Engaging in Research to Improve Education Policy Around the World

In the 21st century, marked by the rapid pace of global change, comparative and international education has become of paramount importance. International peace at a global level requires transforming our educational and social institutions, but improvements are also needed in equity, social justice, and the ability to promote sustainable development. By understanding and critically reflecting on current policies, practices, and conditions, the International Education Policy (IEP) program hopes to contribute to both educational and social change. The UM program, which is recognized as one of the top programs of its kind in the country, aims at creating a community of faculty, students, and development professionals that strives to further cross-cultural and multicultural understanding and bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners.

The University of Maryland, as a whole, and the College of Education, in particular, has made a specific and strong commitment to internationalization throughout its programs and policies. The courses in the IEP program provide the foundations of educational theory and practice, the nature of comparative and international education, and the application of cultural, economic, political, and sociological perspectives to understanding education and development. Beyond the core courses, an individually tailored program is designed for each student that uniquely reflects their background and career goals. Students are encouraged to draw upon the entire range of resources the University of Maryland has to offer and to choose courses appropriate to their interests in the social sciences, the humanities, cross-disciplinary areas (e.g., focusing on gender or race issues), professional educational specializations (e.g., early childhood, international exchange, or higher education), and regional emphases (e.g., Africa or Latin America).

The IEP program has three core faculty who direct the program and a number of affiliate faculty who teach relevant courses and work with UM students. Professor Steve Klees coordinates the program. Klees previously taught at Cornell, Stanford, and Florida State University, as well as having taught courses abroad. He was a Fulbright Scholar on two occasions in Brazil and is former president of the Comparative and International Education Society. His research interests are in...
the political economy of educational policy and social change, particularly in the nature of educational and social inequalities and what is needed to overcome them. He has published extensively on a variety of related topics, including the situation of disadvantaged children and the policies of international institutions such as the World Bank. Professor Jing Lin and Professor Nelly Stromquist are the other two core faculty. Lin taught at McGill University before joining UM in 2000. She has published five books on Chinese education, culture, and society, systematically examining educational changes in China in the last 30 years. Further, she has done extensive research on peace education and environmental education. She is also the co-editor of two book series, one on education and the other on transforming education for the future. Stromquist taught at the University of Southern California before coming to UM. Her research focuses on gender issues, adult literacy, the links between popular education and social movements, and the impact of globalization on education. She has published 15 books and numerous articles. She is former president of the Comparative and International Education Society and received a New Century Scholar Fulbright Fellowship in 2005-2006. Adding to their many activities, the three IEP faculty members were recently awarded a grant to work together, along with some of their graduate students and recent graduates, to study the shortage of female teachers in many African countries, focusing on the barriers to women becoming teachers and the policies that can remove these barriers. This is extremely important to furthering access to and quality of education for young girls.

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Current Students in Action

Rachel McKinney
Rachel McKinney has worked in conflict and post-conflict communities for 14 years in the Balkans, South and Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. As lead consultant for the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies’ Teaching and Learning Initiative, she developed guidance materials for practitioners working with education systems in crisis-affected communities to support the transition from crisis to stable and peaceful societies through education.

Jorge Baxter
Jorge Baxter, originally from Mexico, is currently the International Director of Education and Outreach for Sesame Workshop where he oversees education activities in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Western Europe. He is co-founder of MobilizArte, an organization focused on film and education for social change. Prior to Sesame Workshop, he worked as an education specialist at the Organization of American States (OAS), where he helped to launch a hemispheric program to promote human rights and citizenship education and launch the Inter-American Journal on Education for Democracy.

Dave Edwards
David Edwards is a senior policy analyst for International Relations at the National Education Association (NEA) where he helps to represent NEA’s members in discussions at various international organizations, oversees a portion of NEA’s development cooperation projects, and conducts research on issues of global education. Prior to NEA, he was an education specialist at the OAS. Currently, he serves on the Leadership Council of the U.S. Chapter of the Global Campaign for Education and represents NEA in a number of coalitions and alliances such as the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign, the Education International Taskforce on Teacher Migration, and the Partnership for Global Learning.

Meredith McCormac
An international education practitioner and researcher in the nongovernmental sector, Meredith McCormac has worked in a wide range of countries including Zambia, Liberia, Uganda, Burma, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Bosnia. Her work focuses on educational quality improvement in developing countries. Currently, she works at World Learning where she implements and evaluates USAID-funded projects that aim to expand access to and improve quality of basic education to marginalized communities.

Justin W. van Fleet
Justin W. van Fleet is currently a guest researcher at the Brookings Institution’s Center for Universal Education exploring the focus, volume, and motivations behind U.S. corporate philanthropy directed towards education in developing countries. At the University of Maryland, he has also served in several education-advising capacities for the Clinton Global Initiative.

Jorge Baxter with Bert and Ernie from Sesame Street

Dave Edwards addressing a National Education Association meeting

Rachel McKinney (Far Left) facilitating a workshop in Gaza on education in emergencies materials

Meredith McCormac (Middle) leading a focus group in Rangoon, Burma

Justin Van Fleet (Middle) with President Bill Clinton at Clinton Global Initiative meeting

Current IEP Students

Jorge Baxter

Maryland International
Recent Graduates from the IEP Program

**Nassim Abdi Dezfooli, Ph.D. 2010**
Nassim Abdi Dezfooli, from Iran, is a faculty research assistant at the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland. Her research addresses language and cultural programs for K-12 students across the United States. Inspired by discussions in the comparative education course at UM, she conducted a Freirean summer camp for young girls in her home country, an experience which provided the empirical grounds for her dissertation on the use of critical pedagogy.

**Lan Gao, Ph.D. 2008**
Lan Gao, from China, is currently working as a senior project analyst in the Office of the Vice President for Policy at Harvard University. She supports its core activities of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data on faculty, students, and staff, as well as providing critical academic, physical, and financial information, and designing and executing research initiatives that answer strategic questions for the university. Her dissertation was on the impacts of economic and cultural capital on students’ access to college and their college choices.

**Bjorn Nordtveit, Ph.D. 2005**
Originally from Norway, Bjorn Nordtveit is an assistant professor in international educational development at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). His research is related to aid effectiveness and safety in schools. He has conducted extensive research on public–private partnerships financed by the World Bank, including his dissertation research on this topic in Senegal. More recently, his research has taken him to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Guinea. His book *Constructing Development, Civil Society and Literacy in a Time of Globalization* received HKU’s Faculty of Education’s Early Career Research Output Award.

**Nisha Thapliyal, Ph.D. 2006**
Nisha Thapliyal, originally from India, is now an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Colgate University. She states, “The IEP program helped me develop a critical perspective on issues of equality and social justice in education which are the cornerstone of my research and teaching. My doctoral dissertation on the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil has expanded into a three-pronged project studying social movements for the right to education in Brazil, South Africa, and India.”

**Sandee Pyne, Ph.D. 2007**
Sandee Pyne, originally from Burma, is a program manager at the USAID/Regional Development Mission for Asia based in Bangkok. As part of the Governance and Vulnerable Populations Office, she manages and provides technical oversight of the Burma portfolio, including humanitarian assistance and civil society strengthening programs. Her dissertation fieldwork documented the impact of forced migration, poverty, and lack of protection in non-state schools for marginalized children run by community-based organizations at the Thailand-Burma border.

New Global Studies Minor Program

Beginning this school year, a new undergraduate Global Studies Minor is being offered at Maryland for students to develop an understanding and appreciation for how and why interactions across national and ethnic borders are shaped by language, culture, politics, economics, development, and conflict.

The program is interdisciplinary in nature and provides opportunities for students from any discipline or major. It is comprised of a number of specialization tracks, which allows students to choose from among a set of approved courses from different disciplines. All students can choose one course from a set of “signature” courses outside of their chosen track to provide them with exposure to major global issues addressed by another track. Each track provides an opportunity for an experiential learning component within a student’s elective courses, including a study abroad experience.

Four tracks are included in the inauguration of the program: International Development and Conflict Management (College of Behavioral and Social Sciences), Global Terrorism (College of Behavioral and Social Sciences), Global Poverty (College of Agricultural and Natural Resources), and International Engineering (A. James Clark School of Engineering). The program is designed so that new tracks can be added to meet new student interests. For more information on the program, visit www.ugst.umd.edu.

By David Ottalini, Senior Media Relations Associate

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**General Education for a Global Century**

The University of Maryland was one of 32 institutions of higher education in the United States chosen to participate in a new curriculum and faculty development project called “General Education for a Global Century.” The initiative, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, is part of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Shared Futures initiative.

“The University of Maryland is thrilled to be part of the General Education for a Global University project,” says University Provost Niranam Farvardin. “As the university moves forward with its Strategic Plan and new general education requirements, this program will help us ensure that our students have the international focus they need to become effective citizens in a global community.”

This new project builds upon innovative efforts to reframe general education courses and programs and create coherent courses that address complex, global issues across divisions and disciplines. Institutional teams will spend the next two years reforming general education reform strategies and strengthening connections between existing general education goals and outcomes and essential global learning outcomes. They will also inventory the curricular and co-curricular opportunities for global learning that already exist on their campuses and ways those opportunities could be better integrated within their larger general education efforts. Working through a social networking website, team members will help identify common areas of interest and concern. Those critical issues will be addressed in the project’s central activity, an intensive summer institute in 2011.

AAC&U President Carol Geary explains, “It was gratifying to see how seriously today’s academy takes the challenge of preparing college students with much higher levels of global knowledge and skill. This initiative will help the higher education community graduate students with these critical capacities.”

See the Global Century website for additional information about the initiative at www.aacu.org/SharedFutures/global_century.

“This program will help ensure that our students have the international focus they need to become effective citizens in a global community.”

— Nariman Farvardin

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By David Ottalini, Senior Media Relations Associate

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**Recent Graduates from the IEP Program**

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