



PADNOS  
INTERNATIONAL  
CENTER

# GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

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Cover photos courtesy of Diane Maodush-Pitzer





# Global Competence and Internationalization

Mark Schaub, Executive Director, Barbara H. Padnos International Center

The Padnos International Center's work is primarily in three areas: Study Abroad, International Students, and campus internationalization. Essentially, we support outbound traffic, inbound traffic, and education "here at home." In previous columns, I've largely focused on the first two, but haven't written much about that elusive third effort. What is the best way to "internationalize" GVSU?

## Internationalization Overview

Study Abroad programs are the most visible and obviously successful way in which our campus becomes more and more internationalized. The impact of an academic term abroad makes a huge difference to individual students, and indirectly affects those who come in contact with those students after their return to the USA and our campus. Even with the steady growth in study abroad participation over the years, though, fewer than 9% of GVSU students study abroad. What about those students who do not study abroad—how is their global competence enhanced? There are several ways:

### *International Students*

For students who never leave the USA, having students from Uzbekistan, or Palau, or Poland in the classroom desk next to them can have a tremendous impact on their learning. Discussions or group work is greatly enhanced when you throw perspectives from other continents or cultures into the mix. Degree-seeking undergraduates from other countries—though currently less than 7% of the undergraduate population—make a great positive impact on the internationalization of our campus.

### *International Faculty*

Though no official statistics are kept, and it's not easy to categorize who is an "international" faculty member, there are indeed many faculty who have long experience and/or expertise in other cultures or countries. These faculty help shape the liberal education at GVSU because of the multitude of perspectives they bring to our labs, classrooms, and lecture halls. International faculty in the sciences and engineering may not teach the content in ways that are very different from their colleagues, but certainly bring valuable perspectives to curricular work, faculty meetings, and advising sessions with students.

### *The General Education Program*

Every student graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree at GVSU has completed at least three semesters of a foreign language. Every graduate has taken the Theme, a U.S. Diversity course, and a World Perspectives course—all of which foster an appreciation for and understanding of the diversity of perspective that can be gained from other cultures.





A close-up photograph of several bright yellow cosmos flowers with dark centers, growing on thin green stems with small leaves. The background is slightly blurred, showing more foliage and a hint of a blue sky.

### *International Programming*

During the last academic year, Padnos International Center sponsored or co-sponsored (with other units or programs) dozens of international programs, lectures, events, or presentations at GVSU. While many of the student attendees come to these programs as a course requirement, a very large percentage attend out of intellectual curiosity or personal interest. These events, and the many scores of international events at GVSU for which we are not a direct or indirect sponsor, are a critically important element of a vibrant intellectual community.

### So What's Missing?

With all the progress towards internationalization here at GVSU, there is still much work to be done. One of the missing pieces, in our minds, is that there are still many key faculty and staff who have not themselves had intense or meaningful international experiences that have transformed their appreciation and awareness of diverse cultures, people, or ideas. If every faculty member regularly had transformative international experiences, that would certainly be reflected in their teaching, research, service, and contact with students and colleagues. Our office administers \$55,000 of endowed study abroad scholarships per year, along with over \$100,000 in base-funded study abroad scholarships each year. Those funds are meant for students, and they help greatly.


But in terms of investment, it also makes a lot of sense to take \$2000 and instead of using that to help one student it could help a faculty member gain new international insights. That faculty member will in turn be in a position to reach many students and thus the impact of that \$2000 investment might be amplified.

### Big Changes This Year

With the 2008-09 academic year, we are introducing significant changes in the grants available to faculty and staff through the Padnos International Center. While we are offering the new CIEE Faculty Development Seminar Grants for a second year, we are adding two new opportunities for faculty: the International Partnership Delegation (In 2009, to Turkey) and the Interdisciplinary Nicaragua Projects (INP). Another major change for 2008 is that the focus for the Faculty Development Project Grants has shifted towards funding projects that are meant to directly enhance the international or intercultural elements of faculty members' teaching. These grants are no longer meant to fund travel to academic conferences.

### Use (or get) your Passport!

This year, PIC has allocated about \$66,000 towards international travel and projects for faculty and staff, and we want faculty and staff to know about it and use it. We can even help you towards securing your U.S. passport. Don't have a passport? Get your passport application at the PIC office, along with passport photographs for \$2 per set (with valid GVSU I.D.).

A close-up photograph of several bright yellow cosmos flowers with dark centers, growing on thin green stems with small leaves. The background is slightly blurred, showing more foliage and a hint of a blue sky.

Professor Diane Maodush-Pitzer was one of two recipients of the Padnos International Center's CIEE Grant. She traveled to Botswana during the summer of 2008.

CIEE International Faculty Development Seminars are short-term, concentrated, educational experiences designed to explore fascinations, challenge preconceptions, and open eyes to a wide variety of issues shaping the world today. Expect one or two intensive weeks of lectures given by local faculty or experts from prestigious public and private institutions; lively discussions with overseas academics and colleagues; and coordinated site visits to academic, economic, educational, environmental, historic, political, religious, and social institutions. The Padnos International Center offers grants for two faculty per year to cover participation in these seminars. For a list of seminars, consult the CIEE website, [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org) (look for "Faculty Development Seminars").

## Botswana's Diamonds and HIV

Diane Maodush-Pitzer, Department of Liberal Studies



School grounds in Manyana Village, Botswana

As we entered the grounds of Boswelakgosi CJSS, a middle school in Manyana Village just outside of the capital city of Gaborone, we were warmly greeted by the headmaster and his gracious staff. Neatly kept and brightly colored classroom buildings outlined the rural campus. An enormous satellite dish was anchored on one end of the grounds, bringing signals to this school from all around the world. Strutting right next to that dish and clearly comfortably at home while oblivious to the U.S. university faculty who were eager to take it all in, were a rooster and a collection of his goat herd friends. This scene exemplifies the contrasts that define the young country of Botswana in southern Africa.

It is primarily a dry desert land dotted with cattle posts and traditional thatched huts. Yet, it is also the place of deltas, national parks and game reserves where giraffes, elephants, cougars and hippopotami live alongside warthogs and vervet monkeys. In Gaborone, glass towers soar into the clear blue sky, housing businesses and governmental agencies. While right outside their doors in the open market, artisans stretch out blankets to sell their hand crafted pottery and woven baskets; others hope to find buyers for single cigarettes, penny candy and yesterday's fruit.

Botswana is a stable multi-party democracy. However, when deciding judicial matters the village chiefs still play a prominent role. Progress is welcomed. Tradition continues to be respected. Having peaceably achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1966, something few other nations have been able to do, Botswana is criticized for not knowing how to fight. The result is a seemingly weak civil society which allows expatriates from India, China and South Africa to dominate the economy.

With the discovery of diamond fields in the last half of the twentieth century, Botswana has shifted from being one of the poorest nations in Africa to its current status as a middle income country having one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Yet, 17% of the population is unemployed and one third of its people live in poverty.

While diamond mines have made it possible for the government in Botswana to develop a strong infrastructure in addition to caring for the poor and providing education and health to its citizenry, they have also been central to the spread of HIV/AIDS throughout the land. As men left home for long periods of time to work in the mines, they contracted the disease from sex workers in mining towns. When the men returned to their villages throughout the country, they brought the disease home with them, and the numbers of those infected multiplied dramatically.

Currently, it is estimated that between one quarter and one third of the population in Botswana is living with HIV/AIDS. It is a heterosexual disease in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa that affects every family, every rural village and every urban center.

It is incomprehensible to imagine that one out of every three or four people one passes at the mall, on the university campus, at church, or on the street is HIV positive. Every baby that is born in the hospitals, or 98% of infants, is tested for the virus. The average life expectancy has declined from 60 years to 34 years in the past two decades. However, as we heard, if one can make it through the mid-life years, "You will live a long, long life."

The statistics are staggering. One might imagine they would be overwhelming to both a young government and a population for whom funerals on weekends is a way of life. However, at the core of this culture and guiding its people are two interwoven beliefs that have their roots in ancient African spirituality: "I am because we are" and "We are saved together or we perish together"

Botswana's deep roots in African Traditional Religion have shaped its communal sense and identity. Traditionally, no one owned land or had individual wealth. Rather, the sense of wealth was derived from the life of the community. One belonged in the community, and gave of themselves to strengthen that community. With many "fathers" and "mothers" the concept of being orphaned or becoming an orphan was simply not possible. Born into community one lived their life committed to the well being of the whole.



Sign on middle school grounds





Children residing at SOS Children's Village in Tlokweng

This deep sense of connectedness and responsibility has marked the country's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Under the strong and collaborative guidance of both elected and tribal leadership, the government of Botswana has worked with local, national and world agencies to address the issue directly and establish one of the most progressive and comprehensive programs of response. Through multi-strategy efforts that involve education, treatment and response, hope grows that people with HIV/AIDS will be able to live longer, healthier lives; that the rate of transmission will begin to diminish; that fewer children will be orphaned and that the lives of all who make their home in Botswana will continue to improve.

At Boswelakgosi CJSS in Manyana Village the lively and uniformed students take full advantage of their hours in classrooms filled with traditional metal school desks and well worn blackboards. Serious note taking is accompanied by eager hands waving in response to questions being asked. Outside they play soccer with vigor and eat hot lunch in courtyards that feature beautiful poinsettia trees alongside signs that proclaim, "Virginity is a Virtue," and "Sex Thrills. AIDS kills." Young girls and boys are taught respect for both themselves and others. They hold the promise to a nation's goal of raising an AIDS free generation by 2016.

Orphans and orphanages were not an understandable concept a few decades ago. But now there are believed to be 60,000 HIV orphans in Botswana. While 90% remain in the care of extended family, orphanages like SOS Children's Village in Tlokweng have been established to provide a stable environment for children to grow and thrive. Each child is part of a family house which they share with other children like themselves.

An SOS mother and aunt are committed to raising them in an environment of love and care. At the onsite kindergarten beautiful, smiling faces welcome the sight of digital cameras with loud and clear, "Cheese" smiles and the delight of seeing their own face on the camera's LCD monitor. Here they are saved together.

In the waiting room of the Botswana-Baylor Children's Clinical Centre of Excellence, almost one hundred HIV infected children are waiting for the regular antiretroviral (ATR) vaccine that gives them a better chance for a healthier life. This modern pediatric center which opened in 2003 is a collaboration between Baylor College of Medicine in Texas and the government of Botswana. Each patient room has been painted by village women in traditional village patterns and decorated with breathtaking artistry done by local children. It provides state-of-the art treatment and care to over one thousand infants and children. Since its opening this clinic has witnessed a decline in the death rate of its young clients from 4.7% to .3%. Transmission of the disease from mother to child has decreased from 35% to 4%. These are hopeful statistics.

Pula is the currency for Botswana. It is also the word for rain and blessing in this desert land. To be in a place of such contrasts – tradition and modernity; wealth and poverty; disease and optimism – is to experience pula, the blessing. To break bread and share stories of both struggle and hope is to understand more fully that deep truth from African Traditional Religion that stands in stark contrast to the rugged individualism that is so much a part of our own culture. As a global community we are saved together or we will perish together. In one another we find strength, hope and ultimately pula, the blessing.



## International Partnership Delegation Grants: Turkey/March 2009

New for the 2008-09 academic year, the International Partnership Delegation Grants are intended to fund participation by GVSU faculty and staff on an interdisciplinary team visit to a partner institution. The delegation will spend time on the partnership campus, learning about many aspects of that university's host city, nation, and culture. Together, they will seek new perspectives from counterparts at the host campus that can be brought back to GVSU to share with our own campus community. The team will also extend an invitation to 1-2 individuals at the host campus to visit GVSU during the following academic year.

The destination partner institution is Middle East Technical University (METU), the "MIT of the Middle East," in Turkey's capital city of Ankara. English is the official language of instruction. For more information on this institution, consult the website at: <http://www.metu.edu.tr/>

Turkey is the intersection of East and West, of Europe and the Middle East. Its gateway city, fascinating and historic Istanbul, straddles two continents: Europe and Asia. A NATO member and a democracy with a primarily Muslim population, Turkey is an interesting case study in the relationship between Islam and democratic, secular government. The Mediterranean climate and food, as well as the treasure trove of historic sites and artifacts, including Ephesus and Troy, are an attraction to millions of tourists each year.

The tentative dates for the 2009 delegation trip to METU and Turkey are 28 Feb. to 9 March 2009. Included in the itinerary will be several days on the sprawling and forested METU campus, a visit to historic sites in central Turkey, and an exciting couple of days in the bustling city of Istanbul.

We are looking for a diverse and representative team comprised of full-time faculty (tenured, tenure-track, or affiliates), AP staff, and COT or Maintenance staff. The committee charged with selection of the delegation will also take into consideration the desires and needs of the host institution, and may give preference to individuals at GVSU who have had limited opportunity for overseas travel. Five individuals will be selected for the 2009 delegation.





Vigeland Sculpture Gardens

## All That Glitters is Not Gay

A report on LGBT life in Norway  
Gary Van Harn, Padnos International Center

Gary Van Harn works in the Padnos International Center as a budget manager and administers grants, scholarships, and travel expenses for students, staff and faculty. He has been a supporter and proponent of LGBT issues on campus for the greater part of a decade, creating an endowed scholarship for LGBT students in 2001 funded entirely by staff and faculty and making dozens of classroom presentations every year at the invitation of professors. He currently serves as the Chair of Allies & Advocates, a group of staff and faculty dedicated to making GVSU a safe, supportive, and welcoming place for LGBT students, staff, and faculty.

I've long had a fascination with the Scandinavian countries and their almost mythically tolerant and accepting attitudes about human sexuality, and when the opportunity arose to go to Norway on Padnos International Center business, I immediately saw that I had my chance to find out if there was any truth to the myths. The first thing one learns from the locals is not to lump the Scandinavian countries together; each one has its own character, tone, and temperament. Further, you find out that there is lingering bad blood between the Scandinavian countries, but this mostly plays out in the form of sports rivalries and bad jokes about each other. Norway has expanded and contracted over the last 1000 years, a history which includes the expansionist Viking era, and then a convoluted history of subjugation and colonization by the Swedes and the Danes, during which Norway lost significant territory, territories like Greenland, Iceland, the Isle of Man, and the Western Isles. It was only in 1905 that Norway held a national referendum, voting overwhelmingly to leave Sweden. The Swedish King Oskar II had no choice but to recognize Norwegian sovereignty, and he reinstated the Norwegian monarchy. The invasion and occupation of Norway by the Nazis during WWII was traumatic in the extreme for the Norwegian people and served to cement a fierce sense of independence which could be said to be playing out today in Norway's refusal to join the European Union or adopt the Euro as its currency.

The dignified capital city of Oslo sparkles against the waters of the Oslofjord, rich in museums, architecture, and night life. Bergen, on the west, reminds one of San Francisco, a glittering jewel of a place, relaxed and hip. Rich in North Sea oil, and producing most of its own power from hydroelectric dams, Norway is enjoying an unprecedented period of prosperity and likes to think of itself as having created "the most egalitarian social democracy in western Europe." I was also told by several professors at the University of Oslo that Norwegians don't think of themselves as Europeans, per se, but consider themselves as belonging to the club comprised of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Iceland, Greenland, Canada, and the United States, which would explain the preponderance of and passion for classic American cars, which I saw everywhere.

My first meeting with University of Oslo staff was at the Blindern campus, about five miles northwest of the city center in Oslo. The Blindern campus is a masterpiece of the best of the 60's International Style; after only 40 years the government of Norway has put it on their version of the National Historic Register. Svein Hullstein was my contact there; he is the Associate Head of their International Office and the person who set up my itinerary. He began with a warm welcome and a general overview of the University of Oslo. This was



followed shortly by a meeting with Jorgen Bollingmo and Arnt Arntsen, student leaders from "Skeivt (queer) Forum." Skeivt Forum was created primarily to address issues that had come up in the International Dorm on campus, not for any domestic purpose. This was really interesting, in terms of getting the lowdown on the social climate in Norway. There is such a significant integration in Norway on one level that there are few LGBT organizations on campus, and very low participation in those that do exist. There is a complacency within the Oslo LGBT community born of general contentment, not apathy. (This is their explanation, not mine.) The lack of organization reflects this "contentment," but there is something more, as I found out later. And there are problems in Norway. It turns out that in the country, in small rural towns, it is not ok to be gay or lesbian, and the rates of suicide, drug addiction and alcoholism among gay and lesbian teenagers and young people is almost the same as in the US. Adoption by gay or lesbian people is not permitted, and civil unions, while legal, are viewed as "better than nothing," a stop on the way to marriage.

There is a "state" religion in Norway, the Lutheran Church, to which 85% of the population belongs, at least officially, but actual church attendance is very low at approximately 15%. The state pays the wages and expenses of the Lutheran Church and is in effect the church's employer. In terms of LGBT, this means that the government of Norway can and does dictate what the church's position will be on LGBT matters, and since Norway is a signatory to certain EU accords that ban all forms of discrimination, this means Norway does not have to deal with a religious backlash, or the pulpit being used as a force for oppression. Non-state religions are of course perfectly permissible, and it is only from a tiny segment of this population that any significant anti-gay protest is heard, mostly from what we in the US would call fundamentalist or evangelical denominations. They are considered the lunatic fringe in Norway. Norwegians love their churches for holidays like Christmas and Easter, for weddings, baptisms, primarily ceremonial reasons. But they are not a church-going people. In fact, among those who are, it is considered vulgar and rude to wear one's religion on one's sleeve. Recently, the new Bishop of Oslo declared upon taking office that no one deserved to be discriminated against for gender orientation, and then later he was caught

trying to back out of a job offer he made to a priest of a church when it was discovered that the priest was not only gay, but living with a partner. There was a public outcry and the Bishop was forced to back down from his attempt to fire the priest. This Bishop has since made a number of pro and anti gay remarks, talking out of both sides of his mouth, and he has been disciplined by the government, but not fired. He is widely believed to be a crackpot (an opinion expressed by almost everyone I met with.) There is a motion being considered in the Parliament to eliminate the institution of a state religion, which has its pros and cons. This arrangement does seem to act as a check and balance on the power of the Church, but people question whether it is worth the financial subsidy that it costs the government. Is it still appropriate in the modern age for a country like Norway to have a state religion?

After the meetings, Svein, the students and I had a great light lunch, consisting of the omnipresent razor-thin salmon sashimi on hearty bread or half roll, with lettuce, a slice of cucumber, a wedge of tomato, or cheese with same, and mineral water or juice. (This and walking everywhere is probably why you don't see any overweight people in Norway, but everybody smokes!) After lunch I took a taxi to the headquarters of the Norwegian National Association of Lesbian and Gay Liberation, where I met the directors Christian and Andreas who basically told me the same story as the students from the Skeivt Forum. The organization is housed in a grubby run-down building; there are three or four full-time staffers, with about 1200 members nationwide out of a population of 4.5 million. They seemed somewhat disorganized; the office was messy and unprofessional looking. They talked about working in "the trenches" on behalf of LGBT teenagers, kids from small towns and remote rural areas, where it is still not ok to be gay. They were the ones who told me about teen suicide, drug abuse and alcoholism rates being approximately the same as in the US, even though most Norwegians think all is well. This perception is common among both straight and gay people. It's not so much apathy as a misinterpretation of the situation: Norway believing its own press. Christian and Andreas seemed to have a pretty good handle on their situation but were having a hard time generating interest, programming, and government funding for their work.



My next meeting was with Dr. Marianne Brantsaeter, a UIO professor of Sociology housed in the Department of Criminal Justice. Marianne is a lively and engaging person, clearly enjoying the chance to speak with someone from the LGBT community in the US. She too spoke of the phenomenon of an almost complete lack of structure, organization, or visibility in what passed as the LGBT “community” in Norway. Marianne looked up GVSU’s LGBT website and was astonished at what she found there. The idea of a gay/straight alliance (Allies & Advocates, Out n’ About) of any sort was radical, unimaginable. Marianne was the one who was most specific in her comments about Norwegian society. She suggested that there was some sort of trade-off between the mainline straight population and the minority gay population, an unspoken agreement, which basically went something like this: “We’ll give you a nearly full plate of civil rights and legal protections, and you in turn agree to integrate fully into society, in essence, to become invisible. Don’t complain or act up, don’t be loud or visible, and if you have a problem with this society or are unhappy with something, it’s your own fault.” She also said that a lot of gay people buy into this unwritten code, becoming unwitting accomplices in their own invisibility. One must also consider and include in this mix the very admirable Norwegian tendency to live and let live, the tendency to avoid confrontation, and a certain emotional reserve in the national character, all of which contributes to this dynamic of invisibility. I remarked to Marianne that I had yet to find one single gay bar, club, book store, flag...any indicator of what I would call gay culture. Marianne acknowledged that this was so and also said that some Norwegian gays are aware of the lack of community, visibility, culture and are envious of those of us in the US, Great Britain, and Australia who enjoy some of those resources. This was definitely not what I expected to be hearing.

After sharing a “brisk” ride from the downtown UIO campus to the Blinden campus with Marianne and her little dog in their tiny red Mazda Miata convertible, we were joined for lunch by Dr. Rebecca Scherr, an American from Minnesota. She had fallen in love with and married a woman from Norway who was in the US as a study abroad scholar and followed her back home. It was very interesting to hear her perspective on being LGBT in Norway (much the same story from her as from the native Norwegians I’d spoken with) except she did mention that transgender people were not particularly well understood or respected. As further evidence of the lack of community even at UIO, Rebecca and Marianne, both self-identified lesbians, both UIO faculty, had never met and didn’t even know of each other’s existence, in spite of the fact that Marianne participates in and helps to maintain an online UIO LGBT network of some sort. Marianne seemed to know quite a bit about the politics of LGBT in the US, and in spite of the discrimination and oppression we suffer here, she expressed great optimism for the near future of the gay community in the US.



Vigelund Sculpture Gardens

Next was Dr. Oystein Rian, a historian and researcher who focuses on LGBT in Early and Medieval Norwegian history. Dr. Rian was a bachelor who came out at the age of 50, after the death of his mother whom he looked after for years. He met and married an American man from the deep South, so he is well acquainted with US Bible Belt culture. He was shy, not very outgoing, his English was weak. (My Norwegian being almost non-existent) conversation was somewhat difficult, but we managed well enough. After some general introductions and background information, we focused on the differences between Norway and the US. Dr. Rian’s most interesting observation and comment was that in the US, we define ourselves by our opposition. The more we’re oppressed, the longer it goes on, the more visible, well-defined and vocal we become. Dr. Rian saw this as a *productive dynamic*. In Norway, there is no overt oppression or legal impediments, no overt discrimination. Norwegians believe that this constitutes acceptance and tolerance, and yet, as mentioned before, particularly among teenagers and young people in small towns and rural areas, suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse rates are almost as high as in the US. Clearly there’s a disconnect here. This seems to be almost the only point that Norwegian gays and lesbians could come together on for public support and increased awareness.



A few more thoughts about life and culture in Norway and my inability to see much of anyone or anything identifiably gay or lesbian: There appears to be little or no macho culture here at least as we would define it in the U.S. Many men here don't seem to do anything to "rough up" their appearance or presentation. There seems to be a softening, a blurring of gender lines here. People just don't seem as much concerned here with traditional roles, traditional looks, traditional behavior as defined in the US. Most people, men and women, appeared quite well turned out in public. People clearly put effort and thought into their appearance and wouldn't dream of going out in public the way many American do. Jeans and t-shirts are for working around the house and in the yard, not for going out to a restaurant or pub. Many people sport a fashionably punk look, or a look I would call androgynous, even some of the middle-aged and older folks. In the US, especially as regards men, attention to one's dress and appearance is sometimes read as being gay, or at least "affected." These visual cues don't necessarily mean anything in Norway, nor does it mean anything when you see two young men with their arms around each other's shoulders other than that they're close friends. Two women holding hands or walking with arms around each other's waists just means they're close friends; it has no particular sexual connotation. Most of the subtle social cues I watch for in the US do not seem to exist or apply in Norway.

After Dr. Rian and I parted ways, I went back over to Svein Hullstein's office on the Blinden campus. We had a wrap-up conversation, and I presented him with a fifth of a very special single-barrel Jack Daniels, which he was delighted with. I felt that I had had a very successful few days. While Norway may be a very beautiful, sophisticated and civilized place to live, the myth of a gay utopia in Norway is officially busted. From Oslo in the south-east to Bergen on the west and all points in between, I saw nobody who was identifiably gay, lesbian or transgender. I did finally find one pub near my hotel that was said to become a gay gathering place at night, but other than that, no bookstores, coffee houses, no rainbow flags, nothing. Compared to the US, Norway might be a legal Shangri-la, but it's devoid of gay life and culture. I'll take what I've got in the US, as strange as that might sound. At least I have friends, community, culture, and visibility.

In the case of Norway, it would appear that there has never been much of any overt oppression from religion, nor from the state. Norwegian gays and lesbians have never had a pressing need to band together for their own defense, and have not experienced anything like the "productive dynamic" we experience here in the US. The lesson to be drawn from Norway is about the non-development of culture and group identity in the absence of oppression and about what is missing from the everyday lives of a very specific minority group within a larger culture. Over and over again I heard LGBT Norwegians expressing a longing for community, for identity, for visibility. I heard Norwegians express jealousy over America's gay neighborhoods, gay pride festivals and marches, for GSA's in high school and in University, for the vitality and excitement of nightlife, and our place in popular culture. Norwegian gays and lesbians will own up to a certain amount of lethargy due to an overall sense of contentment with their place in society, but this is not apathy. It is this contentment that concerns me.

This entire experience has me wondering about what's to come in the United States. While I don't expect that gay and lesbian people will be achieving full civil rights any time soon, I also don't think it's premature to wonder about where we go from there, when it does eventually happen. Would the attainment of full civil rights for the LGBT community in the US also mean a kind of cultural death? If the day should ever arrive when we are no longer maligned from the pulpit, ridiculed in the media, and marginalized by the law, what then? If, as Dr. Rian stated, that oppression acts as a "productive dynamic," will the lack of that oppression produce its opposite, which would be entropy, lethargy, invisibility, a drifting apart? Oppression is the model we've all grown up with in the US, it's all we know. Would we just fade away without it?

# The International Language of Theatre: The Bard Goes to China

Karen Libman, School of Communications



Chinese high school students watch a Bard to Go performance

It's the last full day of our time in Shanghai, China, at East China Normal University, and we are about to enter a classroom space where the ECNU drama students have prepared a work in progress for us to see. All 10 of us GVSU students, faculty, and staff are now so used to being in China—despite having been there only 8 short days—that walking through campus seems almost as natural as walking through GVSU, except that everyone else is Asian but us! As we enter the space—and it looks like any theatre practice room anywhere—the students start clapping and chanting in rhythm, chanting us in, greeting us with a warm cheer in Chinese and a familiar clapping pattern that we join too. Some are in makeshift costume pieces and there is a synthesizer set up in the middle of the audience area. Their drama teacher, through a student interpreter, tells us that we are going to warm up with a game. It is easy to learn—like musical chairs, except with hugging, and we play until a very small group of us are left. I get to play until the end, although who knows if they let me, as teacher, win?! Still, we are laughing and sweating by the time we are called to order, and as we sit down, I know that, for me, this is going to be the best day yet.

We settle in and settle down, and are told that we are going to see three versions of Hamlet—or at least, the part about “who killed the King.” One will be language-based; one will be musically-based, and one will be movement-based. We are alerted to the fact that each small scene will contain that famous phrase: *To be or not to be? That is the question.*

For us, the question is: will we understand? More questions follow: Will we like it? Will we connect with their ideas, their theatre piece? And what if we don't?

The first scene begins. It is, of course, in Chinese, but because we know what to expect, it is easy to catch the general gist of the work. The King is ill—he is old—and the Queen is young and in love with the King's Brother. Should they kill him? Let Nature take its course? But how long will that take? The students perform with confidence. The scene is not naturalistic, but more stylized, the emotions on the surface, and much dialogue.



While we cannot understand the words, they flow over us, and we are immersed in the somber and morbid tone of this piece. We understand! We like it! The applause is heart-felt, and we wait for the next piece.

Imagine our surprise when it is a USA Western-style musical parody, very tongue in cheek, with cowboys and cowgirls, and Hamlet as an aw-shucks every-dude. We crack up. The music is pure Americana. We cannot believe their right-on mimicry and satire. There is a clog-like dance that is quite wonderful, and one of our translator friends is the Queen, and she sings like an angel. I am in awe of the variety of performance styles these students can do.

And then, we take an improvisation break. We are told to come up with our own version of "Who killed the King," and like the ECNU student versions, each must contain the phrase, *To be or not to be? That is the question*. We break up into groups, counting off in Chinese. We are not given much time, so we need to work together quickly. It is a challenge, since we don't share a common language. But of course we do—the language of theatre and drama. We do this in American theatre classes; we easily adapt to the activity. I know I shouldn't be, but I am stunned. We do speak the same language! We do explore the same ideas! Theatre really is universal!

My group flounders for a bit, but we decide on an instance of "cheating" in school. Should the student cheat or not? We hurriedly practice, I, in the character of teacher giving the test, and the Chinese and American students as, well, students! We perform in Chinese and English, but with much pantomime. I'm not sure how this is going to work out. The Chinese drama teacher calls us back to order. The first group to volunteer creates a situation of building a door. The students create the door with their bodies. First, it is too tall, then too small, finally, just right! *To be or not to be*—to go through or not? There is much laughter, particularly as one of our students looks at the very skinny door and says, with much pantomime, are you kidding? I cannot fit through this—and then gestures to a smaller Chinese student, saying, maybe you can! I am so proud of her, for making a joke that everyone can understand.

Our group goes next, and it is a million times better than what we rehearsed. The Chinese students ham it up, and add a lot that we didn't consider! Everyone understands what we are doing, and I am satisfied.

The last scene is a scenario we discussed too. It takes place at the site of the devastating Szechuan earthquake, now 72 hours old, and, of course, much on the minds of everyone (despite the fact that it is 1000 miles away). Students playing mudslide victims call for help, as one student tries to decide if he can offer it. If he helps, he may be pulled in himself. Should he do it? How can he sacrifice his own life for the potential of others? It is an existential and very serious improvisation. *To be, or not to be?* We applaud soberly.

The teacher speaks for a bit about the improvisations, and then we move on to their last scene. This one has no words, except the ubiquitous phrase, which they utter at the end. It has two main characters. The Queen...and a man? They dance to languid music, in such sensual and caressing postures that we are convinced of their love for each other. The Queen resists—how can she cheat on her husband? But the scarf around her, her symbol of choice, is eventually taken from her, and they dance with it between them, until it too falls away. They dance with such grace and beauty. Only afterwards do we find out that they are not dancers at all, and this is their first duet together. Wow! Wow.

All too soon, the two hours allotted for our sharing has gone by. The Chinese drama teacher must go to another job; he is in the Army, and works as an actor as well. The students must go back to their studies. We have yet more sightseeing to do, and packing, and goodbye saying. We break out the gifts—GVSU Shakespeare Festival t-shirts and stickers for everyone! We take LOTS of pictures together. We cry, although not as much as we will cry the next day when we truly have to part. When shall we see each other again?

For myself, I count my lucky stars. I was there, in China, doing theatre, seeing theatre, creating bridges and being the best teacher I can be. *To be or not to be?* There is no question. *To be* is the best thing there is.

Kingston University Chaplain Rev. Stan Brown spent two weeks in April 2008 visiting Grand Valley State University in Michigan as part of the staff exchange programme between the two universities. The visit focused on three themes – comparing the spiritual support offered to students, looking at the impact of religious belief in diversity and equality issues and comparing approaches to general student support. This article reflects on the different relationships of religion to public life in Britain and the USA, and how this shapes the culture of our universities.

## Religion on Campus - A Very Horrid Thing!

Chaplain Rev. Stan Brown, Kingston University



Kapaleeshwarar Temple, India



British people – including those who are devoutly religious – will tell you that ours is a secular society. A visitor from the more church-going parts of America might well agree. Although surveys of religious practice vary wildly it is generally accepted that less than 10% of the UK population regularly attend a place of worship, far lower than similar statistics from the United States. Britain may have a predominantly secular culture, but the truth is that Britain is not a secular society. With an established church, whose head is also head of state, ex officio places for church leaders in the legislature (Anglican Bishops sit in the House of Lords), and a complex interweaving of religion, law, civic practice and the ceremonial, this is emphatically not a secular state. Yet the direct impact of religion on policy in public life is quite minimal in the UK when compared to the level of religious organisations' involvement in the United States where the mantra of "separation of church and state" is everywhere repeated. Like many features of British society this is a paradox, and as it concerns our unwritten constitution it is probably a paradox wrapped in an enigma and buried deep in the dark pit of a conundrum. Whilst the American constitution can be printed, put on the shelf, read, studied and amended by the normal processes of law and politics, the British one lies so scattered around our past that it requires archaeological excavation from the events of our history in order to be understood.

As the British historian Simon Schama has remarked in one of his broadcasts, the curiously British settlement of affairs between church, state and sovereignty has effects on many aspects of our society and is reflected in our Universities. The chief executive of a British university is its Vice Chancellor, who in the theoretical order of things sits beneath a Chancellor – but the two roles are quite separate and mirror the arrangements in the state. The Vice Chancellor is head of the organisation in all but name, s/he is its chief executive and first servant – if you like its "prime minister," but the ceremonial and representative functions are vested in the Chancellor, an honorary figure lending their name and reputation to the University and acting as its representative "head of state." Chancellors appear at Degree Ceremonies and on the cover of annual reports, but not at the university's senior management team meetings. So far as I understand the American University structure it is "presidential" with the roles of head of state and chief executive combined in one person – again closely paralleling the national constitution.

The most historic of our universities were Christian foundations and convey their degrees in a quasi religious ceremony in the name of the Trinity, they have chapels built into the fabric of their architecture and chaplains built in their staffing structures – yet their general outward demeanour remains as apparently secular as the rest of British society. Indeed, the bond of Higher Education and Established Church was formerly so tight that when the university system began to expand in the nineteenth century it did so mainly with money from the largely nonconformist Christians of the new industrial classes who up to then had been denied access to higher education by the Established Church's control of the old universities. Nonconformist Christians in alliance with free thinkers and the Jewish community supported the foundation of new secular universities in which religious affiliation was not to be a matter of concern for the institution. In effect these secular universities followed the American tradition (itself born of an earlier wave of British nonconformity) in which there was a separation of church and state. In my present role I am a Methodist minister (a nonconformist) serving in an Ecumenical appointment (and representing the established Church of England) employed by a Secular university. It is my delight and mischief to remind the less religious members of the University that the "secularism" of which they are justly proud was originally the gift and invention of my own religious tradition in its search for a more open, varied and tolerant society. It is, I suppose, a characteristically British arrangement formed of sedimentary layers rather than a single volcanic event.

My apologies for the history lesson – but history lies everywhere over British society like a heavy blanket and our identity cannot be understood without it. There is, however, a real relevance to a major question for both our societies and both our universities. In my view the foundation of secular universities in Britain with all the access to higher education and professional life which they brought, made possible what we today would describe as "multi-cultural" Britain. This was a key point at which the glue between church, state and culture began to fail, a moment from which there was no going back to the old hegemony. Society could no longer pretend that it was uniform and mono-cultural, difference had to be allowed for, and in British society that affirmation of the right to be different was first made by the religious minorities of Nonconformists, Roman Catholics, Jews and "Free Thinkers".

This history ought to be a resource for us today as many secular British universities find themselves having to rethink the classic form of the secular settlement in higher education. Until very recently these universities operated along lines which would be very familiar in the United States and might indeed be said to reflect the philosophy of that most American of political theorists - John Rawls. Rawls argues that the best way to maintain a society in which there is genuine freedom of belief and choice of lifestyle is to agree that in the public realm of politics and law only arguments based on "public reason" may be used<sup>1</sup>. To over simplify, this means that whatever your own private and religious reasons for advocating a policy, in the public realm your argument must be presented according to agreed public reasons, not personal or religious ones. So for example (a real example) when Kingston University Chaplain Stan Brown wanted to support the University's growing number of Islamic students in their request for a prayer room on campus he did not argue that as a liberal Christian he was committed to showing hospitality to members of another faith and delighted that God should be honoured by their prayers as well as his (a theological argument) – but rather that the University's secular commitment to diversity, equality and to student support required this development (a public and secular argument).

The old form of the secular settlement worked well in the British university when the majority of the religious groups were Christian, European, individualist and quiet. There was little conflict between the religious and secular timetables, some of the more conservative students might find their beliefs and values challenged by those which prevailed in the university but this didn't lead to direct conflict with their lifestyles. In the last fifteen years or so all of this has changed. Mass immigration in the second half of the C20th, the government policy of "widening participation" in higher education and the rising aspirations of a new generation within the ethnic minorities have completely changed the religious demography of at least the urban British universities. Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism are widely practiced, Christianity has taken on a more African-Caribbean and international character and university managers have found themselves somewhat puzzled by a new generation of students who simply do not understand what "your religion is a private matter" means. We are having to renegotiate the settlement with a new urgency added by the re-emergence of an old problem - violent extremism in the name of religion. Since 9/11 and 7/7 with universities seen as potential recruiting grounds for violent extremists, Government has understandably taken a much more pro-active interest in its relationship with the faith communities and in particular with religion on campus.<sup>2</sup> At times universities have had to reassert their independence and a determination to keep spiritual support separate from security issues. Government too has been troubled and puzzled by the new religiosity of the campuses.

In evidence given to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs in 2007, Marc Sageman argued that if the core myth of American identity is the "melting pot" of immigrants who found new ways of living with their cultures in a new country, then the core identity myth of the British is that of "essentialism" – that there is some unchanging essence of Britishness to which every foreign physical or cultural incursion represents a threat.<sup>3</sup> According to this myth no one has dared to mess with what it is to be British (or at least English...) since William the Bastard crossed the narrow seas with his band of thugs and succeeded in changing his name to William the Conqueror in a field near Hastings one October day in 1066. It is of course total nonsense – there have been several invasions and many waves of immigration into the country since then. Nevertheless, it does mean that the presence of new forms of cultural and religious variety – even on our university campuses – is all too easily seen as a threat rather than a benefit. The essentialist myth makes it just too tempting for us to make the connection stick between violent extremism, Islam and "foreignness".

This same mindset is somehow impelled to find a foreign origin for all new forms of religious expression. The small but growing right wing Christian conservative constituency here is increasingly being recognised as a new religious reality, but it is universally seen as something "American". Whatever warmth of feeling there is toward the United States in Britain (despite the strains over the war there is a considerable affection), the adjective "American" when applied to a religious group is always a negative one. It suggests something unrestrained, outlandish, over enthusiastic and lacking in those quintessential British qualities of restraint and reasonableness. In other words it is foreign. In the eighteenth century Anglican Bishop of Durham and philosopher Joseph Butler told John Wesley (founder of Methodism) that religious enthusiasm was: "A horrid thing Sir! A very horrid thing!" Well, there are many "horrid things" of this sort on our campuses right now and that part of me which has been shaped by the radical spirituality of the English Puritans and of Nonconformity rejoices in them!





### (Endnotes)

1 Rawls, J., (1999) *The Law of the Peoples with "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London England, Harvard University Press

2. There have been a number of government reports and advice notes to Universities on this subject. The most significant at present is: DIUS 2007, *Promoting Good Campus Relations, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism in Universities and Higher Education Colleges* <http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/extremismhe.pdf>

3 Sageman, M., (2007) *Radicalisation of Global Islamic Terrorists*, United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs June 27, 2007 [http://hsgac.senate.gov/public\\_files/062707Sageman.pdf](http://hsgac.senate.gov/public_files/062707Sageman.pdf)



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## EVENTS

### Wednesday, October 15

10:00 - 4:00

Allendale Study Abroad Fair  
Grand River Room, Kirkhof Center

### Tuesday, October 21

12:00-6:00

DeVos Study Abroad Fair  
Student Project Area, Building C

### Wednesday, October 29

Turkey International Friends and Faculty Event  
Details available on [www.gvsu.edu/pic](http://www.gvsu.edu/pic)

### November 16 - 20

International Education Week  
<http://iew.state.gov/about.htm>

### Tuesday, November 25

Ghana International Friends and Faculty Event  
Details available on [www.gvsu.edu/pic](http://www.gvsu.edu/pic)







Photo courtesy of Andrés Ortiz Estevez

#### GLOBAL CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

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#### PADNOS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

The mission of the Padnos International Center is to engage the community of Grand Valley State University in meaningful international experiences which foster an appreciation and awareness of diverse cultures, people, and ideas.

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