

Cultural Globalism and Curriculum Design in the 21st Century: The Florida A&M University College of Law Experience

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Introduction

This paper discusses the importance of process of internationalization and culturalization of university curriculum in historically black universities and colleges (HBCU's), particularly Florida A&M University and its College of Law. It essentially argues that universities that mainstream, fuse or provide substantively holistic international and cultural components to their educational curriculum produce more globally orientated, culturally competent and successful graduates.

The role of the HBCU, particularly Florida A&M University (FAMU), in global affairs is above all things significant given its history. On October 3, 1887, twenty-four years after the legal abolishment of American slavery, FAMU was founded as the State Normal College for Colored Students. From its inception until the interdiction of Jim Crow segregation in 1965, HBCU's like FAMU assumed the responsibility of providing excellent educational opportunities and training to successive generations of African-Americans and other American minorities seeking to obtain a high quality education in nearly every discipline while simultaneously inculcating in them a sense of social justice and service to traditionally underserved communities. The College of Law unfortunately shares a similar history of systematic discrimination and was literally birthed out of pervasive ad institutional racism in Florida. After an African-American man was denied admission to the University of Florida (UF) on the basis of his race, rather than advocate for his entry the State of Florida through the Florida Board of Control, applied the now famous "separate but equal" doctrine and opted to open an entirely new law school than racially integrate UF. On December 21, 1949, a division of law was established at the then Florida A&M College, and the first class was admitted in 1951. After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" law in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954, in 1966 the Florida Board of Control (later known as the Board of Regents) suddenly withdrew its permission for the institution to admit law students, and two years later, the law school graduated its last class and closed down. Between 1954 and 1968, the law school graduated 57 students – men and women that have made significant contributions to the legal profession within the state, nation and world. Nearly thirty-two years later and after decades of advocacy, the 2000 Florida Legislature unanimously passed legislation reestablishing the Florida A&M University. The College of Law's first class was admitted in Fall 2002 and graduated in Spring 2005.

Despite its deprived legacy, today, FAMU graduates more African-American baccalaureates than any other university in the nation, and is a national leader in producing African-American Ph.D.'s in physics and J.D's in law. It is also a recognized leader in research and training in architecture, business, computer information sciences, journalism, pharmaceutical sciences, physical therapy, psychology, public health, sociology, and boasts leading programs in law, particularly in international law and clinical legal education.

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Naturally, as a result of its unique history, FAMU developed an institutional cultural of racial and social justice, which has evolved to embrace innovations in its curriculum including mandatory courses in African-American history and literature at the undergraduate level, and today the university is in the process of mainstreaming globalism throughout its curriculum. For its part, the College of Law has developed a robust international program inclusive of a Center for International Law and Justice (CILJ) and hearty international law curriculum. This includes an expansive international law internship program that sends dozens of students around the world each summer to gain experiential opportunities in governments, transnational corporations, international institutions and the non-for-profit sector.

Our international curriculum was heavily impacted by the robust way in which globalization impacts our economy and workforce as well as the daily lives of African-Americans, blacks in the Diaspora and minorities generally. Given the interdependent world in which we live, globalization affects and is affected by African-American life in every conceivable way. Whether it is the prominent role African-Americans play in, for example, every arm of the U.S. government, research think tanks, science and industry, academia or religious institutions, or the globalization of African-American culture through the modicum of sports and entertainment, Black Americans are global citizens. African-Americans are also a global leader in the consumption of foreign goods and services and play a central role in the global economy boasting a purchasing power estimated to break 1 trillion in 2012, which exceeds the gross domestic product of one-fourth of the nations in the world.

This is precisely why a globally-centered education is critical in nearly every field and discipline. FAMU College of Law's global philosophy is that students must be equipped with the knowledge, consciousness and training to compete globally. And, while we purport to have a global mission, internationalization necessitated efforts to globalize our mission and institutional consciousness. Since, as Joseph Heller noted, "[p]rocrastination is the thief of time;" similar to the main campus, the College of Law faculty decided to embolden our curriculum to ensure that we are providing a historically and culturally competent, freedom-minded and empowerment orientated institutional identity to students. Consequently, last year, it adopting two mandatory mission-related courses—Race in the Law and Public International Law—with the hope of adding additional courses such as Environmental Justice in the future. At least one of these courses must be taken by each FAMU College of Law student prior to graduation. The purpose of our mission related courses is to highlight the unique legal and socio-political experiences of African-Americans and people of African descent generally in domestic and international fora; from the internationalization of domestic issues to the domestication of international issues and their intersection with historical processes such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Enslavement or Slavery, Freedom Movements, Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and Globalization. This globally orientated culturistic approach, which I for convenience refer to as cultural globalism is vital to our institutional identity and existence, particularly embracing cultural and heritage-based perspective antithetical to the status quo. Cultural globalism intertwines unconventional and conventional educational formulations, and should adopted or replicated by academic institutions in the developing world still struggling for intellectual identify outside of the postcolonial construct.

The cultural-globalization of the curriculum necessitates that senior leadership make hard choices about its past, present and future legacy, and whether it wishes to remain philosophically parochial. Stated otherwise, if institutions seeking to evolve their curriculum desire to be a global leader in higher education then the worn paths of accepted success are inadequate roadmaps for future success. As Sun Tzu correctly stated, the "...quality of decision is like the well-timed swoop of a falcon which enables it to strike and destroy its victim." (Chinese General and Author, b. 500 BC). From this background, the falcon is the symbol for a strategic global vision of leadership and excellence that

holistically culturalizes and globalizes the curriculum; whereas, its victim's represent mediocrity, institutional malfeasance and close-mindedness. In the FAMU context, the central aim of cultural globalism is to nurture a new generation of internationalists committed to expanding the global imprint of African-Americans and others with unorthodox approaches to advancing humanity. As Martin Luther King, Jr. noted, "The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists who are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood." (Martin Luther King, Jr., "Strength to Love" – 1929-1968).