Summary of Assessment/Reflection of International Studies Seniors - May 2011

Late April, ten graduating seniors were asked to fill out a questionnaire evaluating their experiences as IS majors. Eight out of the ten responded to seven questions ranging from reasons to major in IS, general personal and professional goals, impact of IS on their (pre) conception of the world beyond their country, to the strengths of the program and areas that need improvement.

All eight respondents cited as reasons for majoring in IS their desire to study other cultures and to explore other parts of the world.

In terms of IS raising their awareness about world issues, all the students agreed that the program had provided the tools, enhanced their knowledge base as well as given them the historical background to better understand and “objectively” analyze issues in a globalized context. Some students indicated that the program had given them “a more nuanced and complex view of the world where things are not necessarily right and wrong all the time.” This is in contrast to same students’ worldview prior to majoring in IS where they saw the world as US, that is, the USA versus Them, the rest of the world. As one student put it, “In my freshman year, I was very much focused on the US and its problems rather than the world’s. And like many Americans, I was under the misconception that most people hate/dislike Americans.” Another one adds, “I also realize now that not everyone has such a negative opinion of the States; sure some people aren’t fond of us, but it does not mean everybody hates us.” One student talking about IS has broadened his/her understanding rememorizes his/her freshman year in these terms, “Reflecting back to my freshman year, I believe that my understanding [of the world] was minimalist.”

As to the impact of IS on their experiences, all students stated that the program helped them understand the relations between the USA and other regions of the world and also the interconnectedness of their country with the rest of the world. Additionally, some students suggested that the program not only helped correct their misconceptions of other parts of the world but also helped them re-evaluate their conception/view of their country. Others said the IS requirements for majors including language and study abroad offered them the opportunity to break/venture outside of their comfort zone to focus on international issues and their impact on domestic situations as well as examine international dimensions of domestic issues. As one student sums it up, “The IS major has helped me open my eyes to the world around me. I see how important it is to be [part of] a global community.”

Regarding the strengths of the program, most students complimented its flexibility, inter-disciplinarity, individualized nature of capstone course, broader view of the world, study abroad, language requirement, and wide variety of courses. IS faculty – sound knowledge of the field as well as effectiveness in imparting that knowledge to students.

Areas of improvement: offer diverse foundation courses in other departments; more theory-based courses; more International Studies specific courses; advising via e-mail

Given the reflections of the 2011 graduating seniors summarized above, the IS program is carrying out its mission as well as that of the College quite efficiently.