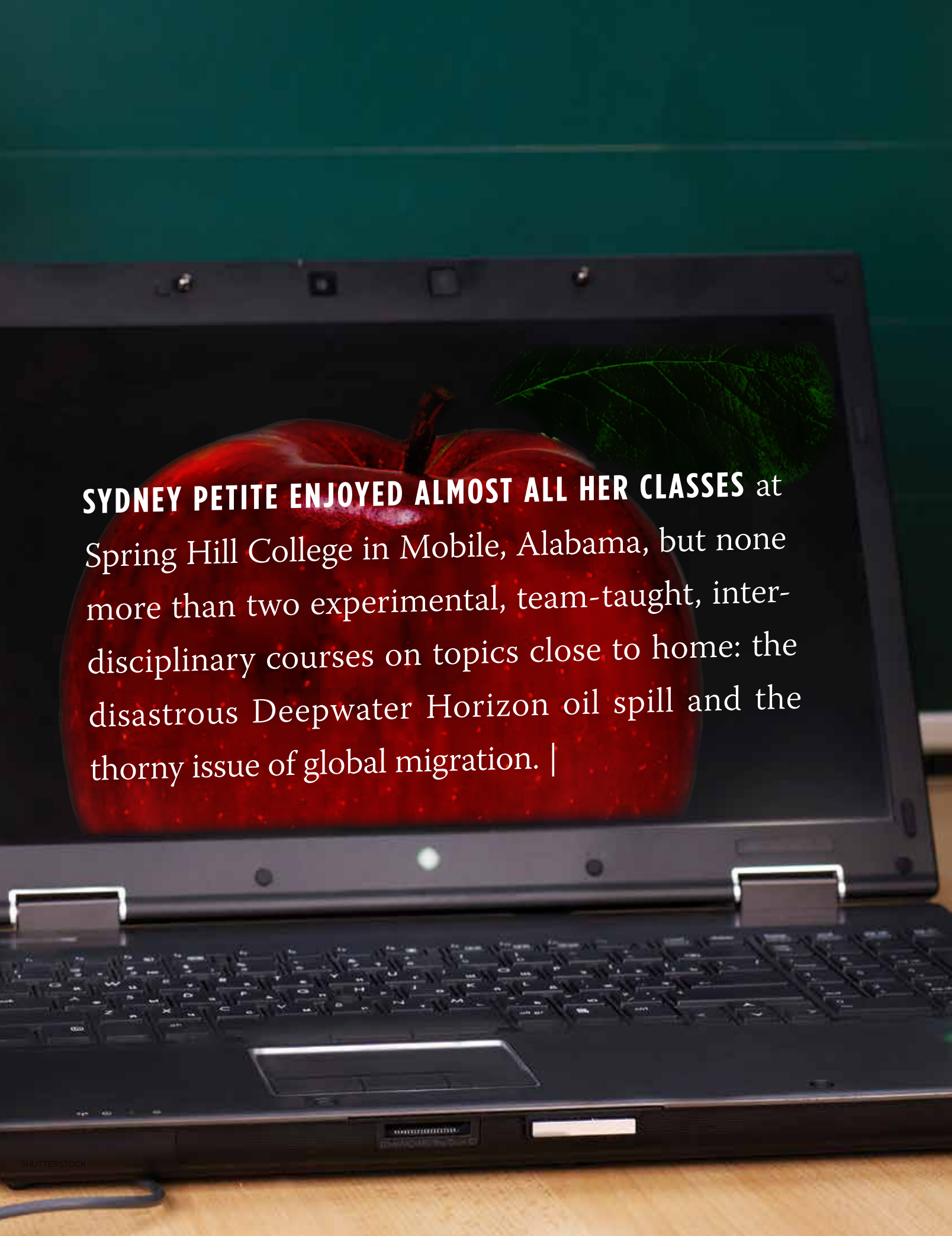


A photograph of a desk with various school supplies. In the background, a globe sits on a stand. In the foreground, there are several books, including a large red one and a black one. A stack of colorful sticky notes (yellow, blue, pink, green) is on top of a green notebook. There are also several spiral-bound notebooks, some with pens and markers resting on them. A white computer mouse is visible in the bottom right corner. The background is a dark green chalkboard.

# CORE VALUES

Infusing Global Awareness Across the  
General Education Curriculum

BY CHRISTOPHER CONNELL



**SYDNEY PETITE ENJOYED ALMOST ALL HER CLASSES** at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama, but none more than two experimental, team-taught, interdisciplinary courses on topics close to home: the disastrous Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the thorny issue of global migration. |

"I had never taken a class with more than one professor before. This was a different professor almost every other class," said the international relations and political science major. "I loved Spring Hill and had an amazing educational experience, but this was the first time we'd ever gone so in depth from so many different angles on one topic."

"We were getting the economic perspective, the science, the politics of oil, the government's role, and the role the media played in the crisis," said the Mobile native, who is taking the Foreign Service exam and applying to graduate school.

At Arcadia University outside Philadelphia, students clamor to get into the seminar that Jeff Shultz, anthropologist and education professor, teaches on and anthropologist, teaches on "Baseball and Béisbol: The Evolution of Race and Ethnicity in the Major Leagues." It focuses on black and Latino players and explores how baseball became a lifeline for the Dominican Republic's economy.

The Spring Hill and Arcadia classes both grew out of efforts to reinvigorate and globalize general education led by the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). The two schools were in a cohort of 32 colleges and universities in a project called General Education for a Global Century that is now winding down, although the association's older, parent initiative, Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility, continues.

Kevin Hovland, AAC&U's senior director for Global Learning and Curricular Change, said that when Shared Futures began in 2001, the international education agenda centered on education abroad, language competencies, and "movements" of students and faculty. Nothing wrong with that, but "we wanted to focus a little bit more on the learning that people were targeting through those activities," he said.

After the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, many institutions began "putting 'global-something' in their mission statements. Their graduates were going to be 'globally prepared' or 'global citizens' or 'thriving in a global, interdependent world,'" Hovland said, but "nobody had gone to the trouble to figure out what global learning meant."

The AAC&U has carried the torch for liberal arts for nearly a century and represents nearly 1,300 institutions of every type and size. The challenges it faces have grown larger as state support for higher education has shrunk. "General education is now caught in the cross fire that attends efforts to accelerate degree 'produc-

tion,' reduce costs, and improve quality," AAC&U stated in its latest strategic plan.

Hovland said AAC&U functions essentially as "a curriculum and faculty development laboratory." As it did for the General Education for a Global Century cohort, its modus operandi is to bring teams of faculty together for intensive workshops to bounce ideas off one another and share curricular models.

The other schools in the Global Century cohort ran the gamut from such flagship institutions as the University of Maryland College Park and the University of Massachusetts Amherst to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Carnegie Mellon University, Haverford College, and Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

## Disaster in the Gulf Inspires a New Class

Spring Hill, the oldest Catholic college in the Southeast (established 1830), enrolls 1,300 undergraduates on a campus seven miles from Mobile Bay; 60 percent of students come from outside Alabama. The liberal arts core consumes 60 of the requisite 128 hours for a degree. "We give all our students a big dose of the liberal arts, but more and more are going into the sciences, business, and education. Fewer and fewer graduate in the liberal arts," said English Professor Margaret Davis, who directs the core curriculum.

After being selected for the AAC&U project, "we put together a team whose purpose was to propagate global learning on our campus. We really hadn't paid much attention to it before that," said Davis, apart from the Jesuit institution's strong emphasis on service.

She and a small group set out to redesign general education in ways that would "make our students more knowledgeable about issues around the globe and give them a sense of social justice." They surveyed other faculty "to ask where they saw global learning in our curriculum and where they saw gaps," Davis said. They also got academic affairs and student life people talking and working together on curricular and co-curricular activities, and they looked for the global in Spring Hill's backyard. "We saw global as not just about international studies, but about getting together at any level where you operate, even locally."

A nudge from AAC&U helped them realize that the Deepwater Horizon oil spill presented an opportunity "to do something special" in the classroom," Davis said. The result was an upper division course called "Globalizing the Oil Spill" taught by 10 professors—so many

that Davis thinks it scared off some students who feared being overworked. Petite was among 18 who took the class in spring 2012.

There were faculty from chemistry, economics, biology, political science, fine arts, history, communications, English, and psychology. Leigh Ann Litwiller, the English professor who coordinated the course, said, "It is hard to capture how energizing this has been for faculty."

There has been prior classes on healthcare and global warming taught by three instructors, but never 10. They didn't all teach at once. The course syllabus said the aim was to explore how "this local disaster was also a part of a global petroleum economy" and to help students see the "interrelated local and global impacts" of petroleum extraction and exchange.

"Our students had only heard of the Gulf spill and the Exxon Valdez," said Litwiller. "It was a big revelation to learn that giant spills have happened and tankers have crashed all over the world." A history professor presented a case study on Norway's environmental safeguards over drilling in the North Sea versus devastation in the Niger Delta, where the industry was poorly regulated and where guerillas have battled the Nigerian government over oil revenues. A political scientist showed how companies follow different rules in different places, some stringent, some lax. And Davis had students read the British novel, *The Queen Bee*, about a teenage Nigerian refugee whose life is turned upside down by the country's oil wars.

Looking at the problems attendant to oil drilling from such different perspectives created "something unique and powerful for students," said Litwiller.

The formula was a hit. "The student feedback was fabulous," said Davis. Students went on field trips to Dauphin Island Sea Lab and to Bayou La Batre, a coastal fishing village hit hard by the oil spill. They did a hands-on experiment in class that demonstrated the difficulties of removing oil, and interviewed residents who told them domestic violence and drug problems rose after the hurricane destroyed the fishing fleet.

Spring Hill ramped up another interdisciplinary course, "Globalizing Migration," for spring 2013 with a dozen faculty hands on the tiller, and a third is in the works on water issues. Davis and Litwiller made a presentation at an AAC&U conference they called, "Interdisciplinarity on a Dime." What happened at Spring Hill demonstrates "a way for schools that don't have any money to do something that spreads out the work so that everybody can take part. It's not a huge burden," said Davis.

## Beyond Strict Distribution Requirements

Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU) is in the midst of a curricular overhaul seeking a more integrative approach to global learning. A large majority of the 1,500 undergraduates at the Methodist institution are Nebraskans. Its global studies program is now more than two decades old, and NWU won a Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization from NAFSA in 2008.

**After the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, many institutions began "putting 'global-something' in their mission statements. Their graduates were going to be 'globally prepared' or 'global citizens' or 'thriving in a global, interdependent world, but nobody had gone to the trouble to figure out what global learning meant.'"**



NWU changed the core in 1997 when it rolled out what it called its “Global Citizenship Preparation” program, which prescribed language and global culture studies. The new Archways Curriculum moves from “a strictly distributive model to something... more relevant to this world,” said Kathy Wolfe, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Instead of front-loading required courses aimed at building students’ writing, speaking, and civic discourse skills, it will seek to “scaffold” those skills in linked courses called “threads” that students will take across all four years. It comes with two, new experiential learning requirements for graduation: a 20-hour “exploratory” experience followed by a 45-hour “intensive” one. The changes take effect in fall 2014.

The ways to meet these requirements include study abroad or study away, internships and practica, service learning, collaborative research, and campus leadership as well, Wolfe said. Some students, of course, already do far more than 20 or 45 hours, but making everyone do it “is a big change for us.”

Students will complete two “threads,” consisting of three courses from at least two disciplines linked by a common theme of global significance. Each thread will be buttressed by co-curricular activities. “We’re developing threads in global human health, science and religion, gender and sexuality identity. It just sounds more interesting and enjoyable to them than the random, distributive set of classes,” the dean said.

Several factors motivated Nebraska Wesleyan to overhaul general education. “Our understanding of what it means to be a global citizen is a lot broader now than it was in the ‘90s,” said Wolfe, an English professor. “We also know a lot more now about good learning practices.” Pre- and post-testing of students in the old general education courses “weren’t showing as much improvement as we would like, especially in writing and oral communication,” the dean said.

While the university passed reaccreditation with flying colors in 2010, the visitors were underwhelmed by the core. Their comment was along the lines that it was working pretty well “for an antique,” Wolfe said.

Provost Judy Muyskens was a strong proponent of placing more emphasis on experiential learning and blending academic affairs and student life. She hosted the curriculum committee at three gatherings that mixed group discussions with socializing. One ended with the faculty band playing “Sweet Curriculum” to the tune of “Sweet Caroline.” Observed Wolfe, “Never underestimate the power of the sing-along to generate good will.”

“We’ve never had as much conversation on campus about curriculum as we’ve had over the last three years,” said Wolfe, a 1990 alumnus who recalls a three-week class in England as “the most memorable thing” she did as an undergraduate. “Nebraska Wesleyan did great things for me, but I know I would have gotten a lot more out of a curriculum like this.”

SHUTTERSTOCK



Wolfe said Nebraska Wesleyan profited from seeing the changes Otterbein University made to its general education curriculum; Otterbein paired its interdisciplinary courses. “We looked at that as a starting place.” There haven’t been a lot of complaints from students about the old distribution requirement, but for some it was just “a box to check off,” she said. In social science, “it didn’t matter which one you took as long as you took one.”

While Archways will be in place for all entering students in 2014, Nebraska Wesleyan also will allow transfer students to opt into these courses (some faculty feared a stiffer requirement might make it harder to recruit transfers).

Patrick Hayden-Roy, a professor of history since 1989, helped shape both the old and new cores. “The prior reform of general education did a number of things well, but it lacked integration of learning, and the structures intended to put (faculty)...in conversation with one another didn’t work.”

Much of the old method put “learning in different silos...and didn’t integrate writing, speaking, and critical thinking across the curriculum.” These changes were produced by a collaborative process that let faculty voices be heard and allowed for compromise, he said.

The lessons, Harden-Roy added, are that, “In the early and middle stages you need leadership that has tolerance for messy dialogue and the patience to listen to what might sometimes seem a cacophony of voices. Toward the end you need leadership that...moves

things toward deadlines, and well-developed drafts, and a little bit of backroom horse trading.”

Biology Professor Jeff Isaacson was the curriculum committee chair. The 1983 alumnus, recently named assistant provost for integrative and experiential learning, said his students often talked about “getting their gen ed requirements ‘out of the way,’ so they clearly were not assigning much value to them.” Most compartmentalized what they were learning in different disciplines, “sort of like a little kid who doesn’t want the green beans on their plate to mix with their mashed potatoes,” Isaacson said. Archways’ “big questions” approach will push things together and help students understand how real-life issues are often mashed together.

**“The prior reform of general education did a number of things well, but it lacked integration of learning, and the structures intended to put (faculty)...in conversation with one another didn’t work.”**

### **All Students “Cross Boundaries”**

Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia, is a bastion of education abroad. With 2,400 undergraduates, it ranks first among master’s level institutions in the percentage of graduating seniors who studied abroad—147 percent in 2010–2011—a distinction achieved in part because it sends hundreds of freshmen overseas for a week over spring break to whet their interest. Arcadia’s College of Global Studies (formerly the Center for Education Abroad) is one of the country’s largest providers of study, internship, and service programs. The university, a NAFSA 2006 Senator Paul Simon Award winner, is also part of the American Council on Education’s “At Home in the World” initiative, which seeks to spur collaborations between global learning and multicultural education.

Arcadia students used to have to fulfill the global component of general education by taking two courses with an international thrust—on global justice and on pluralism in the United States—or one of those courses combined with study abroad. In 2007 it made sweeping changes to what it now simply calls the Arcadia Curriculum, eschewing the term general education.

Instead of two courses in the catalogue, students since 2008 must take classes that bear the designation “Crossing Boundaries” and explore issues of social jus-



tice, social welfare, and economic rights across national and social boundaries.” Crossing boundaries is one of five “Intellectual Practices” that Arcadia students are expected to develop across their college career, not just as freshmen or sophomores (the others are modern languages, quantitative reasoning, visual literacy, and writing). In addition, they must have what Arcadia calls a “Global Connections Experience” in which students engage with a cultural context different from the one in which they grew up. It doesn’t have to take place abroad; some students perform service in prisons, schools, and refugee centers in Philadelphia.

“Basically what we did is make it so general education is not separate from the rest of the curriculum,” said Ellen Skilton-Sylvester, professor of education and director of Global Connections. “Students can fulfill what used to be general education requirements with courses in their major as long as a course has a (global) designation.” Arcadia came to the realization that “we didn’t need them to all walk through a certain set of courses” to achieve global competencies.

Peter Siskind, a history professor who chaired the steering committee that pushed the reforms over the finish line, said, “We wanted to design a curriculum that focused on ends, learning objectives, and create as much flexibility about means and specific courses as possible.” Siskind, as interim dean of undergraduate studies in 2011–2012, also presided over some modifications to the curriculum, including tightening the requirements for transfer students.

Overall, the core “is significantly better than what we had. Big pieces of it work,” said Siskind. “Like everything, it has its flaws. When it passed (by the faculty), it did so with 93 percent approval. I’m sure that approval rating is down some.”

But he said it was “absurd” that in the prior curriculum, courses in the major were not allowed to count toward fulfilling the core, he said. Forcing students into the global justice and pluralism courses “bred resentment, the captive audience mentality. We wanted to open it up to different kinds of intellectual energy of the faculty.”

And that has happened with a profusion of seminars that take innovative approaches to global topics, in-

## Solving Global Problems From the First Day on Campus

Students are drawn to Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to solve problems, not just mathematical and chemical formulas, but real-world challenges. The vast majority are engineering, science, and computer science majors. All undergraduates spend a large chunk of their final two years working in teams on open-ended projects. Half of the students fly around the world to the university’s 30 project centers on five continents, working with communities large and small to tackle energy, environmental, and other imbrolios. WPI overhauled its curriculum in 1970 to afford students these interdisciplinary experiences and propel them into careers as engineers and scientists.

In 2007 the university decided it wasn’t starting this soon enough. It launched a two-course seminar for 100 first-year students to jump start their introduction to research projects and

challenged them to tackle global food, water, and energy issues from day one. The popular Great Problems Seminars now have room for 360 students, a third of the entering class, with enrollment first-come, first-served.

Kristin Wobbe, associate dean for undergraduate studies, said the “gearheads” attracted to WPI already know their career path. Before the seminars, “we knew the first year program didn’t engage students enough. Students were frustrated with having to take classes when they came to WPI to do projects.”

Two, seven-week classes are taught by a pair of faculty, one a scientist or engineer with technical expertise and the other from arts, humanities, business, or social sciences “with a more humanistic outlook,” said Wobbe, a chemistry professor.

In the first seven-week quarter, “students and faculty together poke at the problem and try to get a grip on why

this is still a big problem even though we’ve known about it forever.” In the next quarter, students divide into teams, pick “some small piece” of the problem and propose solutions. Some will build on this work as juniors and seniors.

Provost Eric Overstrom called the freshmen seminars “truly ground-breaking” and said WPI hopes to keep expanding capacity. Alumni have chipped in to make that possible.

The response from students has been equally enthusiastic.

The seminar “has given me skills that will help me throughout my college and professional career,” said freshman Kaija Roy. Her class worked on hunger in Worcester, the second largest city in Massachusetts, helping a local pantry collect more waste fruits and vegetables from supermarkets and distribute them more efficiently.

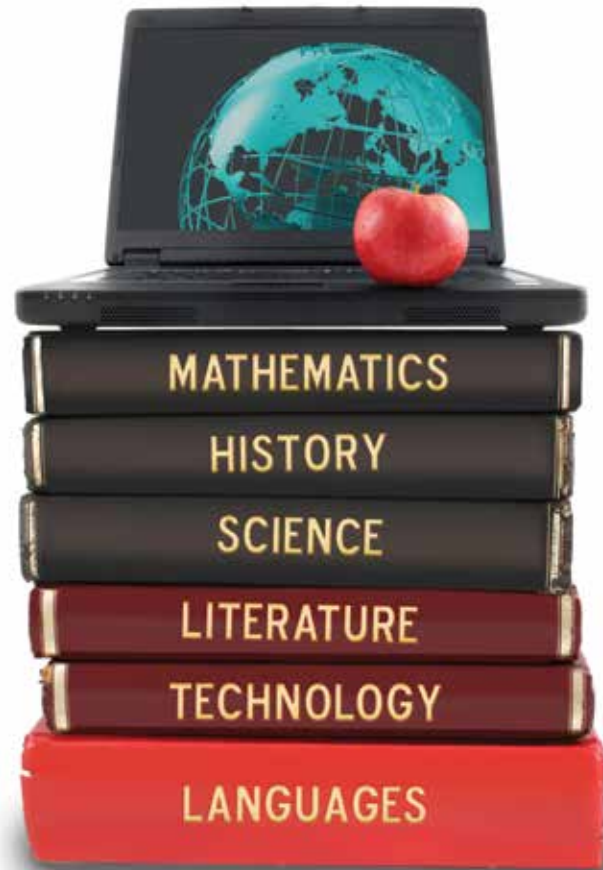
Patrick Ford, a May 2013 graduate and environmental engineer in Provi-

cluding Shultz's baseball seminar. Crossing Boundaries courses must compare at least two parts of the world, but there are dozens to choose from.

"We have such a powerful history of study abroad, but this conception of global learning has been new for us as a community," said Bill Meiers, an English instructor and academic coordinator for the First Year Study Abroad Experience, in which some freshmen start in London and Scotland. "We continue to think through what it means for us to help students connect the United States to the rest of the world."

Students must take a two-credit, online class while they are in the middle of their Global Connections experience reflecting on what they learn about inequities, inequality, and interconnectedness. Meiers, who's taught many sections of the reflections course, said it's hard for some students who "are reluctant to cross class boundaries and see genuine inequality in human form. It makes (them) uncomfortable. That's part of why it exists. It's become part of the fabric of the institution."

In an article about Arcadia's reforms in the FIPSE Update newsletter (published by the U.S. Department of



dence, Rhode Island, took the seminar with Professors Diran Apelian (mechanical engineering) and Svetlana Nikitina (humanities). Ford's team suggested ways to clean up Kingston Harbour, Jamaica.

As freshmen with "little technical experience, we were forced to reach out to other professors for help. This taught us how to network effectively very early on in our college careers," Ford recalled. Their ideas weren't acted on, but "we still learned a lot about how important it is to engineer solutions within the (local) context." Apelian and Nikitina subsequently joined him on projects in Namibia and France. That initial seminar "defined the remainder of my time at WPI."

Nikitina, in Russia with students on a recycling project, said the best thing about working with 18-year-olds was that they were not yet "aware of limits to their dreams and abilities. We try our best not to clip their wings too much."

While just a first step, Nikitina said, the seminar opens "a catalog of prob-

lems (food, transportation, energy, water, health), each of which could plant a seed of a lasting professional and civic interest."

Pairing faculty from different disciplines is a lesson in itself, Wobbe said. It's sometimes difficult "to get students to see why the other things required along the way—their humanities and art, their social science—are important." But in tackling a problem such as water rights, the scales start to fall from their eyes. "While their calculus, chemistry, and fluids are all very useful, they aren't going to be the best problem solvers unless they also have a grip on the realities of government and economics, an awareness of history and culture, and maybe even how to be persuasive," Wobbe said.

"It forced you to stretch your thinking into the social context of engineering problems," said freshman Sam Flibbert, whose team worked on improving water pumps for poor communities in Paraguay. "So often I'm just given a math problem or a chemical formula and told, 'Solve

this.' But this made me consider the world around me as I solved the problem."

WPI brings in Martin Burt, founder of Fundación Paraguaya, which teaches poor people to become self-sufficient, to work with students as "social entrepreneur in residence."

Burt said WPI students built a part that got a solar panel working again at a rural agricultural high school and devised a system to keep newborn piglets warm.

It isn't just that the WPI students possess more technological know-how, he said. On every campus, "there's a new batch of idealistic students that want to change the world and be part of the solution," but they need professors' guidance.

It helps, too, to give them something do-able. "You don't tell them to fix a dam," he said. "For practical purposes, the big problems are comprised of small problems, whether it's a solar dish or preventing some piglets from dying in the winter."



Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education), Shultz quoted a former student, Caylynn Zeitz, who came in as a transfer student and took classes that got her to Dominica, Tanzania, and Sicily. The latter trip was embedded in a class where students learned first-hand about the lives of immigrants in center city Philadelphia. After hearing the stories of Sri Lankan immigrants in Sicily, Zeitz said, "I was absolutely amazed.... Before taking this class, I was rather close-minded about immigration." Zeitz, now a third-grade teacher, credited Arcadia with stretching her understanding of people, places, and cultures "far beyond the boundaries of a typical classroom setting."

### Assessing Outcomes From Integrative Studies

It is one thing to change the curricular and teaching practices at an institution with 2,400 students and several hundred faculty. The task is of another order of magnitude at a university with 37,000 undergraduates and 5,000 faculty such as Michigan State, where the general education core hasn't changed in nearly two decades.

Michigan State imposes three requirements, regardless of major: writing, math, and integrative studies. To fulfill the latter, students must take two social science courses, two arts and humanities courses, one physical science, one biological science, and a lab. Nearly 300 instructors,

from graduate students to professors, are teaching integrative studies classes on common themes—food and water last year and healthcare currently.

The undergraduate studies office, with support from the president and provost, is taking a fresh look at what the students actually learn in those classes. A dozen faculty members were trained in

2012–2013 on ways to reshape how and what they teach and make courses more interdisciplinary and global by working backward from the desired learning outcomes. The assessment team will examine the content of their classes and see if their students wind

up learning more than those taught by instructors who didn't undergo the training. A dozen more faculty are getting the training.

"Faculty are more used to dealing with content and concepts than they are vague learning outcomes, like 'We want students to be good critical thinkers.' They don't necessarily know what it means to teach across disciplinary boundaries," said Jim Lucas, assistant dean for global education and curriculum. "If I'm a scientist, what does it mean to teach about food and water from a humanist perspective, or what would a humanist want included?"

"It's easy to talk about doing global learning, or doing interdisciplinary, integrative teaching, or using learning outcomes. But that's not the language our faculty live in," said Lucas. "We recognized if we are going to go to a globally focused curriculum, we can't make the assumption that the faculty can just do that.... What we've heard from the faculty is that they are going to need help." The dozen instructors in the pilot worked together on new course templates and syllabi.

Michigan State is a long way from proposing changes to its core, which would have to work their way through academic policy and curriculum committees, then be approved by the faculty senate. But accreditors, too, are pushing universities to assess student learning and concentrate on outcomes.

Michigan State remains "very much committed to moving forward the global education agenda, to learning outcomes and assessment, and to making classes more relevant to the students," said Lucas.

AAC&U's Hovland acknowledged, "It's easier to influence a small school with five or six well-chosen campus leaders than it is for a campus with a huge faculty. That's not to say...a good team cannot go back and catalyze some changes."

The association intends to press forward on the general education reform front. "When we started Shared Futures, it was like global was education that happens somewhere else about somebody else," Hovland said. "We slowly moved it to being about this challenge of perspective, integration, and interdependence, and the United States being part of it because we're global as well. We've moved from the idea of, 'Well, we need a global competency requirement or a global awareness course or something' to 'We need to make our entire curriculum more open to these questions and perspectives.'" **IE**

**CHRISTOPHER CONNELL** is a freelance writer in Alexandria, Virginia, and author of NAFSA's annual *Internationalizing the Campus* report.

