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The Rise of Human Rights Education: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Possibilities

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Abstract

Human rights education (HRE) has gained increasing support as a tool for promoting social responsibility and global respect for international human rights standards. Many schools and universities include HRE in their curricula in an attempt to foster a sense of global citizenship among students, yet educators still grapple with how to most effectively include human rights in undergraduate programs. In an attempt to provide resources and to promote effective HRE, this article examines the rise of human rights education and analyzes its potential for positive change. In particular, high impact learning practices (such as community partnerships and short-term study abroad trips) and service learning offer tools for effective HRE. The article also considers inherent challenges facing HRE educators, especially within higher education. It argues that the future of HRE requires critical consideration of core human rights values and practices that are often taken for granted. While growing support for HRE has built a solid foundation for undergraduate education, we must critically consider opportunities, challenges, and future possibilities for effective and widely-available human rights education.

Key Words

Human rights education, undergraduate education, global citizenship, social responsibility, high-impact learning, service learning

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Human rights education (HRE) has gained increasing support over the past twenty years as a tool for promoting peace, tolerance, social responsibility, and global respect for international human rights standards. In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights concluded in its Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action that states are duty-bound “to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms” and that the subject of human rights should be incorporated into programs of study (World Conference

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on Human Rights 1993: 11, para 33). Today, many schools and universities include HRE in their curricula in an attempt to foster a sense of global citizenship and responsibility among students. Amnesty International defines HRE as “a deliberate, participatory practice aimed at empowering individuals, groups, and communities through fostering knowledge, skills, and attitudes consistent with internationally recognized principles.” The goal of such education is to “build a culture of respect for and action in the defense and promotion of rights for all” (Amnesty International, Human Rights Education).

Despite widespread support for HRE, educators still grapple with how to most effectively include international human rights in undergraduate programs. They face challenges associated with integrating this interdisciplinary topic across campus – particularly at traditional institutions that emphasize strict disciplinary borders – and teaching resources for undergraduate education remain limited. Central challenges are not only teaching students about human rights norms and issues of concern, but also building a foundation of global citizenship that promotes social responsibility and problem-solving. Additionally, human rights issues often involve highly political, controversial subjects that necessitate critical analysis and debate; these practices are sometimes viewed as threatening at institutions where faculty neutrality and objectivity are stressed. Faculty members ultimately require resources for effective HRE, as well as institutional support for undertaking innovative teaching strategies.

This article examines the rise of HRE and analyzes its potential for positive change, as well as its inherent challenges and future possibilities. First, a brief overview outlines the goals of HRE – including those related to social responsibility and global citizenship – and highlights growing international interest in this approach. Second, opportunities for innovative teaching strategies emphasize critical analysis of information and solution-seeking. In particular, high impact learning practices (such as community partnerships and short-term study abroad trips) and service learning offer tools for effective HRE. Third, the challenges of HRE include: issues of identity and nationalism, the impacts of biased historical “legends” on educational systems and our ways of thinking, potential incongruities with traditional approaches to undergraduate education, and specific challenges that often require educators to consider the ethical implications of their teaching strategies. Lastly, HRE practices must become more robust and complex as students and educators alike become more familiar with human rights norms and issues. In particular, students should be encouraged to think more critically about values and actions that we take for granted. Understandings of human development and dignity, conceptions of responsibility, best practices for human rights protection, and even the universality of human rights are issues that warrant further discussion

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and debate at the university level. While growing support for HRE has built a solid foundation for undergraduate education, we must critically consider opportunities, challenges, and future possibilities for effective and widely-available human rights education.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (HRE)

HRE has been gaining prominence for several decades as educators seek opportunities for increasing human rights knowledge, encouraging peace and social justice, and responding to new global challenges. HRE is advanced as an approach that “promotes values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others.” It develops an understanding of each person’s “common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community” and “constitutes an essential contribution to the long-term prevention of human rights abuses” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights education and training). Ultimately, advocates contend that HRE builds “a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and molding of attitudes” directed to:

- 1) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- 2) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- 3) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;
- 4) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law;
- 5) The building and maintenance of peace;
- 6) The promotion of people-centered sustainable development and social justice (Bajaj 2001: 484).

A number of academic institutions have developed HRE programs of study, or incorporated human rights education into existing disciplines such as anthropology, political science, and sociology. A handful of U.S. institutions offer undergraduate majors in human rights, including programs at Bard College, Columbia University, Southern Methodist University, University of Dayton, and Webster University. Other institutions, such as the University of Iowa and the University of Chicago, do not offer undergraduate majors but do provide students with the option of earning a certificate and/or minor in human rights. At the graduate level, U.S. institutions are increasingly offering human rights programs (and catching up with their European counterparts) at the master’s degree level; Columbia University has an M.A. in “Human

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Rights Studies,” for instance, and Arizona State University offers an M.A. in “Social Justice and Human Rights.” Unfortunately no comprehensive listing of university-level programs currently exists, but best practices are often shared through non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International’s Human Rights Education Network and Human Rights Education Associates (HREA).

The rising popularity of HRE is reflected by growing international support and the widespread availability of teaching resources. The international community has increasingly expressed interest in HRE since the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights; the United Nations declared 1995-2004 the International Decade for Human Rights Education, and the UN General Assembly made 2009 the International Year of Human Rights Learning. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training has also been drafted, reflecting growing interest in HRE and its potential for rights promotion. UNESCO contends that HRE is “an integral part of the right to education” that is increasingly gaining recognition as a human right in itself. It argues that “knowledge of rights and freedoms is considered a fundamental tool to guarantee respect for the rights of all” (UNESCO, Human Rights Education). There has been a worldwide rise in human rights content in textbooks with increasing emphasis on individual rights and personal agency in topics such as history and social studies (Bajaj 2001: 492), although many of these resources are aimed at primary and secondary students rather than undergraduates. Online teaching resources are available from non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Education Associates (HREA), while the issue of HRE is frequently addressed in academic books and journals.

HRE is a vital component of undergraduate curricula for universities that take the ideals of social responsibility and global citizenship seriously. HRE repositions students as members of a global community instead of simply as national citizens.¹ This form of HRE seeks to cultivate “vibrant global citizenship” with an emphasis on interdependence, global knowledge, and a commitment to social justice around the world (Bajaj 2001: 492). Although critics argue that the ability to exercise global citizenship is an elite activity for students in the global North, discussion of the ethical and institutional implications of such citizenship still provides potential allies and resources for promoting positive change (see Dower 2008). For instance, HRE with an emphasis on global citizenship can prompt students to re-examine their own ways of life and work toward sustainability, or to extend their conceptions of justice and to develop solutions that fit a diverse array of circumstances. Feminist advocates of HRE emphasize the need to recognize difference in order to overcome stereotypes, as well as to challenge structures of power that result in social inequality (Reilly 1997). By stressing the ideals of global citizenship, we can move toward

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the establishment of a more rights-protective environment that not only responds to crises, but provides the foundation for future peace (see Noddings 2005). Those who accept global citizenship are generally making the claim that all human beings have a certain moral status, and that we have a moral responsibility toward one another within this world community (Dower 2008: 41).

This global citizenship approach has also been termed a “values and awareness model” or described as the “internationalization” of the curriculum. The “values and awareness model” helps to transmit basic human rights knowledge and foster its integration into public values, while academic “internationalization” may simply be viewed as education for world-mindedness. Learners are made into critical consumers of human rights, with the goal of building a “critical human rights consciousness” that will bring international pressure for protecting universal human rights (Tibbitts 2002: 163-164). This consciousness (or empowerment) includes the ability of students to recognize the human rights dimensions (and their relationship to) a given conflict or problem, to become aware and concerned about their role in the protection or promotion of rights, to critically evaluate potential solutions, to identify or create new responses (along with being able to judge which choice is most appropriate), and to recognize their responsibility and influence in making decisions and impacting rights issues (see Meintjes 1997). For many educators, a key reason for building this consciousness is ethical; “it helps students to examine their implicit and explicit beliefs about whose well-being matters, and to develop a more globalized sense of responsibility and citizenship” (Kahane 2009: 49).

OPPORTUNITIES

Achieving the goals of HRE require innovative teaching strategies, with an emphasis on critical analysis of information and problem-solving. It is not simply enough for students to learn about international human rights law or to stay updated on current events. Rather, HRE content must be paired with teaching pedagogy that emphasizes global responsibility and community, interconnectedness, the re-humanization of victims and perpetrators of human rights abuse, and potential for enacting solutions for positive change. This section outlines available opportunities stemming from high impact learning practices, such as community partnerships and short-term study abroad trips, and service learning.²

High-Impact Learning

A variety of high-impact learning strategies offer possibilities for advancing HRE among undergraduate students. For instance, teaching models that include community partnerships and student involvement are

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often useful for taking students outside of their comfort zones and becoming more aware of human rights issues. One example comes from the College of Wooster, where undergraduates were paired with students incarcerated at a juvenile prison. The project aimed not only to examine human rights issues inherent to the U.S. prison system and juvenile detention policies, but also to re-humanize detainees. Through extensive personal contact between the project partners, both groups were able to recognize similarities between those they viewed as criminally deviant or privileged. The project also illustrated the role of dehumanization in affecting human rights of those on the fringe of society (Krain and Nurse 2004). Another example comes from Webster University in Saint Louis, where students in an interdisciplinary “Real World Survivor” learn about contributing factors and ethical implications of global poverty, as well as research the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Webster University Library 2012). The course includes a four-day field study trip to Heifer International Ranch in Perryville, Arkansas, where students experience poverty-like conditions. Students and faculty supervisors are divided into families and assigned to a Zambian boma, a Tibetan yurt, or one of two dilapidated Appalachian dwellings (including an old school bus). Participants must trade labor, barter for food, tend to the animals, and determine how to acquire basic food supplies. Nightly confessionals are videotaped in the village marketplace, and students later present their experiences at a community forum at their home campus. “It’s a much more purposeful way to educate students because it requires them to study broadly across the university and outside their own disciplines,” said course co-instructor Victoria McMullen. “It exposes them to other cultures, social systems and human behaviors” (Webster University School of Education 2012).

Human rights-specific study abroad experiences also provide high-impact learning opportunities for undergraduate students. College of Charleston trips to Cuba in 2007 and 2009 illustrated how international study tours can promote the ideals of world-mindedness and global citizenship that is foundational to HRE. Although U.S. students continue to study abroad at growing rates, “research has yet to investigate fully what potential study abroad might hold for the development of a different sense of citizenship among American students: a citizenship that simultaneously transcends and embraces national boundaries” (France and Rogers 2012: 391). Student travel to Cuba – with its oppositional relationship to the United States and status as a developing, non-white, Spanish-speaking country – holds potential for disrupting the “hegemonic narrative” created by historically acrimonious relations between the United States and Cuba (France and Rogers 2012: 391-392). Hollis France and Lee Rogers (2012) write that “for many American college students, experience abroad has the potential to initiate a process to question their American identity

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critically” (393). Undergraduates at the College of Charleston made a number of realizations as a result of their study abroad experience in Cuba, including: taking notice of the otherwise taken-for-granted freedom of travel that most Americans enjoy; increased awareness of how the U.S. media and government have shaped how Americans think about Cuba, communism, and the Castro regime; learning about additional steps needed to travel to what they characterized as a “third world” country (including limited access to material goods); growing awareness of constructions of American privilege and white privilege; and critical consideration of the “American equation of material possessions with happiness” as they explored a country with scarce resources (France and Rogers 2012: 396-401). Studying abroad in Cuba allowed American undergraduate students to separate the policies of the U.S. government from their individual perspectives, providing an “alternate lens...through which to view not only the actions of their government, but their role as Americans as well” (France and Rogers 2012: 402). This process is essential for building identities based on global citizenship, which are central to HRE goals and practices.

Short-term study trips also offer opportunities for students to learn about a human rights issue in-depth, which includes critical consideration of proposed solutions and the re-humanization of both victims and perpetrators of abuse. In 2011 and 2013, Webster University trips to Rwanda combined eight-week online courses with two-week study trips. Students learned about the 1994 Rwandan genocide that killed almost one million people, but instructors didn’t want to organize a “genocide tour” that paid little attention to culture, peace-building, and reconciliation efforts. In addition to visiting several genocide memorials and meeting with survivors, students were encouraged to think about cross-cultural communication and problem-solving. The trip itinerary allowed students to observe the country’s educational system, industry, tourism, urban and rural lifestyles, and government. Students learned about post-conflict reconciliation from high-ranking governments officials such as Rwanda’s Minister of Justice, Tharcisse Karugarama, as well as from everyday people such as translator (and Webster University graduate) John Munyarugamba, a survivor who forgave the neighbors who killed his family. Student participants often compared life in Rwanda to their own lives back home in the United States, building on the potential for global citizenship as discussed above, and made personal connections to human rights issues that they had previously only studied in books. “Walking through [the Rwandan island of Nkombo, where many people live in extreme poverty] was one of the most profound moments in my human rights education,” said student Justin Raymundo. “While I spent years studying extreme poverty, up until that moment, I had never experienced it. It was both heartbreaking and inspiring” (Webster University 2011). This experience highlights the

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potential of short-term study abroad for providing high-impact HRE learning for undergraduate students.

Service Learning

The values and ideals central to models of HRE and global citizenship have prompted increasing interest in the practice of academic service learning. Beginning in the early 1980s, educational and political leaders began calling for more youth involvement within the community, citing the need for young people to understand their rights and responsibilities toward each other. This approach was developed as a way of breaking isolation and lack of community connections among young people. Service learning also has roots in citizenship education (service as a strategy for making students into contributing citizens), experiential education, youth development, and school reform (Kinsley and McPherson 1995: 3-7). Like HRE and the ideal of global citizenship, the practice of service learning emphasizes rights awareness – including understanding the relationship between individual rights and the public good – and a sense of social responsibility (Kinsley and McPherson 1995: 4).

Academic service learning is a pedagogical model that integrates academic learning and relevant community service. It is, first and foremost, a teaching methodology; it requires the integration of experiential and academic learning so that these two practices strengthen and inform each other. This presupposes that service learning simply will not happen unless there is a concerted effort to strategically bridge what is learned in the classroom with what is learned in the field, or community. Therefore, service experiences must be relevant to a student's academic course of study (Howard 1998: 22). Most definitions of service learning have two common threads: separation and integration. The mission of higher education comprises three duties (research, teaching, and service), and service learning is a way to overcome the separation between these goals. It combines community work with classroom instruction and prepares students to participate in public life, thereby integrating theory and practice (Speck 2001: 4-5).

Because this practice is explicitly a teaching methodology, it's important to note that service learning is *not* the same as volunteerism. On the community side, students provide meaningful service work that meets a need or goal, as defined by a community/organization. On the campus side, however, the service must flow from and into course objectives and be integrated into courses through assignments that require some form of reflection. Assignments and service are assessed and evaluated accordingly (Weigert 1998: 6-7). If students are treated simply as volunteers but not service learners, their experiences are often limited to activities that only match their current abilities; they are not

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challenged in ways that meet their educational objectives (Bell and Carlson 2009: 21). Yet organizations that take service learners have their own missions and goals to pursue. “We’re not an educational agency, so the main point for us – we’re glad that they’re learning, but we’re really focused on the service that we’re getting from them,” said an NGO staff member. “If it’s more about them, then it’s not really worth it for us to do it because it ends up diverting energy away from our mission” (Garcia et al. 2009: 55). Service learning programs must benefit the community, but also challenge students in ways that extend beyond traditional conceptions of volunteerism.

One of the first steps toward beginning a service learning program, therefore, is to consider whether student activities will truly benefit the community. Since the 1990s, there has been growing dissatisfaction – both inside and outside the service learning movement – when it comes to the issue of whether service learning truly provides meaningful action. Although service learning began as a way to make students less self-centered and more aware of social issues, critics now express a number of concerns: First, service learning has the potential to exploit poor communities as free sources of education. Second, the “charity model” reinforces negative stereotypes and students’ perceptions of the poor as being helpless. Third, there is often a weak connection between what happens in the classroom versus in the community (Stoecker and Tryon 2009b: 3). There are several contributing factors to these criticisms; for instance, while many organization staff members are willing to view themselves as learners and to see learning as a collective activity, many faculty are more inclined to think of themselves as experts who impart knowledge to students and agencies rather than being true learning partners (Bacon 2002). As a result, some academic institutions fail to adequately consult with the community about needs, goals, and strategies. In some indigenous communities, for example, researchers and students have been denied access after decades of exploitative work that provided little benefit to community members (Smith 2012). As Isaiah Berlin (1969) cautions, sometimes people in positions of knowledge and power feel justified in coercing others “for their own sake” and wrongly identify community needs. He writes, “I am then claiming that I know what they truly need better than they know it themselves” (133).

Keeping these criticisms in mind, educators can begin a course development model for the launching of successful service learning. Service learning takes time, and cannot simply be an add-on to the curriculum. It must be embedded and integrated for it to work with busy faculty members and full-time curricula (Farber 2011: 5). Maureen Shubow Rubin (2001: 16-25) outlines seven key steps for launching a successful program:

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1. *Define student learning outcomes.*
2. *Define personal scholarship outcomes.* Faculty are encouraged to integrate scholarship into service-learning courses; for instance, by keeping an eye toward publication in service learning, education, or discipline-based academic journals.
3. *Plan community collaboration.* Faculty must identify partnerships and realize that organizations/community partners may not know how service learning works at first. "Each partner must understand and appreciate the perspectives, needs, and especially, contributions of the other. There is no place for arrogant attitudes on the part of faculty members or students," writes Rubin (2001). "Instead, everyone must recognize and respect the significant contributions of all partners as co-educators" (20).
4. *Design the course.* Approaches have included hypothesis testing, teacher preparation, multiple-semester projects, cross-disciplinary activities, and project planning and execution. Since many community needs cannot be addressed in a single semester, some professors create multi-semester projects that allow students to contribute a vital piece of the whole picture each semester.
 - i. Arrange logistics and create forms. Professors and community partners should review a series of questions, including these top ten:
 - ii. How long will the service component of the class last? What are the start/end dates?
 - iii. How many students will serve? How often? For how many hours?
 - iv. Are there transportation or parking problems?
 - v. Who will conduct orientation for the college students? Will it be in-class or on-site orientation? Can community partners attend class during the first week to introduce their programs and answer student questions? What icebreakers will be used to break down barriers between students and their new clients?
 - vi. Who will be the on-site supervisor? What are the check-in and check-out procedures?
 - vii. How will students be evaluated? What outcome measures will be used to evaluate agency satisfaction with the students, and vice versa?
 - viii. How will communication among the faculty member, students, and community partners be maintained? Exchange home and work telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

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- ix. What is the plan for closure and recognition of participants?
 - x. Is any special training necessary prior to starting service? If so, can the faculty member and agency share the special training? When can it be scheduled?
 - xi. Are any additional tests or procedures, such as tuberculosis tests or fingerprinting, necessary prior to starting?
5. *Reflect, analyze, and deliver.* Programs need to connect service performed and course content. The primary ways to bring about these linkages are reflection, critical analysis, and deliverables (a product that is left in the community for its future use).
 6. *Perform assessment and evaluation of and among all critical audiences.* Assessment is done by the university (see student learning outcomes), while evaluation is done by and for each service-learning population: students, faculty, and community sites.

The establishment and continued success of a service learning program depends on commitment, communication, and compatibility. The success of service learning projects depend, in large part, upon the level of commitment made by academic and community partners in developing and carrying out the project; the effectiveness of communication between professors, students, and organizations before and during the project; and the compatibility (in terms of cultural understanding, knowledge, and professional skills) of the program and the student with the community site (Hidayat et al. 2009: 148). Crucial ingredients to a successful service learning project include effective communication, the development of positive relationships, an infrastructure for service learning (such as offices of community engagement or service learning centers for defining and implementing projects), efficient management of service learners (including supervising, evaluating, and troubleshooting problems), and diversity promotion (including frameworks for cultural competency and recruiting a diverse pool of service learners) (Stoecker and Tryon 2009a: 164).

Lastly, adequate reflection and assessment are necessary for successful service learning programs. At the individual student level, reflection refers to the thinking processes that convert service experiences into productive learning experiences. Reflection is necessary for connecting service projects to learning outcomes (a practice that is often underdeveloped, as critics are quick to point out); it uses creative and critical thinking skills to help prepare for, succeed in, and learn from service experiences while examining the larger picture and context in which service occurs (Toole and Toole 1995: 100-101). Educators recommend that students actively reflect on their thoughts and

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experiences before, during and after service (Toole and Toole 1995: 106-107). For instance, critical incident journals allow students to describe, analyze, and reflect on experiences in the field (Cooper 1998: 49). Many scholars suggest that reflection should not only occur alone, but also with classmates, faculty, and community partners (Eyler 2001). At the institutional level, assessing service learning must measure its impact and effectiveness in serving the educational mission of the institution. Notably, an assessment that focuses only on students will not capture essential data related to the impacts of service learning on faculty, community partners, and the institution. For service learning to be sustainable, all actors must see the benefits of shared efforts (Holland 2001: 53).

CHALLENGES

Although service and high-impact learning strategies offer opportunities for effective HRE, educators must face a variety of challenges associated with teaching the subject of international human rights. Inherent obstacles for HRE models that emphasize the ideal of global citizenship, for example, relate to issues of identity and nationalism. In the West, education is closely linked to citizenship and national identity formation; educators often lack the full vocabulary and images necessary for teaching world mindedness (Richardson 2008: 57-58). Mainstream political philosophers in the English-speaking world have only begun to question the assumption that justice and responsibility apply only within bounded political communities during the last twenty years (Kahane 2009: 50). John Willinsky (1998) warns that the West's comprehension of the world is directly tied to conquest, and that educators must uncover the global prejudices perpetuated in the classroom. He argues that teachers owe their students some account, if always partial, of what they are taught about the world. The ethics of this "educational accountability" require us to examine what schooling has underwritten and who it has denied in the process (16). Willinsky (1998) writes:

Imperialism afforded lessons in how to divide the world. It taught people to read the exotic, primitive, and timeless identity of the other, whether in skin color, hair texture, or the inflections of taste and tongue. Its themes of conquering, civilizing, converting, collecting, and classifying inspired educational metaphors equally concerned with taking possession of the world – metaphors that we now have to give an account of, beginning with our own education (13).

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Some scholars argue that it isn't enough to simply know what is happening in other countries, or how we are connected to other communities; students need to be conscious of how the "global village" fits in making sense of their own lives, including the fundamental belief systems that govern thoughts and actions.³ Graham Pike (2008) argues that this requires revisions of historical "legends" (such as confronting colonialism, racism, and sexism) and representing a more inclusive spectrum of the world's population (225-226). The role of global educators is to "help weave the fabric of a new legend," which requires a spread of global consciousness that promotes an ethos of global citizenship and responsibility (Pike 2008: 226-227). The "architecture" of educational systems makes it difficult to identify the roots of world mindedness, however, much less recognize any sort of superstructure that represents visible aspects of global citizenship. George Richardson (2008) writes that contemporary geopolitical context and forces of nationalism further obstruct calls for a broadened world community. Developing a global imagination that provides students with a "deeper structure of identification with the world as a geopolitical whole" is a daunting task (Richardson 2008: 57-59). "We need to see how citizenship has been continually read through the nation, but we also need to see the emergence of a global civic imagination on the part of young people," Richardson (2008) explains. "In the context of educating for global citizenship, the persistence of nation is much more than a problem to overcome; it is a presence to be acknowledged" (62).

To accomplish this task, HRE teaching models are usually interdisciplinary and internationalized and stress the value of collaboration and exchange. The tie that binds various HRE courses and experiences together is the "human rights ethos" that fosters respect for human rights and dedication to their protection. This ethos transcends boundaries to encompass scholarship and activism occurring at various levels; it is not based in any particular academic discipline or national identity. Human rights educators must intellectually examine human rights issues and themes, identify models of human rights activism to emulate, urge action in accordance with human rights principles, provide opportunities for action, and create a classroom environment and institutional culture grounded in rights-protective principles (Flowers and Shiman 1997: 161-162). Internationalized curriculums must reflect a plurality of knowledge that draws from various sources and engages students in different ways; this HRE approach "requires that we extend our actions far beyond concerns of course content to include pedagogies that promote cross-cultural understanding and facilitate the development of knowledge [that enables students] to successfully engage with others in an increasingly interconnected and dependent world" (Van Gyn et al. 2009: 26-27).

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Unfortunately, the ideals of HRE are sometimes at odds with traditional approaches to undergraduate education that stress neutrality and objectivity. In this profession prone to disciplinary specialization, teaching and activism are often viewed as separate and distinct activities. “Open support of human rights threatens to transgress the glass wall that maintains the separation of activities outside the classroom from views expressed in the classroom,” writes Rita Maran (1997). “Although the basic tenets of human rights are unconnected to any political strain, the concern is that an instructor who is visibly supportive of human rights will be identified with particular political factions” (195). This paradox impacts HRE lessons centered on past and present human rights issues. Human rights discussions of the Holocaust as well as current events in Israel-Palestine, for instance, are often controversial. Scholars debate the value of teaching students about the Holocaust, raising the question of whether historical accounts of genocide actually sensitize us to oppression and provide tools for prevention of future crimes. Some scholars, such as Peter Novick (2000), contend that Holocaust education in the United States may promote evasion of moral and historical responsibility by positing genocide as a crime that happens in far-away places, or by limiting serious/worthwhile human rights abuses as only those atrocities on a scale similar to the Holocaust (15). Discussions of current human rights issues in Israel and Palestine often erode into nationalistic, politically-charged arguments about religious identity and land rights; many student opinions are fueled by incorrect and biased online news sources, or they are unwilling to share potentially unpopular views in class because of the highly politicized nature of the conflict. Academic discussion of international human rights is fraught with challenges to objectivity, and educators dedicated to HRE may find themselves walking a dangerous line between perceived activism and teaching.

Advocates of approaches such as service learning must face additional challenges within academia – possibly even from colleagues at one’s own institution – because these practices are incongruent with traditional pedagogies in several important ways. For instance, service learning and traditional teaching methodologies face a conflict of goals; service learning’s goal of advancing students’ sense of social responsibility conflicts with the individualistic self-orientation of traditional classrooms. This “conflict about control” highlights that, while classes have a high degree of faculty direction, service learning is much more student-driven (Howard 1998: 23-24). Jeffrey Howard (1998) writes that a new synergistic educational model is necessary to resolve these tensions, constituting a re-conceptualization of the teaching-learning process. This pedagogical model must encourage social responsibility, value and integrate both academic and experiential learning, accommodate high and low levels of structure and direction,

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embrace the active and participatory student, and welcome both subjective and objective ways of knowing (Howard 1998: 25). This approach will help service learning advocates respond to a wide range of objections, ranging from “We’re not here to teach morality or social justice!” to “Service is volunteerism. We’re lowering our standards to give academic credit for service” (O’Byrne 2001). Responding to such challenges is particularly important for developing a critical mass of faculty who support and promote the use of service learning, thereby helping to institutionalize this practice within higher education (Furco 2001: 69).

High-impact learning approaches come with their own specific challenges, often requiring educators to consider the ethical implications of their teaching strategies. Although study abroad travel offers opportunities for effective HRE, for instance, even the most well-intentioned trips may result in negative consequences for vulnerable populations that students encounter along the way. “Slum tours” of impoverished neighborhoods of cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Mumbai are sometimes promoted as ways to increase social awareness of poverty and to help local economies. Critics, however, contend that “slum tourism turns poverty into entertainment” and that few tourists, no matter how well-intentioned, will be able to adequately understand the issues of poverty as a result of their experiences (Odede 2010). Similarly, “study tours” that target specific human rights issues – such as human trafficking in northern Thailand – sometimes result in the further oppression and dehumanization of vulnerable populations, with local communities receiving little to no tour profits in the process. Educators have an ethical obligation to consider the impacts of all HRE study trip activities, research the practices and reputations of any tour companies and potential partners, and take steps necessary to ensure that local communities are respected, consulted, and protected from harm. Many universities adopt codes of conduct to help guide study abroad experiences (see Forum on Education Abroad 2011), although these codes are often vague and rarely framed for human rights-specific travel. Lee University, for example, outlines criteria for creating relationships with host societies that include “a commitment to creating sustainable local relationships that are mutually beneficial” and “sensitivity to and respect for differences between local cultural norms and those of the home culture” (Lee University). Although HRE trips should not be equated with simple tourism, the 2002 Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations provides educators with guidelines in its definition of “responsible tourism.” The Declaration defined responsible tourism as travel which:

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- minimizes negative economic, environmental and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well being of host communities;
- improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, embracing diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people;
- is culturally sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence (City of Cape Town: 1).

The challenges associated with HRE are vast – including issues of identity and nationalism, Western biases in education systems, unwillingness to undertake new teaching strategies such as service learning, and ethical concerns related to high-impact practices such as study tours. Although these obstacles present specific difficulties for human rights educators, they are not insurmountable; they require dedication to educational goals and learning outcomes, as well as careful attention to best practices and ethical responsibilities. As the final section highlights, these opportunities for HRE provide us with a starting point for future educational possibilities.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Growing support for HRE over the last twenty years has provided educators with a solid foundation for effectively integrating international human rights into undergraduate curricula, and a variety of future possibilities exist for enhanced and widespread HRE learning. As students and educators alike become more familiar with human rights norms and issues, HRE practices must become more robust and complex. In particular, students should be encouraged to think more critically about values and actions that we take for granted. Understandings of human development and dignity, conceptions of responsibility, best practices for human rights protection, and even the universality of human rights are issues that warrant further discussion and debate at the university level.

The Capabilities Approach is an approach to human development that provides a potential starting point for these critical HRE discussions. The Capabilities Approach is defined as “an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice” that centers on the key question: What is each person

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about to do and be? This approach “takes each person as an end” and focuses on choice and freedom (Nussbaum 2011: 18). It rejects using indicators such as GDP as measures of quality of life, since economic growth does not automatically improve quality of life in important areas such as health and education, and instead centers on building central capabilities necessary for a life of human dignity (Nussbaum 2011: 47-48). These central capabilities include bodily health and integrity; having the education and freedom of expression necessary for using one’s senses, thinking, reasoning, and imagining; and having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation necessary to be treated in a dignified way (Nussbaum 2011: 33-34). Central to this approach is freedom of choice; “we should not ignore the fact that people’s choices differ, and that respect for people requires respecting the areas of freedom around them within which they make these choices” (Nussbaum 2011: 107).

The Capabilities Approach provides possibilities for HRE in several significant ways. First, it encourages world mindedness by stressing duties that require action by the world community. A prominent idea of rights, especially in U.S. political and legal tradition, is that rights are secured if states simply keep their “hands off”. The Capabilities Approach, however, insists that states have an obligation to *do something* when rights are violated and human dignity is not respected (Nussbaum 2011: 65). This approach provides students with a new way of thinking about their own governments, as well as their roles as citizens. Second, the Capabilities Approach addresses the historical legends that reinforce social injustice, even within educational systems. The approach stresses that richer countries have responsibilities to assist the efforts of poor nations, especially since many problems are linked to colonial exploitation and structural inequalities in the world economy. Students are asked to re-assess their individual choices and impacts, and to critically consider how their decisions affect people in other parts of the world. ‘The simplest consumer purchase – for example, that of a soft drink or a pair of jeans – affects lives on the other side of the world’ (Nussbaum 2011: 116). Third, the Capabilities Approach expands students’ conceptions of human rights – which often center on civil and political rights – to more fully address social, economic, and cultural rights. Not only does this approach focus on building on capabilities, free choice, and human dignity, but it also acknowledges that income and wealth are not good enough proxies for what people can do and be (Nussbaum 2011: 57). Fourth, it helps students move beyond the rather ethnocentric notion of “saving” people in the developing world to embrace ideals of mutual respect, partnership, and cooperation. Development programs and human rights agencies, despite their good intentions, should not infantilize the people they aim to serve. “There’s a great difference between a public policy that aims to take care of people and a public policy that aims to honor choice. [A nutrition policy, for

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example,] that just doles out food to people rather than giving them choice in matters of nutrition is insufficiently respectful” (Nussbaum 2011: 56). This approach encourages students to think about the long-term goals of human rights protection and how their actions can impact, both positively and negatively, vulnerable populations.

Discussions of international human rights should not neglect responsibility and problems at home; students should be made aware of the human rights issues that directly touch their lives and prompted to engage in solution-seeking. In the words of Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient: “Before we do for the world, it's easier to do for the neighborhood” (Yunus 2010). One way to accomplish this goal is for universities to reflect on their own practices by assessing the availability of fair wages for adjunct professors and staff members, fair trade merchandise for sale in university bookstores, and organic and fair trade food in the dining halls, as well as by considering the university's overall impact on local communities. Some universities have focused their attention on social justice issues, even if they aren't always tied to human rights specifically; Syracuse University's “Scholarship in Action” initiative attempts to connect its campus with Syracuse's urban community and help forge local partnerships to promote opportunity, democratic decision-making, and knowledge exchange (Syracuse University), for instance. The national United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) advocates for the rights of campus workers and garment workers who make collegiate licensed clothing, sparking student activism on college campuses across the United States and convincing many universities to make their school merchandise and bookstores sweatshop-free (United Students Against Sweatshops). The Minneapolis-based NGO The Advocates for Human Rights extends this HRE approach to a wide range of communities; its “Discover Human Rights” training series provides concrete steps for using the “standards, principles, and methods of human rights to combat entrenched poverty, discrimination, and injustice” in local communities, including workplaces. Participants create an action plan for incorporating human rights in their work, using a variety of organizational tools as well as their own experiences (The Advocates for Human Rights). Feminist scholars and activists highlight intersections between the feminist movement and human rights, noting that abuses occurring within the “private sphere” of family life gain new urgency when framed as human rights concerns. These women's rights issues include freedom of movement, the right to work outside the home, bodily integrity, and freedom from violence (Okin 1998). At the university level, respect for human rights should ultimately translate into identifiable action both within the campus community and beyond. Students are often eager to take on initiatives to make these positive changes a reality, and linking local social justice issues to broader human rights issues help

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undergraduates identify the role of rights in their own lives. Such activism is just one way that classroom learning about human rights can translate into concrete action and enhanced HRE (Author 2012).

Lastly, HRE must include critical analysis of the normative assumptions that underpin international human rights frameworks and action. Serious attention to criticisms of human rights – including charges of cultural imperialism and the negative consequences of NGOs – are often not adequately addressed in college classrooms. Although HRE educators are understandably sympathetic to the ideals of human rights, it is nonetheless necessary that students are aware of criticisms and possible shortcomings of human rights standards and initiatives. Although some of these issues – ranging from human rights’ potential clashes with democracy and “Asian values” to problems related to market redistribution and national security (see Donnelly 2013) – are increasingly highlighted in university texts, educators must make a conscious effort to question the assumptions and ideals that many HRE scholars simply take for granted. This includes the universality of human rights and their fit (or lack of fit) within non-Western cultural traditions. Students should also consider the potential negative consequences of even well-intentioned human rights work, such as actions by the United Nations, government agencies, and NGOs. By critically considering both the successes and failures of human rights work, students are better equipped to seek positive solutions in the future and engage in responsible, long-term activism and scholarship.

HRE has grown tremendously since the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights called for the subject of international human rights to be incorporated into programs of study (World Conference on Human Rights 1993: 11, para 33). Many schools and universities now include HRE in their curricula and emphasize the corresponding values of global citizenship and social responsibility. Educators continue to expand opportunities for enhanced HRE, including high-impact learning strategies (such as community partnerships and short-term study abroad trips) and service learning. Advocates of HRE often face challenges – including issues of identity and nationalism, the impacts of biased historical “legends,” incongruities with traditional approaches to undergraduate education, and specific ethical challenges associated with teaching strategies such as human rights-focused travel – yet these obstacles are not insurmountable. These challenges require dedication to HRE goals and careful attention to best practices and ethical responsibilities, and educators should keep these issues in mind when considering future possibilities for HRE. Critical consideration of the practices and norms that underpin the international human rights regime will further enhance undergraduate HRE and help prepare future activists and scholars for their important work. Further discussion, collaboration,

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and creativity are both necessary and welcomed by advocates of human rights education.

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Endnotes

¹ Some universities have adopted “global citizenship” models on a broad scale. Webster University recently replaced its general education program with a “Global Citizenship Program” that requires undergraduates to learn about required categories such as roots of culture, social systems and human behavior, and global understanding (Webster University).

² Only some of the examples outlined in this section are self-identified as HRE by their organizers/educators. For the purposes of this article, a practice or approach must directly relate to the principles outlined by international human rights frameworks – particularly the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights – to be considered an example of HRE.

³ Some scholars argue that the normative assumptions and cultural biases inherent to international human rights standards must also be questioned. Makau Mutua, for instance, contends that human rights corpus – while well-intentioned – is a Eurocentric construct for reconstituting non-Western societies and peoples according to a set of culturally-biased norms and practices. Mutua argues that the human rights movement must move away from being a “civilizing” crusade and instead approach human rights from a multicultural perspective that better incorporates indigenous and non-Western traditions (Mutua 2008).

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