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Global Studies Initiative Faculty Report: Interdisciplinary Collaborations

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Aims of Global Studies Initiative: Parkland’s Global Studies Initiative promotes the addition to Parkland’s courses of instructional materials on global issues with a focus on the European Union, Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia, and East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Further, it aims to provide faculty with instructional design tools and aid them with the implementation of new course materials in the classroom.

Global Studies Initiative Faculty Report: Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Faculty Name: V. Andreea Chiritescu

Courses Taught (course name(s), section number): ECO 101: Principles of Macroeconomics, ECO102: Principles of Microeconomics.

Please answer the following questions to complete this report:

1. Please describe an assignment or class material covered in your course that teaches students about global issues or, better yet, teaches them about the areas of the world covered in this initiative: the European Union, Eastern Europe, Russia, Eurasia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. You can attach the assignment rubric, instructions, and/or syllabus or course schedule to this report if you wish. If you have no current materials or assignments dealing with global issues, describe an idea you have for a new assignment or course material you wish to adopt.

When discussing types of economic systems (pure central planning, pure market systems, mixed economies, transitioning economies, mixed systems) – while the textbook material on the subject is limited to characteristics and pros and cons for each system – I spend some time explaining students my experience living under a centrally planned economy in Romania, before 1989. This happens in both Micro and Macro classes.

I start by giving students some background information about Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the characteristics of the pure centrally planned economic system: all resources are owned by the government (from land and labor to capital, factories, and health care), all production of goods and services is controlled by the government, all production decisions are made by the government, and all goods and services are distributed to the people by the government. As such, the personal preference of the “dude” (person/group in charge) is seen in these production and distribution decisions.

Students are most interested in the personal experience: things such as waiting in line for days to buy meat, encountering empty shelves at the store, having access to imported goods such as oranges once a year (by the decision of ‘the dude’), watching only government-approved entertainment, dealing

with shortages (of electricity, water, food, clothing, and ... everything), forced labor, restrictions on what people can own (1 car per family, 1 apartment, no land, etc.), and so on.

At the same time, we identify the emergence of the underground economy and the government policies leading to the underground economy, as well as many of the undesirable characteristics and consequences of living in a centrally planned economy, as Eastern Europe has suffered until 1989.

The 15 minutes planned discussion ends up taking the entire class time because students are interested in the socio-economic life in a centrally planned economy, as well as the political ramifications, and they ask lots of questions. Some students even share their experience (or their parents' experience) in a centrally planned economy, and comment on the similarities. ("I didn't believe it when my dad told me!")

From there, the discussion continues with the current socio-economic environment in transition economies in Eastern Europe (yes, more than 30 years of transition!) and identifying elements of central planning and elements of market systems in the transition economies, as well as the intended and unintended consequences of various old and new government policies, from the 2-year long maternity leave to the mandatory military service.

After the first 10 minutes introduction, the discussion is student-lead: students express their interest into a specific issue (inflation, health care, jobs, currency depreciation, schooling, food, policies, pensions, travel, etc.), and I guide the discussion to identify the economic concepts, the causes, the consequences, what policy (government or market-based) is appropriate to deal with the unintended consequences.

2. Parkland College faculty have developed six general learning outcomes to help students acquire essential skills, knowledge, and values that will serve them in their future careers. The Global Awareness and Ethical Reasoning outcome states that *students will demonstrate an understanding of global issues, gender and sexual orientation, multicultural perspectives, and/or the role of ethical core values in making personal, social, academic, and professional decisions.* Please reflect on how the assignment or materials you described in the previous question contributes to this learning outcome or could be modified to better fit this outcome.

Besides the relevant economic concepts introduced in this class discussion, students learn some of the history, politics, and socio-economic environment in Eastern Europe for the past 50+ years. While not a written assignment, the class discussion gives students the opportunity to find more information about an area they are interested: some students ask about the cultural aspect, others about the political environment, some about the day-to-day life, and others share their interest in analyzing the differences between different countries and economic systems.

Having a mostly student-guided discussion, opened for questions from any field, while still relevant to the economic topic at hand, shows students how interconnected some fields of study are, and hopefully will empower students to always ask questions, in any class.

3. How do you think learning about global issues and other areas of the world benefits your students in your field of study or discipline?

Studying various economic indicators – standard of living, poverty rates, life expectancy, economic growth rates, amount of research and development, or literacy rates – how they differ across the world, the causes for these differences, and the public policies that can help improve equality and equity, at least from an economic perspective, shows students that we live in an inter-connected world.

4. Do you believe your course could benefit from more interdisciplinary collaborations on global issues participating, for instance, in some of the collaborative teaching initiatives presented by your group in your joint report? Explain your answer.

While my students learn about the economics of crime in my class (yes, we're back to supply and demand), they would benefit from a discussion on the social impact of crime and a better understanding of the judicial system. And while my students learn about the various macro-indicators and how they differ among countries, I think they will benefit from learning the geography of the region and how, for example, being land-locked impacted the economic development of a county. The various political systems across countries also affect the economic development of a country and the macro-economic indicators. And while I do comment on these differences when discussing these topics, I do believe my students would benefit from an invited guest speaker from a different field, or maybe sources for students to research and comment.

Thank you very much for participating in the Global Studies Initiative and completing this report!