



Envisioning Global Citizenship

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My reflections on the promise of Ohio University focus on the responsibilities and commitments associated with global citizenship.

In a sense, my comments on global citizenship echo Dr. Ping's insights, written in 1982, on the importance of international community and what he calls "education for interdependence." "The call for education for interdependence," he wrote, "must be based on more than naïve dreams of one world." At that time, as now, new global realities were emerging, making young people the inheritors of global change. "Education for interdependence," he wrote, "is a recognition of a practical necessity to understand and respond to this new reality."

Our world – the world that you students are inheriting – is increasingly shaped by forces of globalization, and many of the problems facing the international community transcend conventional boundaries and borders: problems of conflict and warfare, global warming, food insecurity, epidemics, and world poverty, all interconnected and intertwined. The students we are recognizing today in this room, and all of the students across this campus, are facing new challenges as well as new opportunities as they graduate from OU and necessarily engage with and respond to these problems out in the world.

The promise of Ohio University, to me, is to prepare students in all fields of study to carry the responsibilities of participation in an international community while also realizing their personal and collective potential through expressions of global citizenship. These expressions can take many forms – forms which seem to blur the boundaries between places we consider here and places we consider there.

After all, being a global citizen is not simply about moving back and forth between points separated by distance on a world map. Instead, global citizenship is about conceptual mapping – recognizing the connections between local interests and global concerns, and taking seriously the moral implications of our decisions and actions in an increasingly transnational world.

For example, the field of global citizenship includes Laura Allen, an undergraduate student in the Honors Tutorial College who is writing her senior thesis on citizen action in response to corporate coal mining in West Virginia, as well as Rebakah Daro, a graduate student in Southeast Asian Studies who is writing her master's thesis on how corporate agriculture impacts local family farmers in rural Thailand.

Global citizenship in this sense is an intellectual stance, a critical lens. It involves a figurative movement out of a comfort zone and a thoughtful repositioning in relation to it, with a sense of responsibility and engagement.

To me, this is ultimately the meaning of a public liberal arts education.

I learned this lesson at a young age from my parents, both of them first generation college graduates, and products of public universities. My mother Helen Evans grew up in a small town in South Carolina and attended the University of South Carolina. My father Jack Duschinski grew up in Portsmouth Ohio and attended Ohio University. (He was on the varsity basketball team in 1954.) Their college professors did something right, I think, in inspiring their curiosity about the world and shaping their projects and commitments in it

In the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s they lived throughout the country – in Southern Florida, in Northern California – finally settling in South Carolina, where I was raised. As I grew up, they encouraged me to embrace the uncertainty and ambivalence of being in unfamiliar places, to explore within and beyond US borders, and ultimately to become a cultural anthropologist. They were, in their own ways of looking at the world, members of an international community.

Today when I stand in front of a classroom here at Ohio University, I imagine that the students in the lecture hall are young people like my father was 50 years ago, and I try to continue the tradition of instruction that shaped and molded him – by teaching today’s students to be curious, to be critical, to be reflective, and to be alert.

This means teaching them to live in the world with a sense of provisionality.

A few weeks ago, I read the memoir of cultural critic Edward Said. In it, he writes about this mode of provisionality as a feeling of being perpetually in exile, and perpetually out of place. He likens it to a state of insomnia, a wakefulness that is also a worldliness, a feeling of constant alertness, an uneasiness with accommodation and cooptation and conformity. I like to think of this wakefulness, or worldliness, as a shifting of one’s reference point from the center to the periphery and then struggling to see the world from that decentered and denaturalized point of view.

This process of denaturalization is central to the project of cultural anthropology. It gives rise to a feeling of what my anthropology professor in graduate school used to call “productive discomfort” – a special kind of double vision that arises through participant observation, through a perpetual dis-placement on the threshold between insider and outsider status.

But this process of denaturalization is also central to the project of a liberal arts education.

This is what we teach our students – to develop critical faculties, to see the world with an alternate lens, to resist easy formulas and grand narratives, to position themselves against the grain. This does not mean abandoning one’s own local attachments but rather leaving one’s field of familiarity and returning to see the taken-for-granted world with new eyes.

I like to think of the promise of Ohio University as a vision, but a double vision - a reflective balance of cultural, national, and global identities that is required to position oneself thoughtfully and responsibly in the world today.