

What's in a Name
Non-Western Culture: A Semantic Argument

Faculty and administrators often have a overwhelming desire to change titles of courses and categories of requirements because change seems necessary to more clearly achieve the goals of some esoteric vision statement. Usually the chances are no more than semantic chances to correct some subtle shift in attitudes of the society, the state, the faculty, or the administration. Recently, some faculty have argued the courses listed in the university catalog as "Non-Western Culture" should change their category label to "Global Perspectives" or "International Studies" because "Non-Western Culture" is a negative, pejorative term meaning "not" good culture. The continued use of the label "Non-Western", according to the dissenters, indicates a lack of sensitivity to the feelings of the people of the very countries that are encompassed in the area of study. Students, the complaining faculty assert, do not know the meaning of the term "Non-Western," and on transcripts, the courses would be more impressive if listed as "International Studies."

I disagree--Non-Western is descriptive not pejorative, and the label Non-Western was not accidentally adopted by the faculty. In the early 1960s, the faculty at the college decided to require all students to take at least one course on a country, or area of the world, that had a totally different history and culture. Students needed to be exposed to ideas other than those that had developed in Europe and the United States. The world was changing rapidly, and the students needed to be aware of those changes. The faculty visualized the students being taught the history and culture of countries such as Egypt, China, Algeria, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, and a myriad of other non-western areas.

The task of developing the courses for the non-western area was assigned the History & Social Science departments. Within the courses, the teachers were instructed to take a broad view rather than a narrow professional one. Historians should teach more than history, sociologists more than sociology, and anthropologist more than anthropology. The hope was the teachers would expose the students to the religions, arts, politics, geographies, histories, and societies of these non-western areas. According to the area or country studied, the student would learn, for example, about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, or Taoism as well as about dynasties, empires, and social attitudes.

In the History & Social Science departments, a debate

raged over the title of the new "areas" studies program. Should it be called "Area Studies, International Studies, the Underdeveloped World, the Developing World, or the Third World." None of the labels seemed appropriate: some were patronizing while others inadequately described the purpose of the new requirements. "Non-Western" was selected as a compromise because it seemed to be the only label that could encompass areas as diverse as Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia.

Thirty years later, there is rumblings among a few faculty that Non-Western is a negative label, indicating what it is not, and offensive to the very cultures it proclaims to represent. It is a semantic argument. No one is suggesting that the courses be altered, nor is any one suggesting that the study of "Non-Western Cultures" be abandoned. What is being suggested is that the label be changed. Naturally, the suggested new labels include "Global Studies, International Studies, World Studies, or Third World Studies." None of the suggested labels seem as acceptable as "Non-Western Cultures."

Unless the critics can suggest a title that more adequately describes the function of the non-western courses, then I am opposed to altering thirty years of tradition. My predecessors were wise in their selection of the title. No other label seems appropriate: Global Perspectives, Area Studies, or International Studies are unacceptable because they are less restrictive, and other possible labels, such as "The Under-Developed World," are even less acceptable because they are clearly disparaging. "Non-Western" is not a negative label, but a label proclaiming that the cultures to be studied are not European or American in orientation. They are "Non-Western."

The term Non-Western Culture is under attack by the education professors and their allies. Led by Dr. John Caruso, Dr. Walter Bernstein, and particularly Dean Richard Dozier, this group proclaims the professors in the History-Non Western, and Social Science Departments are frauds, unqualified, insensitive, and irrational. The most offensive of the attackers is Dean Dozier who asserted in an open letter that the professors of Non-Western Culture were bigots and unqualified to be college teachers. He attempted to intimidate on the assumption that educators and administrators are frightened sheep who will surrender if charged with insensitive. After all, if the term Non-Western offends Dean Dozier, the term should be changed.

Is Dean Dozeir a semantic expert? Is he an expert in African, Middle Eastern or Asian Cultures? No, he is not. Yet, he believes he is qualified to form a value judgment based on his opinion with no supporting documentation. He thinks Non-Western is pejorative, therefore it is pejorative. Question: Who made Dean Dozier God? Equally important, why has he decided to

confront two respected academic departments over a semantic issue? In defining the term Non-Western, does Dean Dozier really believe his opinion should be accepted over that of Professor Warner on Asia, Dr. Linabury on Middle East, Professor Rosenberg on Africa, and Professor Bannister on India & the Philippines? Does Dean Dozier also consider the terms Far East, Middle East, and Southeast Asia pejorative because they define the areas by their geographical relation to Europe?

Following the lead of Dean Dozier, with no documented proof, the whole issue of Non-Western seems to be a power move on the part of Dr. Caruso and others to place the courses taught under a new Dean of International Studies.

There are practical reasons to change Non-Western to International Studies or Global Studies. International Studies sounds more prestigious ^{than} non-western as university sounds more prestigious than college and as maintenance engineer sounds more prestigious than janitor.

The History-Social Science Departments are not opposed to changing the label, we are opposed to changing the philosophy. Students are required to take one course in Non-Western Cultures to expose them to beliefs vastly different from European and American cultures. The Departments are willing to change the title to International Studies if the intent is more than simply an euphemistic name change. An International Studies major is possible with the current staff and such an approach would be acceptable. Unacceptable is the format proposed by Dr. Caruso and his WIC Committee---simply list 60 or 70 courses and say take a few. The Social Sciences Department could offer a major in International Studies as could the History Department. The attached pages illustrates a possible major in History and International Studies.

Sincerely

Ken Young
History-Non-Western

History & International Studies

All Common Core Courses including a foreign language

Summary:

- General History Requirements (12 credits)
- Level 100 Courses in NWC (12 Credits)
- Upper Level Courses in History (15 credits)
- Related Fields (12 Credits)

General History Requirements: (12 credits)

- His 151: Intro to Historical Research
- His. 187: Modern Europe
- His. 249: American History since 1877
- His. 350: Historiography

Level 100 courses: (12 credits)

- One Course on the Africa: NWC 102 or 108
- One Course on Asia: NWC 103, 104, 105, 106
- One Course on the Middle East, NWC 107
- One Course on Latin America

Upper Level History Courses (15 credits) minimum of 3 Courses in Same Area

- World Cultures: Africa, Asia, Middle East
 - His 219: Afro-American History
 - His. 234: Islam & Arab-Israeli Wars
 - His 237: Middle East Oil & the Great Powers
 - His. 245: Egypt & the Pharaohs
 - His 250 Revolution in China
 - His 277: Communist China
 - His. 285: Ancient Egypt

Europe

- His 226: Absolutism & Revolution
- His 227: 19th Century Europe
- His 228: Contemporary Europe
- His 232: The Germans
- His 241: The Russians
- His 246: Judaism

American Diplomacy

- His. 253: International Conflict
- His 218: World War II
- His 239: The United States & Japan
- His 265: United States & the Philippines
- His. 266: United States & the Vietnam War

Interdisciplinary Courses (12 Credits)

2 courses with two concentrated in same area)

World Cultures: Anthropology & Geography

- Ant. 212: Peoples & Cultures of Africa
- Ant. 214: Peoples & Cultures of the Pacific
- Ant. 215: Peoples & Cultures of Asia
- Ant. 222: Peasant Societies

Geo. 251: Africa
Geo. 252: Latin American
World Literature & Art
Art. 233: African Art
Art. 230: Afro-American Visual Arts
Eng. 219: Afro-American Literature
Eng. 237: Classics of the East
Phil. 218: Oriental Philosophy
European Literature & Art
See English courses, etc
International Diplomacy & Business
PS 200: International Relations
PS 205: Comparative Governments
PS 300: Politics of Modernization
Eco. 201: Comparative Economic Systems
Eco. 300: International Economics
Mkt. 335 Multinational Marketing
Mkt. 425: International Marketing