and the arts and humanities.

The following brief content descriptions provide two examples of core course sequences, highlighting the ways that global perspectives are integrated into each sequence. The relatedness of sequential course topics in effect creates an interdisciplinary environment that allows students to acquire in-depth knowledge as they negotiate topics in sequential semesters. Obviously, scheduling issues often keep students from pursuing directly related topics in 200- and 300-level courses, or students may prefer to explore seemingly unrelated topics, yet the emphasis on global perspectives for all core honors courses, in particular those at the 300-level, ensures coherence within the internationalized curriculum.

For example, the social science strand includes Honors 270 and Honors 370. In an Honors 270 course such as U.S. Cultural Diplomacy in the 20th Century, students investigate how the United States interacts with other nations by examining both informal foreign relations and cultural diplomacy. A student who wishes to delve deeper into these issues in a practical, hands-on manner may sign up for the Honors 370 Model United Nations course, which involves traveling to the national Model United Nations conference in New York City to engage with international diplomats.

In the science strand, Honors 290, Dimensions of Environmental Change, is organized around the WSU Center for Environmental Research, Education and Outreach (CEREO) seminar series and explores a broad range of environmental issues and research currently underway to address these problems. A complementary

Honors 390 Global Issues in Science course argues that understanding the interdisciplinary nature of science is of paramount importance as students investigate the history of scientific inventions. When taken together, this Honors 290-390 sequence provides students with a scientific consciousness of global environments and, importantly, with a scientific understanding of environmental dynamics.

Students can also complete honors core requirements by studying abroad or enrolling in classes that include short-term, faculty-led study abroad experiences. For example, Honors 390, Interdisciplinary Iceland, has been taught in the fall semesters and offered as a summer study program in Norway and Iceland. This course explores the literature and culture of Iceland since its founding in the ninth century, drawing connections to Iceland's contemporary advancement of genetic testing and the possible cultural values associated with the Vikings to the nation's nearly catastrophic financial bankruptcy following the economic collapse of 2008. It functions as an interdisciplinary course at several levels by drawing connections from an overarching cultural perspective between seemingly separate events (Andersen and Thorgaard).

Another requirement that highlights the global orientation of the honors college curriculum is a foreign language competency requirement. The required level of competency is generally equivalent to that acquired through four years of high school classwork or four semesters of college coursework. The revised honors curriculum views proficiency in a foreign language as fundamental to providing students with an international dimension to their honors education and enhancing their post-graduate options. The WSU Honors College website cites an article from the *Financial Times of London*, which reported that companies "hire more multilingual employees, because these employees can communicate better, have better intercultural sensitivity, are better at cooperating, negotiating, compromising. But they can also think more efficiently" ("Building Language Skills"). Honors students have several pathways to complete the foreign language requirement. They can complete a minor in a foreign language or foreign language coursework through the 204-level course. Another option is that students

can pass a standardized assessment test, the STAMP test <<https://avantassessment.com/stamp4s>>, at the “intermediate low” level for most common foreign languages offered by the test and the “novice high” level for Chinese and Japanese. STAMP tests students’ competencies in four areas: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking; honors students must pass three of the four and can retake the test to pass those areas failed previously. The foreign language requirement can be a significant challenge for the student who comes to honors relatively unprepared in foreign language. It has, however, caused surprisingly little commotion: most students manage one of these two pathways with few conflicts to their schedules of studies. Many freshmen take and pass the STAMP test during summer orientation before their first semester at WSU.

The WSU Honors College’s capstone requirement, the honors thesis, is completed by students on a breadth of topics spanning the university’s fields of study. Students are not required to engage with international issues in their theses, but they often choose to do so. For example, a student majoring in communication compared the issue of partisanship in media outlets in her thesis, “Objectivity in French and American Journalism.” Another student used a study abroad experience in London to research her thesis, “London’s Graffiti Scene.” Other recent honors theses with an international element include “Environmental Ethics in Costa Rica,” “Resistance through Religion: Liberation Theology in Central America,” and “FGM/C in Senegal: Intervention Approaches and Recent Findings,” which was completed by a student who did field work in Senegal and interned with an international organization working to end female genital mutilation/cutting. Although most international theses are in humanities and social science fields, honors students majoring in animal science have also explored international topics, such as “People or Wildlife? Conflict and Conservation in Madagascar: The World’s ‘Hottest’ Biodiversity Hotspot” and “Canada Lynx Conservation in North America.”

Students who are interested in a greater international emphasis in their honors curriculum have the option to earn the Honors College Certificate of Global Competencies. The certificate requires fifteen credits and includes the following four elements:

1. Advanced foreign language coursework (the STAMP test will not suffice);
2. Study abroad experience;
3. Public presentation on an international topic reflecting their international study-travel experience; and
4. Substantial international dimension in the honors thesis.

The certificate was created with flexibility in mind in order to accommodate student interests in particular aspects of global issues, and therefore, the fifteen required credits may be achieved in different ways. Students must complete three-to-seven credits at the 204-level or higher of a foreign language at WSU or at an approved program abroad. The study abroad experience must entail a minimum of six credits transferred from an approved study abroad program. A short-term, faculty-led program during summer will typically carry three credits; thus two such experiences would be needed to fulfill the study abroad requirement. Finally, the required public presentation should be based upon a course completed abroad although exceptions may be made depending upon the student's interest in a particular topic.

As evidenced by the measures of internationalization of the WSU Honors College curriculum discussed above, it is virtually impossible for a WSU honors student not to engage the world community by acquiring both intellectually critical and practical skill sets. In doing so, students benefit from the historical mission of the honors college and by extension WSU's Land Grant Mission.

THE HONORS CURRICULUM AND EDUCATION ABROAD

Honors at WSU has a compelling history of encouraging its students to study abroad and approving courses taken abroad to fulfill honors requirements. The honors curriculum allows students to substitute two of the three 300-level requirements (six credits) with credits earned abroad. A wide spectrum of exchange partners, provider programs, and faculty-led programs both managed and developed by the Office of International Programs in cooperation

with WSU's academic departments, gives honors students over five hundred different international education opportunities for enriching their academic and personal horizons while boosting their CVs with evidence of international competency. Because the honors college is fully aware that some education abroad opportunities may be more expensive than the cost of attendance for a semester at WSU, it offers scholarships for honors students. During the 2018–2019 fiscal year, for example, the Honors College provided \$84,610 in donor-supported scholarships to 120 students who applied for assistance for study abroad and experiential learning, the study abroad students by far constituting the bulk of the recipients.

Continuing Bhatia's legacy, the honors college took a leadership role at WSU in developing in-house programs led by honors college professors to Brazil, Chile, England, Guatemala, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Scandinavia, and Spain. These faculty-led programs vary from two weeks to four weeks and are typically offered as summer experiences involving pre-departure meetings during the preceding spring semester. At these sessions faculty are able to familiarize students with materials for the course and to generate esprit de corps. Following the experience, students complete travel journals and research papers to earn academic credit.

The re-structuring of the honors curriculum has enabled more honors students to integrate a learning abroad experience into their undergraduate career. Students are able to meet their student learning outcomes (SLOs) both in their global issues courses at home or abroad. For example, cultural competency and integration of knowledge, two of WSU Honors College's seven SLOs, can be achieved by studying "the Troubles" in Ireland or in a more traditional honors classroom. Because of the variety of factors that influence a student's decision to study abroad, which are both internal and external to the honors college, we cannot attribute the increase in study abroad participation by honors students solely to the curriculum change. There has been, however, a 368% increase in the number of honors students studying abroad in the decade since the new curriculum was introduced in 2008. By comparison, the increase in study abroad participation by non-honors WSU students for that same decade

was only 30%. Table 1 provides a snapshot of honors study abroad participation growth from AY 2016 to AY 2017. It also identifies the disciplines of students who studied abroad in AY 2017 and their study abroad program types.

One hundred three honors students studied abroad in AY 2017, comprising 14% of all WSU students who studied abroad. This number is impressive because honors students made up only 3% of undergraduate students that year. This represented a substantial increase of 17% over AY 2016. Also worth noting is that over a third of honors students who studied abroad in AY 2017 were from STEM fields, compared to 26% of STEM students nationally (“Open Doors”). Although many STEM students participate in the honors college at WSU, their significant presence in study abroad programs is likely attributable to the college’s integrated emphasis on global learning and cultural and language competency. While many students across the country are choosing to participate in short-term programs, the national figure for participating in semester-long programs is approximately 30% (“Open Doors”). In contrast, 44% of WSU honors students enroll in semester-long programs.

GLOBALLY FOCUSED CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

WSU honors students are actively engaged in all three globally focused curricular programs available to them: the Global Leadership Certificate, Global Studies Minor, and the honors college’s own Certificate of Global Competencies. From 2012 to 2017, 461 students graduated from the honors college, and 37% of honors graduates completed at least one of these globally focused curricular programs. Sixteen students earned the Certificate of Global Competencies (available only to honors students); 52 earned the Global Leadership Certificate; and 101 students completed the Global Studies Minor. Since its inception in 2012, 93 WSU undergraduates have completed the Global Leadership Certificate; that 56% of the students earning the Global Leadership Certificate have been honors students is noteworthy.

Approximately 10% of the students who participated in the 2017 Global Case Competition were honors students, and an honors

TABLE 1. WSU HONORS STUDY ABROAD, AY 2016 AND AY 2017

Colleges	Honors Students Studying Abroad, 2017	Honors Study Abroad Per AY/Term		Honors Participation by Program Type	
		Term	2016	2017	Faculty-Led
College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences	8		8	13	35
College of Arts and Sciences	44	Fall			Provider
Carson College of Business	15	Spring	18	32	Exchange
Murrow College of Communication	2	Summer	62	58	Direct Enroll
College of Education	2	Calendar Year	0	0	Partnership
Eelson S. Floyd College of Medicine	1	Academic Year	0	0	Total
College of Nursing	5	Total	88	103	103
Voiland College of Engineering and Architecture	15				
College of Veterinary Medicine	11				
Total Honors	103				
Total WSU	736				
Honors % of Total	14				

Note: Only international for-credit experiences are included.

student was on the first-place team. The Global Case Competition is a co-curricular opportunity available to students across the WSU multi-campus system. Global Case places students on teams of four-to-six students from WSU campuses and colleges that are different from their own. Teams are given two weeks to write a two-page proposal outlining solutions to a complex global issue, and finalists present their solutions in a public forum. The first-place team travels to the location of the case, giving students the opportunity to assess their solutions in a real-world setting. The case topic in 2017 was researching viable solutions to digital inequality in Tanzania.

The integration and application of global learning throughout the honors curriculum and participation in additional scholarly opportunities have not only created global citizens, they have also produced students who have the confidence, intercultural competence and communication skills, self-awareness, and adaptability to lead and excel in our interconnected world. The intentional focus on a globalized education has enhanced and enriched the experience of WSU Honors College students.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been our attempt to produce a comprehensive discussion of the history of the Honors College at Washington State University, from its beginning as a minor program whose key administrator from the outset was dedicated to infusing global perspectives across the curriculum to its blossoming as an academic unit implementing an ambitious new curriculum that features an international emphasis in its course requirements, specifically a foreign language requirement, and offers a Certificate of Global Competencies. It is undeniable that educated, cognizant human beings are proficient navigating international cultural environments and that they have, in particular, attained those qualities as a product of the educational system. The WSU Honors College has been structured with that goal in mind since its inception in 1960. The two curricula described in this chapter each have their strengths and weaknesses, which perhaps calls to attention that what ultimately drives the success of an educational vision rests no less with

the structure of requirements than with the fundamental components of any curriculum: the individual course, its instructor, its students, and the culture they together develop during the course of a semester. Graduating students with the knowledge, skills, and critical perspectives to contribute to the ever-globalized professional, political, and technical arenas, however, must be a core principle of both the curriculum and the individual course. Despite the complexities of assessing the effects of internationalization, the WSU Honors College is confident that the 2008 curriculum revision provides students with comprehensive exposure to global perspectives through coursework, research, and study abroad opportunities.

Recipes for success are precisely that: recipes on paper, on computer screens, and on web pages—as is the case with mission statements—must not fall prey to becoming degrees of rhetoric as the pressures of modern undergraduate education, both from within and from outside institutions, take their tolls. A curriculum will only achieve its lofty visions if the culture that permeates the program behind the scenes, with the support of the university, translates into every fundamental unit, especially the courses that give faculty the freedom to think, the incentives to explore, and the nurture to fail. And if that can be achieved, in such an environment, honors students will benefit greatly.

NOTES

¹Bhatia was also instrumental in the creation of the National Collegiate Honors Council, and he became president of the organization in 1968 (“NCHC Officers”).

²On a side note: Frank Potter, a WSU philosophy professor who was instrumental in the founding of the Philosophy Department in 1949, mentored students in his and his wife Irene’s beautiful 1940s craftsman campus home, which they donated to the honors program. Potter also achieved the truly extraordinary accomplishment of having ten of his students win Rhodes Scholarships. For years the Potter House was the popular venue for honors students for evening seminars and other functions. It was the place for stimulating

fireside conversations about ideas over a cup of tea. A few years after Bhatia's retirement, the Potter House reverted to the university and was eventually sold.

³The original curriculum was comfortable in its division into Western and Eastern cultures. Under the auspices of these two sweeping categories, a wide spectrum of course material was effectively covered through the years by faculty from different disciplines. Not having the current curriculum identify any particular cultural areas as a mandatory part of honors education may prove a fascinating topic for future monographs and curricular discussions.

⁴The current dean of the WSU Honors College, Dr. M. Grant Norton, a professor in the School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering, is a British native educated at Imperial College, London. Norton inherited the current curriculum and has fully embraced the college's traditional international emphasis.

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