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What's a Cultural Studies Curriculum

A FEW YEARS INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM, following the disastrous events marking the autumn of its first year, the global media sounds an increasingly urgent alarm about the widening cracks in the global "order," describing divisions of race, religion, nation, gender, politics, and worldview that mar the promise (perhaps naive, yet once powerful nonetheless) signified in the term "global village."

Read in this light, Peter Stearns's lead article, "Teaching Culture," about the failure of cultural studies research generated at scholarly and graduate levels to be expressed in practice in general education curricula, carries a particular urgency—an urgency that transcends the usual disciplinary turf battles and canon wars that often mark such discussions. Stearns calls for the carving out of a "modest new space" of "inclusion of explicit cultural analysis in . . . liberal education sequence[s]," acknowledging the disciplinary and organizational challenges that this work would present to scholars, educators, and administrators. Stearns asserts that "there is a crying need to relate this aspect of cultural research and training to cultural analysis more generally" in an effort to "encourage students to think critically about basic assumptions."

Stearns's diagnosis that cultural studies paradigms generated as "new knowledge" by scholars and graduate students have not made their way "down" to undergraduate curricula is astute. His assertion that undergraduate programs need precisely the "habits of mind" cultivated by cultural studies methods in order to prepare students to be world citizens capable of managing—and perhaps even energizing—the weary planet they stand to inherit is one to which administrators and educators alike would do well to pay heed.

Keeping these ideas in mind, we will lay out a model of one such "modest space": the incorporation of cultural studies methodologies into un-

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Doing in a Collage like This?

dergraduate curricula across the "divide" of management (specifically organizational behavior) and liberal arts courses at Babson College, a small, private college that awards the Bachelor of Science degree in management. Specifically, we will provide ways of thinking about such curricular advances that move beyond specific courses, knowledge bases, or methodologies to reveal how underlying assumptions about individuals operating within cultural contexts at the heart of the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies may influence curricular design and course delivery on an institutional level.

Cultural studies

Before beginning, it is crucial to identify the differences between cultural studies as a discrete, interdisciplinary, intellectual practice, and the study of culture in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. Stearns differentiates between the "cultural turn" taken by many disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, and English—a turn that featured cultural analysis as an "examination of the impact of fundamental beliefs and values ...on social patterns and personal behavior"—and "the interdisciplinary amalgam called cultural studies." It is important to note, however, that the methods and assumptions of anthropology and sociology as modes of "cultural study" differ in critical ways from those of cultural studies, a field that arose in the late 1960s with the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, England. That development, headed by New Left British intellectuals such as Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams, had its origin in literary studies and authorized a focus upon popular culture as an "object" worthy of academic study. Indeed, in its original manifestation (in a kind of *manifesto* delivered by Hoggart), it was received with unmitigated hostility by sociologists at Birmingham!

Unlike anthropology and sociology, cultural studies does not focus upon observing, describing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions about individuals operating within cultural contexts, but rather examines the role of representation in language, image, and text as both productive

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and reflective of cultural power relations. Given its intellectual foundation in the New Left, described as "a political movement that was socialist in nature, strongly anti-imperialist and anti-racist, broadly supportive of the nationalization of major industries and the abolition of economic and educational privilege," cultural studies as a mode of intellectual inquiry is positioned as inherently oppositional to dominant cultural and economic formations, especially capitalism (Schulman 1993). This positioning makes its pedagogical expression at a college of business like Babson a particularly complex and interesting phenomenon. The question of how such an inherently oppositional discourse might operate within the institutional context of the dominant culture, then, will also be addressed here.

Curricular structure

A brief trek over Babson's curricular terrain will help to situate our discussion in structural terms. First, the curriculum is three-tiered, operating at foundation, intermediate, and advanced levels. Students take courses at all levels across the curriculum (that is, in both management and in liberal arts); this point is crucial for the inclusion of cultural studies methodologies at all three curricular stages. Rather than the liberal arts side "having" students for the first two years in a core curriculum and then sending them over to management professors who "finish them off" in a major, students engage in a parallel course of study at all three tiers, enabling professors on both sides of the house to engage students with ideas, methodologies, and assumptions that may well complement one another in productive and stimulating ways—some of which are clearly based in concrete modes of cultural analysis.

The other structural point of note is closely related: The curriculum at Babson is based on competencies, or learning outcomes, rather than upon content coverage or the accumulation of knowledge *per se*; most of these formal competencies are "culturally based" in the sense that they directly address students' ability to analyze a variety of disciplinary problems "in a world characterized by diverse cultures and ways of knowing" for the express purpose of being able to

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"contribute responsibly to a changing and uncertain world" (Babson Student Core Competencies). Of the twenty-seven competencies that Babson graduates are ostensibly able to demonstrate, almost all seek to cultivate the precise attributes that Stearns asserts are within the purview of cultural studies analyses: "replicable skills" and "habits of mind" that can be applied to a variety of personal, professional, and social problems and situations.

Such habits of mind are practiced on both sides of the curriculum through, among other means, the lens of cultural analysis; this practice begins immediately with recognition of the fundamental biases that can permeate undergraduates' perceptions of business and their own management success. Because of their limited work experience, traditional undergraduate students upon entering college often fail to recognize the impact that the larger cultural system has on their interpretations of an organizational problem and on the actions they may take in response to that problem. In helping students to develop their management capabilities, professors begin by helping them to recognize their own conceptual frames. Cultural analysis be-

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comes a critical tool for students to examine the simplicity of their initial views about business, and for enabling them to reframe these views by recognizing the impact that culture, structure, and politics have on individual and organizational successes.

Cultural perspective

One of the foundational biases to be addressed with undergraduate business students relates to their belief that quantitative data represent "the truth." Students often believe that the value of their business education lies in learning various formulas and technical skills for calculating financial, accounting, and statistical data. Students imagine that their future success in business depends upon their ability to perform complicated quantitative analyses that generate the "correct number." What they fail to recognize is that there is no "truth" inherent in quantitative data. Quantitative data—like all data—are contingent upon the larger cultural lens through which one interprets those data.

Cultural studies assumptions, then, help students to deconstruct and reframe this initial bias. In adopting a cultural perspective upon

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quantitative analysis, professors teach students to recognize how and why different organizations may use the same financial data to justify vastly different courses of action. Using assumptions derived from a cultural studies perspective, students learn to analyze how two organizations may differ in terms of their political, cultural, and structural systems and how these systems impact an individual's interpretation of quantitative data. Students begin to recognize that quantitative data do not represent truth, but like all data, are subject to interpretation that is impacted by the cultural aspect of the organization. In learning to engage in a cultural interpretation of quantitative data, students begin to develop more nuanced analytical skills.

These analytical skills are also central to pedagogical goals at the three curricular levels in the liberal arts. The curriculum provides students the opportunity to utilize the skills of critical analysis in increasingly demanding courses based upon students' intellectual and cognitive development over their four years of study. Disciplinary frameworks built upon the groundwork of the Foundation Program's competencies are introduced at the intermediate level, with intensified focus at the advanced level. These competencies include critical analytical abilities in thinking, reading, speaking, and writing; the ability to tolerate and explore ambiguity; and the ability to reflect critically upon one's own cognitive processes, knowledge bases, and value systems.

The competencies, then, are practiced through textual analysis guided at all levels of the curriculum by questions that drive the cultural studies paradigm: in particular, questions about the construction of identity, of acknowledging identity as a construction, questions about the conditions and forces behind the production of identities and of cultural texts, questions of the role of aesthetics and ethics in the production of a range of cultural texts. Students are challenged in the liberal arts to interrogate the idea of truth—of the ways in which phenomena taken for true or universal belief systems or cultural practices are actually ideologically, institutionally, or culturally determined—in both textual and individual-social contexts.

Cultural analysis

Within the context of this three-tiered, competency-based curriculum, then, students might begin to experience a conversation, or dialogue,

across the disciplinary space between some liberal arts and management courses. While the courses maintain their disciplinary integrity, they do share common ground in their reliance upon cultural analysis as a mode of critical inquiry. In considering the foundation for such a cross-disciplinary conversation in terms of cultural studies assumptions, one primary motivator and/or outcome of studying identity as constructed in both management and liberal arts settings is the de-centering of the individual as a category with primacy in the U.S. and its dominant national, cultural, and economic narratives. In the liberal arts, the emphasis upon social construction and upon studying the power of social categories of class, race, gender, sexuality, and nationality calls the very idea of the autonomous individual actor into question. Rather than accepting the individual as a given form for "the self," the individual as an historically situated *idea* with practical implications for the organization of cultures and the prioritization of shared value systems becomes ground for analytical study and interrogation by students. Significantly, it is not without consequence in the context of a business school that the idea of the individual in the West is historically situated precisely in the rise of capitalism itself, nor that, by contrast, cultural studies arises from an engagement with

> questions that Marxism as a theoretical project put on the agenda: the power, the global reach and history-making capacities of capital; the question of class; the complex relationships between power...and exploitation (Hall 1992, 279).

Given this paradoxical positioning, it is worth considering how cultural studies questions about the individual in relation to structures of power and dominance might be manifest on the management side of the curriculum.

One of the ways "in" to these questions is to enable undergraduates in the context of their management coursework to examine the extent to which they may be biased by their belief in their ability to control their own destinies. Undergraduate students in the U.S. have often been taught to conceptualize success as something that they can control. This frame proposes that students can make the choice to work hard and then they will be "successful," rewarded for their work. This frame is further reinforced by the dominant myths that proliferate in American business culture, such as that contained in the

A central tenet of cultural studies: the "ethical dimension of infinite responsibility to the other"

narrative of the American Dream. Young management students often believe the Horatio Alger legend that anyone can go from rags to riches through his or her own hard work and determination. Again, the downside of this frame is students' failure to recognize how culture, structure, and politics, as well as identity categories such as race, class, gender, nationality, or sexuality, influence an individual's ability to succeed—not to mention the very notion or definition of what counts as success.

Cultural systems

If students are to take control of their journey toward a life that is successful for them in real terms that transcend the dominant ideology of individual power and glory—in other words, if they are going to find and maintain meaningful agency—they must recognize the role that culture, structure, and politics play in every individual's ability to succeed. They need to recognize that while an individual manager's hard work will have some direct influence on her success, this relationship is both mediated and moderated by cultural factors. The challenge is to help students develop their organizational acumen such that they learn to recognize the effects of the cultural system within which their work is situated and to understand how this system may affect their actions and organizational successes.

The study of culture in an anthropological/ sociological sense can be used to help students learn to analyze an organization as a cultural system. From this vantage point, the organization can be viewed as a community with its own unique norms and values that organizational members are encouraged to share. Students learn to be "anthropologists" in an organizational system as they describe how language and structure reinforce the culture of the organization. For many students it is challenge enough to conceptualize an organization as a cultural system and to acquire the skills needed to describe such a system. Yet, the more important and more difficult pedagogical goal is to help students understand how this cultural system influences their ability to successfully take action within the system.

Traditional undergraduate students, with their limited work experience, struggle to under-stand how organizational systems influence individual behavior. As such, professors must find creative pedagogical approaches that enable students to make these connections on their own. While classic research in organizational theory such as the 1950's General Electric and Tavistock studies can be useful for introducing students to the relationship between culture, structure, and individual behavior, for undergraduate students to fully appreciate the connection, they need the opportunity to see how language and structure can influence their own behavior. Since student resistance to the idea that cultural forces influence their own success is often quite strong, it is helpful to generate a gestalt moment in which students realize that they have behaved differently than they might have expected, and that this behavior stems primarily from the cultural system in which they have found themselves.

Once undergraduate students appreciate how cultural context affects their agency, they can begin to critically examine cases in which the organizational system influences someone else's actions or ability to succeed. This move gestures toward what Joanna Zylinska (2004) identifies as a central tenet of cultural studies: the "ethical dimension of infinite responsibility to the other." This gesture is ethical in its desire to create a better good—derived from a deeper, more critical understanding—not just for the individual but for "others" who share organizational and/or global space.

Students' over-identification with and emphasis upon individual agency can also lead them to ignore the political systems that operate within an organization. The political system of the organization not only influences individual agency, it also determines what actions are followed and who is given credit for them. Since students often believe that power and politics in an organization are "bad," a cultural lens can be useful for comprehending how power and politics are inherently embedded in any cultural system. The challenge is to develop a political lens which enables one to expose and examine the interrelationship between power, politics, and culture and to explore how all these systems affect individual agency.

Through cultural analysis, then, one begins to empower students to more effectively implement their ideas and take action in an organization.

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The pedagogical challenge is to avoid inadvertently disempowering students, who may develop the fatalistic viewpoint that all action is predetermined by the culture, structure, and politics of the system. To avoid disempowerment, professors must focus not only on analysis of the cultural system but also on teaching students how, through such effective analysis of the cultural system, they can better take action in an organization.

The idea of action, of finding agency within one's cultural context by making visible the structures of power and dominance operating within that context, is another arena that connects liberal arts and management through a commitment to studying what Stuart Hall (1992, 280) has termed "the enormously productive metaphor of hegemony." In its indebtedness to the work of Italian politico-intellectual Antonio Gramsci, cultural studies as a field of inquiry is grounded in the project of exposing the workings of power, which most often disavow themselves, solidifying their dominance through narratives that represent that dominance *not as dominance*, but rather as the natural order of things, or the "ideology of common sense, known to all 'normal' people as the right and proper way of life" (Hall, in Zylinska 2004). Such attention to exposing and analyzing the workings of power as part of a specifically *resistant* politics originating in cultural studies is another interesting, seemingly unlikely development at a college known for producing "world leaders in business."

However, just as cultural studies demands

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that scholars and teachers refuse simplistic analyses that situate objects of study or texts as seamless productions of knowledge, so too a business college cannot be read as a seamless productive site, (mis)construed as a locus of unthinking celebration of the power of the individual as maverick and of the rise of global capitalism as pure opportunity in a reductive cost-benefit analysis. With its focus upon ethical corporate practice, upon critical inquiry into the nature of globalization as both an opportunity for global advancement and as a phenomenon riddled with material inequity, upon the responsibilities of the entrepreneur and the role of the "social entrepreneur," Babson is a complex intellectual and economic site with a multifaceted relationship to the serious inquiry demanded by cultural studies into the nature of power, culture, and identity.

Cultural studies in the academy

Indeed, the practice of cultural studies at Babson runs the same risks that the institutionalization of cultural studies as a whole within the dominant culture of academic life has had to run: how to maintain its critical legacy while functioning within the very structures of dominance (academic, cultural, and economic) that it is often mobilized to critique. Are its tools being co-opted, or has it managed to carve space on broad enough ground to enable students to undertake the critical project that its proponents imagined could happen both in and outside the academy? In the liberal arts at Babson, much coursework and faculty scholarly production maintains the tradition of cultural studies in questioning the distribution and function of power in its myriad forms. Many texts, topics, and courses in the liberal arts divisions continue in this vein, starting with the Foundation Program in its commitment to considering the impact of social categories upon the individual. Reliance upon and grounding in close, informed, evidentiary readings of texts enables the work in such courses to transcend the status of political advocacy or indoctrination precisely because it is based in the most rigorous forms of cultural analysis. In the end, this mode of textual analysis empowers students to operate as ethical

actors in their increasingly complex cultural contexts precisely by bringing the functioning of those contexts—regardless of political positioning on the right or left—to consciousness and the critical light of day, helping students to recognize and decide whether to consent to global power structures.

The same holds true for the central project of Organizational Behavior. While it is important for students to analyze the influence that cultural systems have on agency in organizational contexts, the primary focus in Organizational Behavior at Babson is to help students learn how to navigate the culture of an organization in order to create change.

Debra Meyerson has coined the term "tempered radicals" to refer to individuals in organizations who want to succeed in their work and want their organizations to succeed but who have ideals, agendas, or even identities that mark them as different from the dominant organizational culture. As such, tempered radicals often have initiatives they want to introduce into the organization that may well challenge the dominant culture and force the organization to change. These initiatives range from ideal-based—focused upon issues around ethics and diversity—to task- or strategy-oriented—focused on introducing innovative new processes, structures, or technologies. For tempered radicals to succeed they must learn how to closely analyze the organization's cultural system as they determine how best to introduce a change initiative.

Through the lens of the tempered radical and the role that cultural analysis plays in the tempered radical's opportunity to succeed in changing the system, students can begin to develop an empowering frame for their own agency in organizations. The goal in an organizational context is to build legitimacy for one's ideas and to slowly introduce change in a way that is not threatening to the existing power systems. As such, the only way to execute such a change strategy is to begin with a close analysis of the existing cultural system.

This idea of the tempered radical may strike some cultural studies practitioners as the antithesis of the organic intellectual of the 1960s New Left. While there may be some authenticity to the original, inherently marginalized position of cultural studies, the truth is that its ideas about cultural construction and the forces of hegemony have made their way into a variety of undergraduate curricula—even those that may,

on the face of things, seem oppositional to its political project. However, such a reading of a simple co-optation of an "oppositional" discourse by an institutional "mainstream" does not do sufficient justice to the complex range of pedagogical strategies originating in cultural analytic modes at a place like Babson. When studied with precisely the nuance demanded by the discipline of cultural studies itself, Babson's pedagogical and scholarly culture reveals a commitment to broadening consciousness of social justice and a recognition of the need for social change, for responsible social entrepreneurship, and for ethical agency and action across the great divides of our global arena.   □

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