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# AN INTERNATIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: Cultural Studies and Study Abroad in an Integrated Studies Program

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**Abstract:** This paper describes the inclusion of a cultural studies/language component and a study abroad experience into the University of North Dakota's successful and long-established Integrated Studies Program. These international study opportunities join a curriculum which fully integrates courses in science, humanities, social science and communications.

## Background and Overview

The Integrated Studies Program (ISP) at the University of North Dakota (UND) was established in 1986 and modeled on the pedagogical philosophies of the Evergreen State College. Initially created in reaction to the traditional, departmentalized university curriculum, the founders of the program hoped to fashion an inquiry-based learning atmosphere that emphasized disciplinary integration of knowledge, critical thinking, and student-centered learning. Now approaching its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Integrated Studies has come to be nationally respected while remaining true to its original philosophies and models. More importantly, operating in a large research university, ISP remains a place where teaching and learning are of utmost importance and where classroom and curricular components are regularly updated and revised to better suit the changing needs of university students.

Unlike the Evergreen State College, a four-year, degree-granting institution,

the Integrated Studies Program at UND provides a first-year, general education experience for university students. An alternative to traditional large-lecture, first-year courses, ISP gives students the opportunity to earn credit in each of the university's General Education Requirement (GER) categories: Humanities, Communications, Social Science, and Math, Science & Technology. The ISP courses are team-taught by a five-member faculty team and are student-centered and inquiry-based. Faculty and students meet for a total of 15 hours a week and engage in integrative study of Composition, Humanities, Life or Physical Science, Social Science and, often, Drama. Each semester, a new curriculum is developed around a central theme that students and faculty explore through integrated, multi-disciplinary readings and assignments. Besides integrating course material, ISP also strives to create a cohesive learning group—a community of learners, both faculty and students, who travel through all learning experiences together for the academic year.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, ISP faculty members have artfully managed to integrate a variety of seemingly disparate disciplines into an increasingly cohesive curriculum. One semester saw the integration of Composition, Humanities, Chemistry and History around the theme "Exploration, *where are we now?*" while another integrated Geology, Humanities, Archaeology and Composition around the theme "Land, Water, People." Emphasis is placed on the use of primary documents and trade books rather than textbooks, and instructors rarely lecture. The goal of this model has always been to "put the students' acts of knowing above the teachers' acts of teaching and ... [involve] the teacher as partner-in-inquiry with her students" (Finkel, 2001, p. 215). Faculty are not concerned about "covering" each discipline, but about giving students tools that help them "[cultivate] Inquiry Skills and Intellectual Judgment and [foster] Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement" (Schneider, 2003, p. 5).

Direct and indirect assessment of student learning outcomes collected over the years has indicated a high rate of academic success and overall satisfaction with the program's curriculum and methods. However, faculty have increasingly felt the need to broaden the students' understanding of international and multicultural issues. The ISP faculty have felt that students in the program, like most other first-year university students, lack familiarity with other countries' histories and viewpoints and are thus unable to compare these histories and viewpoints with those of the United States. Since the majority of students in ISP and at UND are from North Dakota and Minnesota (with very few from other states or countries), and they

have rarely traveled outside of the upper-Midwest, adding this international component becomes particularly important for helping them become better educated and informed citizens.

In the spring semester of 2004, the program took a step toward addressing this need for a more international perspective when it was granted permission and funds to develop a collaboration with the American College of Norway (ACN), an institution that has partnered with UND since 1992, offering study and teaching abroad opportunities for UND faculty and students. ACN does not grant degrees but offers first-year courses for international students who plan to transfer to other universities, often in other countries. Consequently, international students at ACN frequently transfer to UND to finish their four-year degrees.

Each semester, UND faculty members join the ACN faculty in Moss, Norway, to teach classes in their disciplines. Students from UND who attend the international college are able to do so at UND's regular, low tuition rate. The courses at ACN are offered through UND's registration system, so all students there (American and international) receive UND course credits on their transcripts. This makes it easier, more appealing, and more affordable for UND students to study abroad and likewise provides an incentive for the non-American students at ACN to transfer to UND to continue their educations (since they will earn all their first-year credits from UND). The collaboration benefits the students and the faculty of both institutions.

Though the UND/ACN collaboration has been successful, faculty at both institutions saw the development of an Integrated Studies experience at ACN as desirable and beneficial since the model offers students a more connected learning experience and because it develops communication skills and encourages student interaction. For UND's Integrated Studies students, this collaboration offers an opportunity for continuing the integrated style of learning they enjoyed as students in the stateside program. In addition, creating an Integrated Studies Program experience at ACN would introduce interdisciplinarity to their curriculum, something that has remained underdeveloped in the study abroad experience (Klein, 2002, p. 203). Though it seems that such a partnership would be inevitable, the faculty who initially proposed the partnership had to work hard to convince UND administrators that this collaboration was worth the financial gamble it would take to fund such an endeavor. Ultimately though, as institutions like UND push themselves toward the international "market" and try to become more adept at "[engaging] with the world" (Bollag & Field, 2006), new models of teaching and learning will be necessary, and our eventual success

suggests that even research institutions are willing to invest financially in these experiments.

Since not all Integrated Studies students would eventually choose to travel to ACN in the spring, ISP faculty thought an additional component was needed in order for those students remaining stateside to develop an international perspective. Toward that end, they developed a Norwegian Language and Culture component to precede the study-abroad experience in the fall 2004 curriculum. The goal of adding this component was two-fold: to help prepare students who intend to study at ACN in the spring, and, more importantly, to enrich the curriculum for all ISP students by integrating the history, economics, arts, politics, geography, and contributions of another country into their studies of U.S. history, culture, and politics.

To follow this preparatory Language and Culture unit in the fall, the Integrated Studies faculty decided to offer two versions of the Integrated Studies Program each spring semester: one at the University of North Dakota (as usual) and one at the American College of Norway. The two programs would operate simultaneously, exploring the same theme and using many of the same texts and assignments. ISP students at both institutions could participate in cross-Atlantic discussions related to their studies via a Blackboard site maintained at UND. Each spring, one or two faculty members from ISP would live in Norway and teach at ACN while the rest of the faculty team would remain at UND, supplemented by adjunct instructors or by other faculty members who wanted experience teaching in an integrated studies program. This collaboration would be funded jointly by UND and by the American College of Norway. The Integrated Studies instructor's salary and the salary for his replacement at UND would be paid for by UND's Office of Academic Affairs; his travel expenses would be funded by UND's International Center; and his housing in Moss (a furnished apartment) would be provided by ACN.

During fall semester 2004, nine ISP students from the current and previous years were recruited for the experience, and, along with three other UND students, accompanied ISP professor Mark Magness to Moss, Norway, to begin the first Integrated Studies Abroad experience in spring semester 2005. There they joined the non-American students already enrolled at the American College of Norway. While most of these students came from Norway and Sweden, with a contingent from China, the diversity of this group was greater than the national citizenship would suggest. Many of the Scandinavians were first- or second-generation residents of Norway, with very recent connections to Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Philippines.

## Integrating a Culture & Language Course

The University of North Dakota has long and deep ties to Norway and to Norwegian Culture and is one of only a handful of U.S. universities that offer Norwegian language. Since many UND students already have some affinity for or fondness of Norwegian culture as it has evolved here in North Dakota and Minnesota, integrating the study of Norwegian language and culture into the ISP curriculum seemed like a natural way of getting students to think about a culture and political system that is, despite surface similarities, quite different from the U.S. Since a “Language & Culture” class already exists at UND, it was easy to “borrow” the class from the Languages Department and revamp it for inclusion in our curriculum. Steven Finney, an ISP faculty member, also teaches Norwegian, so the Language Department was quite willing to share the course with us under his responsibility.

It is worth noting here that, while Norway was an obvious choice in our case due to the strong regional ties and UND’s existing collaboration with ACN, the curriculum template we created can be applied to many other countries. An institution interested in this kind of international, interdisciplinary curriculum can adapt the template to fit the interests and expertise of its faculty and take advantage of any cultural and institutional ties it has abroad. It is true that the actual study abroad component of this curriculum would be difficult to duplicate without the kind of partnership that UND enjoys with ACN. However, many institutions do have foreign branch campuses or existing collaborations with foreign institutions which they can utilize. For those institutions that are becoming increasingly interested in developing such relationships (Bollag & Field, 2006), our experiences may be instructive. At any rate, the Language and Culture component of our curriculum may be pursued regardless of the presence or absence of institutional partnerships abroad. What is most important is that the integration creates methods for helping students develop an international perspective on a variety of interdisciplinary issues. As Cornwall and Stoddard (1994) have stated, “Cultures are too complex to be comprehended by any single discipline or methodology.”

UND’s Norwegian Language and Culture study was spread over six weeks, with a two-hour block during each of the first five weeks devoted to beginning language instruction and presentations by research Cooperative Learning Unit (CLU) groups engaged in team research. During the final week of the unit, which we dedicated entirely to the study of Norwegian culture, we supplemented the usual two-hour block with a number of other

Norway-related activities. We watched short informational films about Norway, along with the feature film *Elling* (in Norwegian with English subtitles). We read and discussed Henrik Ibsen’s *Enemy of the People* in English translation. We sampled Norwegian food. At the end of this final unit, we hosted a visit by a Norwegian student studying at UND, who shared her experiences and observations as a Norwegian in the American Midwest and answered questions about everything from Norwegian politics to Norwegian rap music.

## Language Instruction

The language portion of the unit had two aims. First, we wanted to give students a “taste” of Norwegian language (as opposed to a functional proficiency, which was beyond the scope of the course)—a taste that might whet an appetite for more Norwegian, or for foreign language study in general.

The second aim was to demonstrate the degree to which individual fields of study are interrelated in the “real” world. Modern Norwegian, like most modern languages, has been shaped in ways both subtle and radical by geography, migration, commerce, and the political history of its speakers.

An additional appeal of Norwegian language study lay in the fact that only one of our faculty had any experience with Norwegian, thus placing the rest of the faculty alongside our students as true co-learners. The language instruction began with a brief history of Norway’s national languages (there are two, plus one hundred or so regional dialects), highlighting the roots they share in common with English, as well as the influence of foreign rule and the resulting movement to reassert a national identity. Next we tackled the usual introductory fare of early first-semester language study: We learned the alphabet and worked on pronunciation of vowels and key consonants. From there we progressed to simple phrases, greetings, and the names of everyday objects and activities. For a text, we used selected chapters of *Norsk Nordmenn og Norge* (Stokker, 1981), a beginning-Norwegian text formerly used in the UND Language department for first- and second-semester Norwegian. Again, the idea was not that students would become fluent in Norwegian, but that they might uncover an aptitude for, or interest in, language learning that had lain fallow until now, and that they would experience some of the thrill and heightening of perspective that carrying on even a rudimentary conversation in a foreign language can inspire.

In each of these aims we were at least partly successful. A few students

went on to complete additional chapters of the text that had not been assigned. A number of students, including a few who had been struggling with other aspects of our program, discovered they had a talent for language. Small measures of glee were evident throughout the room when students managed to complete exchanges with one another. The co-learning aspect was particularly rewarding. Students were able to see their professors struggle along with them to produce strange new vowels like ø and å, and æ. The results were often comical, which eased students' own reluctance to risk looking silly.

What was also evident was a fair amount of grumbling and questioning the “point” of learning a few bits of a language that the majority would never pursue further. Some of the grumbling, on reflection, was justified. We tried to cover too much ground in the language—more than the “taste” of our original goal. Our revision of the Norway unit will reflect this realization. However, though not all students may have immediately realized the value of the language study, it became clear over the semester that even cursory knowledge of another language helps students better understand a foreign culture and its people.

### *Cooperative Learning Unit (CLU) Presentations*

In addition to the introductory language study, we also wove strong cultural research components throughout the semester by creating cooperative or CLU group research assignments for students to complete. CLU groups are teams of students who research specific topics and present their findings to the rest of the students and faculty. The use of student CLU groups in our Integrated Studies Program originated in 1989 and was based on the Problem Based Learning Model then highly popular at UND's School of Medicine (Carmichael, 2004, p.67). The format of the presentation is up to the group, and past presentations have run the gamut from solemn recitation to simulated newscasts, scripted plays, game shows, and variety revues complete with original music and dance. Input from faculty is minimal, and groups are instructed to be informative as well as entertaining. Once again, the goal here was twofold: to have students conduct research and do comparative study on various topics and also to take responsibility for their own learning and for the classroom itself, not depending on professors to feed them information.

CLU team size depends on the nature and number of topics, and may be as few as two or as many as a dozen. For the Norway CLUs we divided the group into 10 teams of seven or eight students each, and assigned each

group one of the following categories: History; Geography and Climate; Religion; Economy; Government; Health, Education and Welfare; Crime and Punishment; Role in World Community; Art and Literature; and Environmental Issues. Our hope was that once students began researching and preparing their presentations, they would see that the categories were all but impossible to study in isolation: that Norway's economy, for instance, with its dominant industries of oil, fishing, timber, and shipping, was highly dependent on its singular geography; that Norwegian art and literature show the stamp of its history, religion, geography, etc.; that its institutions of health, education, and welfare, were heavily influenced by its social traditions and economy. If the essence of integration is, rather than studying what a variety of disciplines has to say about a variety of phenomena, studying what a variety of disciplines has to say about a *single* phenomenon, then studying Norway from these multiple angles seemed like an ideal way to both illustrate the *idea* of integration and to actually practice it. Once students had experienced a method for grasping and comprehending a country in all its aspects, they would have a framework for looking at their own country and culture with a pair of “outsiders' eyes,” seeing for perhaps the first time how these previously unconnected disciplines combine and interact to become what they experience as America. For instance, students studied and debated the pros and cons of different types of penal systems and were able to see vast differences in a “punishment based” penal system like the U.S.'s and a “rehabilitation based” system like Norway's. They compared data regarding the rates and treatment for a variety of criminal offenses, including drunk driving, murder, and armed robbery in the two countries, and they saw how the two different punishment models were effective in different ways for different crimes. This comparison led them to carefully consider ways in which their own country's penal system was successful and ways it could be improved. It also made them realize how much a culture's philosophy and world-view affects all parts of its various social systems.

Again, we were at least partly successful in achieving these aims, although some fine-tuning will be made for the next round of Norway CLUs. Presentations were of uneven quality, to say the least, and tended to stress entertainment over erudition. The best of them dispensed interesting factoids in game-show formats with sometimes less-than-adequate context (per-capita gun ownership statistics, for example, mean little without comparable figures for U.S. and other populations.) The worst of them missed key information. Some of this variability and weakness is typical for first-year student CLU group activity, especially one coming as early in the first semester as this

one does. Quality generally rises as students gain experience and become more engaged and familiar with the material. Our next version of this CLU activity will include more explicit direction regarding the need for context and comprehensiveness, however.

Our concluding week of intense Norway study and immersion was perhaps the most powerful (and popular) component. Several of the activities seemed to bring about a crystallization of all the foregoing language and cooperative learning assignments. Films like *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Trousers*, which encapsulates the last hundred years of Norwegian history beginning with Norway's independence from Sweden and continuing through its occupation by Nazi Germany, and the feature-length Norwegian film *Elling*, shown with subtitles, created a culminating experience for both the students and the faculty, giving them the opportunity to hear the language in its most genteel and vulgar forms while seeing the English translation on-screen.

Perhaps the highest point of this "Norway Week," was our visit with a native Norwegian. Our visitor was a Norwegian UND student who had begun at ACN and transferred to UND to complete her degree. Her considerable charm and ability to articulate her often controversial impressions of both the U.S. and her native Norway put, at last, a living, breathing human face and voice to what had begun six weeks earlier as a pedagogical exercise. The conversation was lively, and our students were eager and engaged. It was evident that many of them had developed an impressive grasp of Norway in all its aspects. Three of them were ready to continue their ISP experience on the other side of the Atlantic at the American College of Norway.

Students came away from this foray into Norwegian Language and Culture having learned the following:

- Modern Norway is a progressive, liberal country, far in advance of many Western countries in terms of philanthropy, women's rights, and education.
- America's capitalistic economy shares more attributes than previously realized with Norway's more mixed economic system.
- Americans share in a "global village" that is greatly affected by their leaders' actions in the world.
- A country they once thought of as "much like their own" is in fact quite different. Its people are far less religious, much more socially and politically liberal and infinitely more engaged in the world than their Norwegian "cousins" in North Dakota and Minnesota.
- There *are* alternative governmental and social models in the world that are as successful and desirable as the American model.

These findings were made much more immediate for students who continued their studies at ACN alongside students from all over the world.

## Integrated Studies at an International College

### *The School*

The American College of Norway, a college with an international student body, is located in Moss, a city of 30,000 on the eastern side of the Oslo fjord, a 50-minute train ride south of Oslo. The college is situated in the center of the city in a new building that also houses a multiplex cinema, a café, and Moss's public library. ACN's space includes two classrooms and a computer lab. The staff is comprised of a small administrative team and a series of adjunct faculty. For instructors, ACN relies primarily upon visiting faculty from UND, with some part-time instructors from the local area to teach standing courses like Norwegian. Course offerings depend largely on the specialties of the visiting UND faculty, but generally include English Composition and Creative Writing or Public Speaking. Typically ACN hosts two visiting faculty per semester, each of whom teaches two or three courses.

The ACN version of ISP is a scaled-down version of the stateside ISP, sharing the semester's theme, its block structure and a majority of the texts. Whereas stateside students earn 12 to 14 credits in four subject areas (Humanities, Social Science, Physical Science and Composition), students in ISP's first semester at ACN earned only seven ISP credits (Humanities and Social Science), though most of them did earn additional credits in non-ISP courses like Composition, Creative Writing, Computer Science, Introduction to Film, Drama, and Norwegian Language (required for American students). The seven credits were divided into two weekly blocks of two hours and two of 90 minutes. In the future we hope to integrate Composition into the ISP curriculum at ACN, which will bring it even closer to the stateside model. Our ability to do so depends on our ability to either forge a partnership with the visiting faculty responsible for teaching Composition or to secure enough funding to send two of our own faculty to handle Humanities, Social Science and Composition in the same integrated way we do at home.

Another noteworthy difference between the stateside and ACN versions of ISP is the opportunity for previous-year ISP students to enroll in the ACN version (ISP at home is limited to first-year students). To accommodate these upper-level students, the ACN ISP offerings feature a two-tier

structure, with additional requirements for students earning upper-level credit.

### *The Students*

We recruited six students from the previous year's (2003-4) ISP group as well as three second-semester freshmen from the current (2004-5) group; while foreign study advisers at UND's International Center recruited three non-ISP students from the general UND student population (the opportunity to study at ACN was not limited to ISP students alone). This group of 12 joined the 48 students already enrolled at ACN for a total enrollment of 60 students (a considerable increase from past years). These students were free to choose among all the course offerings at ACN, including our ISP classes. Forty-five of the 60 enrolled in the ISP classes. This would have posed a staffing problem had it not been for the six second-year ISP students. ISP class time is typically spent in seminar groups of about 15 students. With only one ISP instructor, 45 students in a single seminar group would have been unwieldy to the point of being unworkable. Fortunately, the six American second-year students were seasoned veterans of the ISP approach to seminars and were quickly recruited to work in pairs as seminar leaders in return for upper-level Humanities credit. Using student seminar leaders helped us maintain the small, student-centered that are a hallmark of our program while also decentralizing the professor's role as classroom leader, keeping the focus on the students as learners.

As classes began, it was immediately apparent that ISP would be well suited to this international environment. Whereas large lecture classes and perhaps even some lab classes may not benefit from classroom diversity since student voices (and thus viewpoints) are not prevalent, in ISP seminars, which rely heavily on discussion and the sharing of perspectives, the more diverse the group the more exciting the class. As noted previously, the ACN student body is very diverse, including far more than just native Scandinavians. This wide-ranging student body made these classes international in flavor as well as interdisciplinary in scope.

### *Course Content*

Ideally, to lay a foundation for a trans-Atlantic dialogue between the two student bodies, both the home and abroad versions of ISP would share the same reading list. However, logistical and language considerations led us to

modify the ACN booklist. The stateside ISP reading list had already been settled when ISP at ACN became a possibility. Once our overseas experiment became a reality, it was clear that some changes were in order. Because the overseas version of ISP involved fewer credit hours and because for most ACN students English was a second or third language, the reading list was modified while the semester's theme remained the same.

Of the 14 books on the stateside list, six remained on the ACN list: *The Story of B* (Quinn), *The Metamorphoses* (Ovid), *Metamorphoses* (Zimmerman), *Hiroshima* (Hersey), *A Woman in Amber* (Nesauale), and *Fools Crow* (Welch). In addition, four books *not* included in the UND syllabus—*Lost Horizon* (Hilton), *The Good Earth* (Buck), *Six Questions of Socrates* (Phillips), and a new, very hip, very loose translation of Dante's *Inferno* (Birk)—were added to the ACN list.

In an international program, text selection is particularly important. Consideration of diversity (cultural, historic, experiential) within the class can point to texts that will bring out those diverse experiences during class discussion. For example, both stateside and ACN groups of ISP students read *A Woman in Amber*, a memoir of a woman who grew up during World War II in Latvia and who continued to struggle with the pain of her childhood long after the war had ended and she had emigrated to the United States. At ACN, this was a particularly successful text, inviting cross-cultural perspectives on war, gender, and family expectations. Everyone got involved, not just the Norwegians (whose country had been occupied by the Nazis during the war) or the Americans (who could offer insight into the latter part of the story, which took place in the U.S.). Since the book is very much about trying to find the "truth" of an experience that looks different to different people and seems to change as time passes, everyone got involved. The discussion began about a woman and a war and became about perspective and relativity and the search for meaning.

John Hersey's *Hiroshima* provoked a very vocal and unexpected reaction from the normally quiet Chinese students. Those students talked enthusiastically about the considerable antipathy of the Chinese toward the Japanese, based on pre-war imperialistic violence—a painful and important part of Chinese history, but about which the rest of the class knew very little. Another excellent book was *Six Questions of Socrates*, by Christopher Phillips. Reading—in English—about the philosophy of Socrates is already a cross-cultural activity, and with chapters titled "What is Justice?" and "What is Courage?" everyone could, and did, enter in—young women from The Gambia, Pakistan, and Shanghai, and young men from the Philippines and

North Dakota. These book choices were really fortunate and offer a lesson: Carefully considering the nature of classroom diversity while selecting texts can pay great dividends.

Just as it is at UND, part of the ISP approach at ACN was to seize opportunities for creating impromptu assignments or activities based on classroom interest. After reading *Lost Horizon*, seminar groups were asked to compile a list of “cultural treasures” that students would save (from an impending cataclysmic war) and move for safekeeping to Shangri-la. This was likely a much more interesting and stimulating exercise when done by a diverse group of students than it would have been if done by a more homogeneous group. As is often the case with assignments like these, the students did not go in the direction that we had expected. Instead of deciding to “keep” treasures like Ming dynasty pottery and Italian Renaissance paintings, they instead moved beyond such list-making and debated the *value* of clinging to such artifacts from a past that had led to this hypothetical war.

In addition to learning about each other’s differences, the class discussions also provided ground for understanding the similarities of the human condition no matter where or how one was raised. After reading the short, short story “Girl,” by Jamaica Kincaid (a young girl’s mother gives her “behavior” advice), students wrote and shared their own versions of this story. It was a delightful exercise. While much was revealed about the variety of childhood experiences, much more was learned about the similarity of the parent-child relationship across cultures.

At one point, near the end of the semester, one of the students wondered aloud whether every culture has “common knowledge” that it assumes is universal. Americans, for example, might be surprised if *anyone* didn’t know who George Washington was. Intrigued by this question, the students broke into three groups—American, Chinese, and Scandinavian—and each created its own culture’s general knowledge quiz. (One first-generation Norwegian whose parents had come from Pakistan also contributed some Pakistani questions.) The quiz was not “controlled” enough to generate any conclusions about the relative “worldliness” of any given culture, but students freely shared their cross-cultural knowledge and ignorance, leading to some very interesting further discussion about ethnocentrism.

Because one of the benefits of ISP-style classes is that they engender true learning *communities*, it was rewarding (though not unexpected) to see how close the international ISP students became and how their experiences as a community outside of the classroom both capitalized on and informed their learning experiences. The classroom often provides the impetus for

thinking deeply, making connections (between ideas and between people), and making meaning, but as Sandström and Duncan (1999) have observed, “To make meaning is to connect seemingly disparate phenomena or ideas in ways that generate new understanding ... [and] these ways can be both conscious and unconscious.” On several weekends, for instance, over 30 ACN students traveled out to a large cabin on the North Sea, belonging to one of the Norwegians. Bonds were formed, non-academic experiences were shared, cross-cultural ideas were explored. One group watched “Norwegian Idol,” while Norwegian students translated the program for Americans. In another room, an intense game of cards progressed with Americans counting in Norwegian and Norwegians in English. Weekend conversations began exploring specific cultural differences. Students compared and discussed length of workweeks in different countries, paid vacations, maternity leave and, moving on, cultural and national identities and how these are perceived across the globe. Questions were raised which explored the “right” way of life and how that differed in America, Norway, China, The Gambia. Class texts—specifically Daniel Quinn’s *The Story of B*—found their way, unbidden, into conversations about whether these views were all relative and whether one culture is more selfish than another. Having students who represented various cultural viewpoints present during these conversations, allowed everyone there the opportunity to see his or her own thinking through new lenses, to question ideas that had previously been untested. In addition, students traveled to London, backpacked across Austria, Germany, Italy, and France, visited Denmark and Sweden, and explored many regions of Norway itself, all in the company of the students they met at ACN. It is clear that these kinds of experiences and the meaning that students took from them could only be produced by actually participating in this kind of international learning community. No on-line or distance learning substitute is available. As one student said after the experience and her return to the States, “I went a citizen of the United States and came back a citizen of the world.”

## Conclusion

Integrated Studies students at UND are encouraged to embrace and exercise their curiosity. They are encouraged to become scholars, to explore the world, to question their paradigms. But when American high school seniors become American university freshmen and are attending a university within a day’s drive of their hometowns, they are in a familiar

environment with a familiar population, and exercising curiosity can be almost counterintuitive.

The international multicultural environment of ACN *compels* this scholarly curiosity and is perfect for Integrated Studies because it further encourages curiosity in the classroom. However, like many other study abroad programs, “much of the learning that occurs happens outside the classroom,” coming from personal relationships and experiences and producing “tremendous gains in personal and intellectual growth” in students (Klein, 2002, p.210). Three anecdotal examples illustrate this:

- A group of women students—one from Minnesota, and two from Norway (one by way of The Gambia)—met informally once a week over coffee to “change the world.” They considered religion and pondered how they had become Christian, Muslim, Atheist. They explored whether it made sense to talk about religion in terms of right or wrong, and explored how they could better understand one another. They discussed and argued about consumerism, how it differs across cultures, and wondered at the proper place of human beings on this planet.
- An informal essay by a quiet and apparently disinterested male student written three-fourths of the way through the semester described walking through Norway with several classmates. He shared how he suddenly felt compelled on that trip to enter into a discussion about Socrates’ search for the meaning of justice. It was a breakthrough for him, and he became an enthusiastic and thoughtful classroom participant for the remainder of the semester, which he felt ended all too soon.
- A large group of students who traveled to London for a weekend, attended theater events, visited historical sites, and ate in ethnic restaurants. Their experience traveling and experiencing these things as an international group, they reported, gave them confidence in their abilities to approach the world and helped them think about these experiences from a global perspective.
- A large-group discussion about whether Hiroshima was a “suitable” and “legitimate” military target was derailed by several of the Norwegian students who introduced a theory from their previous semester’s Peace Studies class, completely altering the paradigm of the discussion from one which allowed the question, “Which targets may be bombed?” to one inhabited by the question, “Need *any* targets be bombed?”

Though these examples illustrate the successes of the ACN Integrated Studies Program, the international experiment benefited students in the stateside program as well. Both the American students who studied there and have returned to UND and the students who remained in the UND program have had positively altered learning experiences because of this collaboration. Students in the concurrent stateside program were affected by the ACN program because of the coordinated efforts of faculty on both sides of the Atlantic to create dialogue between the two groups and to share information about assignments and student discussion topics. The use of the Blackboard site to create international discussions was helpful in this effort and proved quite interesting, though since we were all novices using it and were just in the early stages of the ACN experience, it was also underutilized. In the future, we hope to be active, both at UND and ACN, in creating and encouraging more threaded discussions on topics germane to both groups’ readings and classroom activities. Professors in both programs kept in close touch and shared information about various class discussions, problems, and activities. For instance, when Professor Magness revealed the Chinese students’ reactions to *Hiroshima* concerning their long antipathy to the Japanese, stateside faculty shared that information with the UND students who were then able to do further research on Chinese-Japanese relations. Having immediate access to these international perspectives added more diversity to the UND experience. We plan to capitalize more on these sorts of moments in the future, and the flexible nature of our curriculum will allow us to do so.

UND and ACN administrators considered successful not only the students’ and classroom experience but the institutional collaboration as well. The collaboration boosted enrollments at ACN (something that has been a concern since 9/11), increasing UND’s involvement by over 60% from past semesters. Administrators at ACN were pleased with the learning style of the ISP courses and have indicated their enthusiasm for having Integrated Studies as part of the spring semester each year. This collaboration will continue as long as UND administrators are able to provide supplemental funding to make it happen. (ISP’s budget is incredibly limited and barely suitable to operating the UND version of the program.) This is by no means a sure thing since at a large, research university, any program which stresses low student-faculty ratios over “cost-effective education” is always in danger of being cut. However, for now, the administrators on both ends find great value in the educational opportunity this collaboration offers students and faculty, and have agreed to its continuance. It is clear that all parties—student, academic, and administrative—value the fact that the Integrated

Studies/American College of Norway collaboration has enabled students “to be full participants in the various overlapping communities they [will] belong to in their lives” (Coleman, 2001, p. 6).

**Biographical note:** Tami S. Carmichael is the Director of Humanities & Integrated Studies at the University of North Dakota. She publishes and presents regularly on issues in interdisciplinary and integrative teaching and learning as well as on topics in American literature. Her recent book, *Integrated Studies: Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, chronicles the history and pedagogy of this successful, first-year integrated learning community. She holds an M.A. and Ph.D., both in English, from the University of Georgia.

Though this is Steven Finney’s first scholarly publication, his fiction has appeared in a variety of periodicals. He has studied at Bondelagets Folkehøyskole in Mysen, Norway, and currently teaches in the Integrated Studies Program and the Department of Languages, both at the University of North Dakota.

Mark Magness currently teaches in the Integrated Studies Program at the University of North Dakota and serves as a writing consultant for the University Writing Program there. Mark bravely piloted the ISP program at the American College of Norway. He holds graduate degrees in law and English and is a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the history, curriculum, and practices of the Integrated Studies Program at the University of North Dakota, see Carmichael, T.S. (2004). *Integrated studies: Reinventing general education*.

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