

A Formal Approach to International Studies Focusing on Existing International Strengths at Indiana University

James Wimbush
Dean, University Graduate School
Indiana University (United States)

Interdisciplinary programs and degrees have always been unique as they cross over into many areas of study calling students and faculty to appraise and think about materials in various ways. These interdisciplinary programs are a means of joining and connecting disciplines in new and unique ways that facilitate stronger connections between disciplines that might have little to no previous formal connection.

When, in 1901, Professor Fred Atkinson of Indiana University was appointed the general supervisor of education in the Philippines, this began IU's long history of international activities and studies (School of Global and International Studies, History). Indiana University for many years has worked to create and expand programs and departments that promote international studies in as many disciplines as possible. This interdisciplinary focus is seen strongly in the newly established School of Global and International Studies at Indiana University.

The School of Global and International Studies (SGIS) within Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences continues and strengthens this international focus by facilitating over twenty undergraduate degrees and over twenty-five graduate programs that will prepare students for the twenty-first century. For many years Indiana University-Bloomington has taught over seventy different languages and has many different schools and resource centers that focus on understanding and celebrating many world cultures. These languages include Norwegian, Dari, Mongolian, and Uzbek among many others. Departments and Centers have also been created to allow students to study different cultures. These centers include the Russian and East European Institute, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center. Since the advent of the Cold War, Indiana University has worked to strengthen and establish programs that align with current geopolitical concerns of international importance. Thus, it was a natural evolution at Indiana University to create the School of Global and International Studies.

Begun in 2010, the New Academic Directions committee worked to create strategic changes to all of Indiana University's campuses. The plan called for academic excellence, better efficiency, innovation, and collaboration. The committee, whose report was presented to the Board of Trustees of Indiana University in 2011 called for some major strategic shifts at Indiana University. Among these shifts were:

- Investing strategically in existing and new programs;
- Reducing support for lower-priority programs;
- Encouraging innovative alignments of academic units;
- Seizing opportunities for efficiency;

- Reducing administrative barriers for excellence and innovation;
- And enhancing revenue strategically and cost effectively (New Academic Directions Committee 1-2).

Out of this report came many large responses including the School of Global and International Studies.

In “New Academic Directions,” Indiana University sought to create strong partnerships and collaboration between professional schools and the College of Arts and Sciences to create SGIS. SGIS was established in 2012 as a means of focusing much of the talent that was already present at Indiana University. SGIS is more than another research center at Indiana University; it was formed as its own academic unit within the College of Arts and Sciences. Indiana University recognized that globalization and interdisciplinary research are important aspects of twenty-first century scholarship and it wanted to bring together the energy, scholarship, and expertise of the faculty at Indiana University to create an interdisciplinary unit that recognized this important world-view. The establishment of SGIS allows IU to both consolidate international research and scholarship but also allows IU to expand its academic, educational, and research undertakings in a meaningful and deliberate way. SGIS brings together more than 350 core and affiliated faculty from schools including the College of Arts and Sciences, Jacobs School of Music, School of Education, Kelley School of Business, and IU’s 11 Title VI international area study centers to create a unit that addresses the world’s most important geographical, political, economic, and social problems.

Indiana University’s president, Michael McRobbie, noted in 2012 that there is not a single part of American society, which is “not affected by global forces and developments” (“IU Trustees”). With the creation of SGIS, Indiana University is working to create a school where students can prepare to participate in a society that is influenced by global and international events. As McRobbie goes on to say, “The School of Global and International Studies will prepare [Indiana University’s] students for the competencies of the 21st century...and enable them to think more deeply about issues that cross national boundaries” (“IU Trustees”). SGIS will prepare students of many disciplines to understand and function in a world that increasingly has issues and ideas that cross international boundaries and affect everyday life in ways that were completely unanticipated in previous years. Indiana University already has an incredibly strong history in international and global studies and SGIS was a natural continuation of this long tradition.

As SGIS was only approved by the Indiana University Board of Trustees in 2012 there is still much to be done. However, a great deal of progress has already been made and many national and international leaders are involved in this new school. Both Senator Richard Lugar and Representative Lee Hamilton, long-time politicians with strong international political experience have joined the faculty of SGIS. The groundbreaking for the new SGIS building and inauguration of the new school was held on April 29, 2013. The building is expected to take two years for construction and will be ready for the 2015-2016 academic year. SGIS also has a well-respected dean that brings a wealth of knowledge from his two decades of experience in diplomatic and foreign affairs positions. Lee A. Feinstein is the former ambassador to the Republic of Poland and will be the inaugural dean of the School of Global and International Studies.

The new School of International and Global Studies is a perfect example of an interdisciplinary approach to higher education. It is designed to take advantage of the wealth of expertise at Indiana University and take advantage of the long tradition of international research at IU. The “New Academic Directions” report from 2011 set the stage for a school that encourages innovative alignments of academic units and increases the efficiency of the entire university. This interdisciplinary program allows Indiana University to become a leading institution that utilizes cross discipline research and teaching in ways that prepare students to function and thrive in a world that is increasingly interconnected. With increasing globalization and intercultural communication it is important for students to receive a well-rounded and cohesive education. The interdisciplinary nature of the School of Global and International Studies is well suited for this endeavor.

Works Cited

“History.” *Indiana University, School of Global and International Studies*. Indiana University, n.d. Web. 23 July 2014.

Indiana University. *IU Trustees Approve New School of Global and International Studies*, 17 Aug. 2012. Web. 23 July 2014.

New Academic Directions Committee. “Investing in Excellence: The Importance of Strategy and Flexibility.” 2011. PDF file.