

# WE ARE THE WORLD: Global Education at Alverno



In October, 1492, Christopher Columbus accidentally discovered America while searching for a faster spice trade route between Europe and the Orient. Ever since, those who live here have found that their fortunes are inextricably bound with others around the globe.

**T**he ties, of course, are much more numerous and firmly knotted today than they were in Columbus' time. In the past two months, for example, Americans have twice felt their fortunes pivot on events occurring halfway around the globe. When U.S. bombers retaliated against Libya for a terrorist attack in West Germany and when radioactive clouds from Chernobyl Russia drifted high over China, North America and Australia, the world was vividly reminded of Marshall MacCluhan's observation of two decades ago: We have become a global village.

Given these conditions, how does Alverno College prepare its students to live in a dynamic, ever-changing, increasingly interdependent world?

On one level, the question is hardly new to higher education. International awareness is a time-honored goal of liberal arts education, a recurrent theme in history, literature and social science courses. When Alverno created its ability-based education in 1973, it con-

tinued a longstanding emphasis on international awareness by including "an understanding of the world environment" among eight, comprehensive abilities that all students must master in order to graduate.

What is new, though, is the degree to which global interdependence now affects each of us. The twin forces of technology and economics now link fates nearly as much as culture and history distinguish them.

"More and more, students will be called upon to deal with the impact of the interdependence of countries," explained Professor Stephen Sharkey, chairperson of a committee of Alverno faculty and staff responsible for global education at Alverno. As an example, Sharkey points to the changing economic environment of the midwest. The transportation and manufacturing industries which were once exclusively American have become international. American Motors is partnered with Renault. General

Motors has teamed up with Toyota. Volkswagens are built in Pennsylvania, Datsuns in Tennessee and Hondas in Ohio. And these are just the beginning; midwestern states are as active as anyone in wooing additional foreign companies to establish plants within their borders.

"Students need to understand the impact this has on their personal lives," Sharkey commented. "This will greatly redefine what jobs will be available to them after graduation, for example."

During the past year the committee which Sharkey chairs has worked to assure that an understanding of this interdependence is thoroughly reflected in the college's expectations of its students and its teaching. Aided by a grant from the American Association of Colleges, the committee reviewed the entire Alverno global curriculum from start to finish. This past semester students began to experience the results of their collaboration: an interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses as much on

the interdependence of nations as it does on their differences.

Committee members believe that the new curriculum will help students see the connections between global events and their daily lives. Moreover, they expect students to balance the differing — and sometimes conflicting — interests of nations with a basic awareness of their interdependence.

“The new curriculum means that

cient use of resources.”

Students begin to encounter this interdependence during their freshman year. “When they first come to Alverno, most students have never really thought about themselves in relation to the world,” explained Professor Judeen Schulte, a faculty member who worked with Sharkey on development of the global awareness curriculum.

“They’re helped to begin realizing

to carry out the new curriculum, according to Sharkey and Schulte. The new curriculum was woven through more than half of all existing courses in such a way that every student at Alverno will encounter it. “It would have been a lot easier to just create a new course or two, but such courses wouldn’t have reached many students. And they wouldn’t have reached any student well,” Sharkey said.

An example of how these common themes are used to integrate global awareness can be found in the way the concepts of natural and global interdependence are introduced to students.

“In the natural dimension, we’re asking basic questions about the fundamental nature of physical and technological reality,” Sharkey explained. “That covers phenomena ranging from atomic structure to the human body, from musical patterns to computers or ecosystems. Analysis of these topics as examples of global interdependence are now built into several biology, chemistry, physics and other courses.”

“In the cultural dimension, we explore ideas and works of an artistic, philosophical or religious character, and how these ideas link the people of many nations. These, too, are now important topics with in several philosophy, religion and social science courses,” Sharkey added.

Once a student has mastered a basic understanding of the common



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the woman who graduates from Alverno forms opinions and takes actions that appropriately reflect an understanding of the interdependences that have developed among people around the globe,” Sharkey said. “She would take personal responsibility for creating a better future wherever she is — home, work place, neighborhood, region and nation. She will have an interest in long-range planning and effi-

the connections between themselves and the globe.”

Learning experiences to build this awareness are included in the introductory courses all students take in the arts and humanities, sciences and social sciences. Some are even included during orientation week.

Rather than creating a few new courses on “global education” committee members purposefully chose an interdisciplinary approach

bonds that bind the globe, she is then asked to discern the differing perspectives arising from different cultures. Students are encouraged to study these perspectives firsthand. Travelship grants, small stipends to help students take part in learning experiences a day or more away from campus, are an increasingly popular way of accomplishing that goal.

This past semester Anna Ameri, a social science and history major, used a travelship to take part in a Model United Nations program. Before the seminar Ameri read extensively from a variety of sources including newspapers, news magazines and the United Nations Chronicle. At the Model UN, Anna took the role of a delegate representing the United Arab Emirates and participated in discussions and debates on the resolutions placed upon the Model UN agenda.

"Before I went, I assumed we would quickly proceed through the five resolutions proposed to the council," Ameri said. "In two and one half days we were only able to discuss and debate two of them. I learned how hard it is to overcome some of the differences that hold nations apart."

Ameri's comments point out how the approach to global awareness helps students understand that the interrelationships which comprise our global environment do not always follow textbook patterns. In the world, problems are sometimes not solved. Sometimes they are on-

ly contained.

Another resource available to Alverno students learning to articulate different perspectives is a recently acquired shortwave receiver located in the library. One recent use of the receiver was in the aftermath of the American bombing of Libya. The shortwave picked up and allowed students the opportunity to hear English translations of the commentaries broadcast on

students will take part in the first such seminar next fall, a series of workshops on international conflict resolution that have been put together by Alverno faculty and representatives of the Beyond War organization. Other future seminars might focus on issues related to economics, trade or computer technology.

So far, students have welcomed the new approach and the ideas it

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the BBC, Moscow World Series, Radio France International, Duetsche Welle, and Radio Nederland.

To complete their global education, students will eventually take part in simulations and exercises that require judgments and decision-making that reflect a comprehensive understanding of global interdependences and differences. A group of upper division Alverno

brings, Sharkey and Schulte both said. "Since it's new, we don't have anybody who's experienced the whole sequence yet," Sharkey added. "But from what we've seen so far, students are attracted to the idea of global interdependence. They see it as a fresh, valid perspective on something that is especially important to them. Their future." ■