Internationalizing the Undergraduate Curriculum

Opening Commentary

—Benjamin R. Barber, University of Maryland

The excellent papers in this symposium warrant our close attention for the cardinal reason that they teach citizenship in the global world. They arm us with ideas, concrete techniques, and specialized skill sets to reach this goal. The simple importance of learning to function well in a global society belies the complexity of achieving it. These papers give us tools as well as provide motivation to confront this challenge.

The work here looks at the dynamics of global change, but particularly emphasizes comparative inquiry and the recognition and appreciation of difference. The examination of difference is essential for a nuanced understanding of globalization. But this is only a beginning. A focus on difference alone can only produce a static view. Global themes today are marked as much by change as by difference. The world is changing in ways that make it impossible to understand it without new ideas, new perspectives, new modes of inquiry and levels of curiosity. We must understand the message in these papers in terms of enriching modes of inquiry and dynamic processes of global interaction, as well as in terms of the appreciation of difference in language, culture, geography, and politics.

And more, these papers, and the issues that motivate them, are of consequence for understanding the politics of our domestic communities as much as for understanding communities of distance. “Getting it” about internationalizing is essential for “getting it” about localism as well. We live in local worlds of interdependence as well as global ones. The papers to follow make a rich contribution to a multi-layered set of issues and are part of an important conversation about difference, change, and global understanding.

To be of relevance, political science needs to approach global politics and the issues the global context raises through a lens the insights and techniques these papers offer can help construct. It is incumbent upon the discipline as a whole to move these issues to center stage and encourage much more new work in these directions.

The following papers are a product of an APSA initiative on internationalization sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The APSA Committee on Internationalizing the Undergraduate Curriculum (Christine Ingebritsen (chair), University of Washington; Mark Cassell, Kent State University; Steven Lamy, University of Southern California; David Mason, Butler University; Pamela Martin, Carolina Coastal University; and Deborah Ward, Seton Hall University) aims to encourage political science as a discipline to think through how to teach in this new, global world. Following the individual papers, the Committee has also provided a set of learning objectives and web resources to assist faculty in devising curricula with an international focus.