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Global Studies Thrives with Support of Orfalea Foundation

Paul Orfalea's course at UC Santa Barbara is one that turns tradition on its head. There are no textbooks, and no tests. No answers, only questions. In fact, Orfalea told his students during a recent session, "This is a class in asking questions. Don't be so concerned with finding answers."

This senior seminar in global business may not have paper exams, but it's as tough as any students will ever take -- a quarter-long endurance test in critical thinking, smart speaking, and international engagement. Orfalea keeps expectations high, threshold for passivity low, for what is intended as intensive training for potential future leaders in public and private sectors alike.

Upending convention is nothing new for Orfalea -- the Kinko's founder built an office services empire going against the grain. It's an ethos he shares with the discipline in which he teaches -- global studies -- a pursuit predicated on the importance of accepting ambiguity. The still-emerging academic area examines what binds us all together, as well as how, and asks why.

"Back in 1965, a meteorologist described 'the butterfly effect,'" Orfalea explained. "He said that weather systems were so complex and interconnected, that a butterfly flapping its wings in China on Tuesday could cause thunderstorms in Oklahoma on Friday. The same is true of international affairs, and I'm fascinated by those connections. Students cannot be isolationists. I want them to understand how one

country lowering interest rates affects another country's unemployment rates, which affects another country's immigration and yet another's political stability. It's all connected, and the MAGIS program helps students understand, appreciate, and act based on those global connections."

MAGIS is UCSB's still-young Master of Arts in Global & International Studies, an endeavor that is flourishing with the support of Orfalea, Natalie Orfalea, and their Orfalea Foundation. The philanthropic nonprofit gifted the campus \$12 million to launch and grow MAGIS and the Orfalea Center for Global & International Studies. The pledge got each entity off the ground -- and has seen both evolve into world-class hubs for training and research alike.

"Our campus is deeply grateful to the Orfalea Foundation and its benefactors, Natalie Orfalea and Paul Orfalea, for their tremendous vision and philanthropy in helping to support our prestigious Global Studies Program, now in its thirteenth year, and our graduate program, now in its seventh year," said Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "Our students and alumni are making a difference in communities around the world through their involvement with non-governmental organizations, business, and government. The Foundation has also helped to establish our Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, which has enhanced research and education on our campus by bringing some of the world's top business and political leaders to participate in public dialogue on global issues, including former President Bill Clinton."

Of students who have passed through MAGIS since its inception, some one-fourth now work with non-governmental organizations (NGO's); another quarter went into business. UCSB global studies grads are working in district attorney's offices and departments of state, and serving in the social responsibility departments of corporations including Google and BMW. Many pursued advanced degrees.

It won't be long before they can get a doctorate right here in Santa Barbara -- a Ph.D. in global studies is in the works and expected to be available within about two years.

"UCSB was definitely ahead of its time in focusing on global studies as a discipline, and a fertile interdisciplinary environment is what allowed us to do it," said Melvin Oliver, executive dean of the College of Letters & Science, and the SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences. "Our program is well known. It has an impact, an

identity, and the scholars that we've been able to bring together have a profile that is really quite remarkable. I think our Ph.D. will be the type of program we're used to at UCSB -- creating the thought leaders of today and tomorrow."

Global studies as an academic discipline was, in a sense, born at UCSB, the first university in the country to offer a major with contemporary globalizing trends as its central organizing theme.

Its chief architects today comprise the department's senior faculty: Richard Applebaum, MacArthur Chair in Global and International Studies and Sociology; Mark Juergensmeyer, a professor of sociology and of religious studies, and director of the Orfalea Center; and Giles Gunn, a professor of English and chair of UCSB's undergraduate program in global studies.

Applebaum credits his own graduate study of international affairs -- and his ensuing work in Peru with the nonprofit Ford Foundation -- for bolstering his belief that such knowledge "should have some practical application." As a new faculty member some 25 years ago, he joined a committee that was discussing that very issue, and would eventually propose a school of global studies.

That and several subsequent proposals "went nowhere," Applebaum recalled recently, but along the way he met Juergensmeyer, in whom he found a colleague equally devoted to studying globalization and its effects. Together, they developed and floated the idea for a Global and International Studies program. With support from Chancellor Yang, by 1999 they at last had their major. Gunn was among its founding faculty.

"The program itself really grew out of an initial drive to create a professional or semi-professional master's degree that prepares students to be global citizens," Applebaum said. "Because the up and coming thing was the role of NGO's, the department was created as an umbrella. The first thing that was added was the major, and it was instantly immensely popular."

So popular that a master's degree quickly made perfect sense. Barely six years later, in 2005, a financial commitment from the Orfalea Foundation helped make MAGIS a reality. In October 2006, a local visit by former President Clinton inaugurated the graduate program and the Orfalea Center.

"The programs have grown seemingly exponentially," said Juergensmeyer. "Just 15 years ago there were no global studies programs. Now there are hundreds of undergrad programs, and graduate programs are emerging everywhere. As the grandfather of them all, we're playing a role in helping to support them."

That support comes by way of the Juergensmeyer-edited and orchestrated Encyclopedia of Global Studies, a four-volume reference tome -- more than 500 scholars and experts from around the world contributed -- described as a "landmark in the field."

"As the world becomes increasingly more intertwined, and everything we do, it seems, instantly connects everyone else on the planet, we will realize the importance of taking seriously the study of such topics and preparing students for roles as global citizens," Juergensmeyer said. "We have an academic interest in developing the field, but we also have a civic interest in preparing students who are going to be able to play leadership roles and shape the world, transform it, and change it in ways that are positive and good."

Today's students are uniquely, and increasingly, positioned to do just that, according to Eve Darian-Smith, director of MAGIS and a professor of global studies. Many are themselves products of globalization -- multi-ethnic, multiple passport-holding citizens of the world for whom the notion of "national identity" is as passé as it is inapplicable.

"There's no real 'national' anymore," Darian-Smith said. "In the 21st century -- with issues like climate change, dwindling natural resources, water, energy, human rights and how they're implemented on the ground -- we really have moved way beyond that outdated understanding of how the world operates. Our undergraduates are more aware of these things than perhaps senior politicians, in some ways. If you're a person that legitimately has three passports, your commitments or loyalties to a very Western notion of national identity are lessened."

Add to that the impact of ever-advancing technology, and suddenly the growing connections -- among people, events, countries and continents -- that first gave rise to globalization take on greater significance. Six degrees of separation may be an overstatement.

"The world's problems, the world's issues, no longer can be confined to discrete analyses that are geographic- or nation- or state-based," said Oliver. "You have to

have a global perspective, and global studies provides that. The people we're training are the kind of people who understand that context, and they can help make civil society more effective."

Asked about her motivation for, and devotion to, giving -- which at UCSB has also included the Orfalea Family Children's Center, the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, and UCSB Arts & Lectures -- Natalie Orfalea offered a similar sentiment.

"Philanthropy is 'giving back,'" she said, "but it is also an investment. And we get a marvelous return on our investments at UCSB, in the form of a stronger, more resilient community. Students come out of the MAGIS program ready, willing, and able to make the world more just, more humane, and more prosperous. That's a good investment."

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