IU Assists University of Pretoria with American Studies

Among the expanding list of linkages that Indiana University has been developing with institutions of higher education in Africa has been an on-going collaboration with the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Over the past two years, IU Bloomington and Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) have been working together to introduce components of an American Studies curriculum to students at the University of Pretoria (UP), where very few courses exist that deal with the United States. To date, the major funding for this American Studies initiative has been provided by the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria.

In the spring of 2004, Dan Neher, assistant cultural affairs officer of the U.S. Embassy, approached Patrick O’Meara, dean of the Office of International Programs, to discuss the possibility of linking IU and UP for some introductory lectures on aspects of American political life, specifically on the then upcoming November 2004 national and presidential elections.

During the summer, Michael Wolf of IPFW’s Department of Political Science delivered two broad lectures on the elections process via videoconferencing, followed by a week-long visit to Pretoria during election week in November. There he gave blow-by-blow analyses and explanations of the incoming stream of data, met with UP students and faculty in classes, and was widely interviewed by the South African media.

Wolf returned again in August 2005 under an OIP Exchange Affiliations grant between the two political science departments of IPFW and UP. For one full week, he gave lectures to UP lecturer Nicola de Jager’s introductory political science class, speaking on U.S. political culture and socialization, electoral systems, and voting behavior. Neher summed up that week: “Wolf’s visit here was a great success. His week of lectures and small discussion groups was fully worked into the curriculum . . . and response to [his] frank and well-balanced lectures underlines the embassy’s view that telling America’s story ‘warts and all’ is the best form of public outreach imaginable.” Maxi Schoeman, head of political science at UP, was equally appreciative of Wolf’s contribution in providing much needed knowledge for South Africans to better understand the United States.

In spring 2005, Neher worked closely with OIP’s Roxana Ma Newman to develop an intensive one-week institute, the U.S. Studies Program, hosted by the embassy, taught by IU faculty, and aimed at encouraging South African faculty to consider including aspects of United
The broad aims were to “explore various aspects of U.S. history, institutions, politics, economics, society and culture, past and present, in an academic and scholarly environment.” The institute took place September 26–30 at the Farm Inn conference center outside Pretoria and attracted some 50 faculty participants from a range of South African institutions, including several from universities in Botswana, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe, and from diverse departments that included economics, history, journalism and media studies, political science, public law, and sociology. Participants were enthusiastic, describing the week as “objective, informative, helping to understand ‘where the United States is coming from.’”

The institute was an intensive introduction to U.S. history and politics, the first of its kind to be held in South Africa. IUB political science professors Gerald Wright and Christine Barbour spoke on constitutional principles, separation of powers, federalism, political institutions and political processes, and contemporary U.S. politics. Barbour also gave a special lunchtime lecture on the politics of food in America. IU East history professor Joanne Passet covered the founding of the nation, reconstruction, westward expansion, slavery, industrialization, the civil rights movement, and the women’s movement. IPFW’s political science chair James Lutz spoke on America’s role in globalization and, together with Brenda Lutz, on terrorism and homeland security. Time was also available for South African professors to reflect on the content of the lectures from a comparative South African point of view. In addition to these were two videoconference lectures delivered from Bloomington, one on race relations in the United States by Matthew Guterl, chair of the American Studies program and history professor in the African American and African Diaspora Studies department, and the other on the pedagogy of teaching history by historian David Pace.

In April 2006, the UP–IPFW exchange brought two visiting UP lecturers, de Jager from political science and Khumisho Moguerane from sociology, for one week each to the Bloomington and Fort Wayne campuses. At IPFW, they met administrators, faculty, and students in the international studies program, gave class lectures, and talked about their own research. On the IUB campus, they met African studies and American studies faculty, gave guest lectures to international studies major and Global Village classes, and attended two Bloomington conferences related to their own research fields. Their IUB visit coincided with a course on globalization, regionalization, and sovereignty being taught by Randall Baker of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), two sessions of which were interactive video exchanges with de Jager’s and Moguerane’s students at UP.

A second U.S. Studies Institute is being planned for July 2006, where Baker and IUB historian David Thelen will present lectures. The emphasis for this institute is more on recent U.S. history and political culture, from the depression through the two world wars, a new world order, foreign policy, and the U.S. role in world economics and globalization.

In the meantime, talks have continued between IU and UP involving the American Studies programs at IUB and IPFW with UP’s Maxi Schoeman and Marie Muller, dean of the Faculty of Humanities. The goal is to find greater cooperation and financial support for eventually helping UP develop a fuller program of American Studies. Such a program might include short-term exchange visits, using new communications technologies to deliver lectures and online courses, exchange of research materials and publications, and a continuation of the summer U.S. studies institutes.

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