

# Growing a Vietnamese Studies Program

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In 1995 Hobart and William Smith Colleges affiliated with the Vietnam National University in Hanoi and launched its full-term study-abroad program in Vietnam. In 1999, after having fielded three full academic-term programs in Vietnam, Hobart and William Smith formed the Partnership for Global Education (PGE) with Union College (UC). Since its formation, this partnership has annually sponsored the Vietnam study-abroad programs and is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The study-abroad program is at the center of students learning about Vietnam; students take a gateway course on the Sociology of Vietnam and a three week language intensive course prior to arriving on-site.

The Sociology of Vietnam course honors the multi-dimensional complexity of Vietnam. It starts with the history of Vietnam, concentrating thematically on the waves of foreign invasions that have been the Vietnamese experience. The course shifts to looking at Vietnamese cultural

patterns, patterns created during long occupations by the Chinese and later the French. Students learn about Tet and other celebrations and festivals, water puppetry, religion, Vietnamese gender and family patterns, differences between rural and urban life, regional differences, politics and economics, art and music, and the multiplicity of ethnic groups each with unique cultural patterns. The course turns to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnamese struggles and victories against French colonialism and the American War, concentrating on the Vietnamese experience of the war, and concludes by looking at Vietnam since 1975, including the disastrous occupation of Cambodia, the embracing of the market

economy, the problems of corruption, and the trajectory of Vietnam's future internal and external relationships. The course is supported by a rich BlackBoard site that contains historical and cultural materials, as well as contemporary articles on Vietnam. Our Vietnamese exchange scholars and exchange students provide real-life experiences and help with conversational Vietnamese.

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Thus, students going on the study-abroad program become recognizers of social and cultural patterns and can place locations and events in historical and political contexts. However, the course also provides a

context for students to ask their own questions and arrive at different conclusions than the instructor. The pedagogy is straightforward: an enthusiasm for the subject and the country, combined with a sense of inquiry that places Vietnam in a relevant relation to contemporary issues. For example, the course starts with the following propositions:

Why study Vietnam?

1. Vietnam is an ancient and sophisticated society and culture;
2. Vietnam is the 12th most populous nation in the world, with over 80 million people;

3. Vietnam has been historically important geographically, at the crossroads of many other cultures. It is again important geographically and politically because of its location in southeast Asia, especially its proximity to China;
4. Vietnam will expand its importance as a global trading partner based on its rich natural and human resources;
5. Americans should study Vietnam to better understand our involvement in a failed war;
6. Vietnam bridges east and west given its almost 100 years of French influence;
7. Vietnam remains Communist-led, providing an opportunity to see the tensions between communism and the market-economy.
8. The effects of the global economy in Vietnam are much more apparent than in the United States.

The course is not exclusively for students who are going to study abroad in Vietnam. The Sociology of Vietnam course is part of a larger Colleges-wide effort to internationalize the campus, to engage students in the worlds of other societies and their cultures, and to immerse students as participants and not simply visitors and consumers when they are abroad. With support from a Mellon grant, and later a US Department of Education Title VI grant, there has been considerable faculty development and the dramatic expansion of our library holdings. As part of our faculty development efforts, we now have a faculty member steering group for Vietnam studies and a number of faculty have modified their courses (such as *Current Issues in Macroeconomics*, *What is Christianity*, *The Good City*, and *The Politics of Development*) to include Vietnam-related content. A student interested in Vietnam may choose such courses as *Sociology of Vietnam*; *Male*

(continued on next page)

and *Female in East Asian Societies and Cultures*; *Vietnamese Literature in Translation*; *Buddhism*; *Feudal Women in France, Vietnam, and Japan* or *The War in Vietnam*. To support the program and to reach more students, the faculty has developed a web-based product called *IN FOCUS: Vietnam* that highlights 15 mini-lectures on various topics related to Vietnam history and culture. In addition to preparing students for their trip to Vietnam, this course will have the benefit of preparing the students' parents for their children's trip as well.

The design of the Vietnam program is to provide an integrative learning experience, one that has pre- and post-study-abroad experiences. Students do not simply parachute into a society unprepared, and students return home with the expectation that they will, among other things, have opportunities to share their knowledge with students in the public schools, write for a journal, and continue course work, including self-instructional language study. Because of this we arrange activities to coordinate with the courses including seminars, symposia, guest speakers, musical events, art shows, and films, and have over the past several years hosted exchange students and faculty from Vietnam with support from ASIANetwork and The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.

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While in Vietnam (on the study-abroad program), students attend presentations provided by Vietnam National University faculty and specialists in respective fields of the arts, and participate in field trips (to Hanoi-Halong Bay, the border region near China, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Danang, and Hoi An) organized by the HWS faculty director of the program. Students learn about Vietnamese history, aspects of Vietnamese culture, and current social and political issues, as well as continue their Vietnamese language instruction. In addition, students take a course taught by the HWS faculty director, in the director's field of expertise, and design and

implement an independent field project or complete an internship. Independent projects are diverse and range from studying Vietnamese traditional medicine (with the student attending a course at the leading traditional medicine school, accompanied by a translator, and visiting several traditional medicine practitioners) to working as an intern at the American Embassy in the Foreign and Commercial Services area, to studying Vietnamese street children and the social service and educational resources available to them. Several students join the BRIDGE project which creates query-based lessons on Vietnamese topics for several classes in the Geneva elementary schools.

We continue to build lasting relationships with Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese academics and experts in a multitude of disciplines, as well as artists, musicians, and numerous families, from north to south in Vietnam and also in the United States. We also have committed to effective relationships with several Vietnamese organizations that provide student and faculty support and opportunities for study and internships while abroad. This web of relationships enlivens and enriches our students' and faculty's experience and understanding of Vietnam on campus and when abroad and brings Vietnam home.

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## Sample Course Syllabus

# The Sociology of Vietnam: Conflict, Colonialism, and Catharsis

### Description

In this course we explore the social world of Vietnam. We will study the varied and complex history, culture and social relations of Vietnam. Through our study of their institutions, arts, and artifacts, we will find ourselves immersed in the life world of Vietnam, and are likely to achieve a fuller appreciation of the modes and meanings of what it means to be Vietnamese, and what it means to be American.

We examine the many forces of social relations that impinge on Vietnamese life. This includes geography and geographic location, social institutions such as kinship, village, religion, economy, education, and arts, tribal and ethnic history and the continued influence of ethnic groups, and the diversity of its urban and rural regions. In addition, we examine Vietnam's legacy of conflict and colonialism, including the American/Vietnam war and its human social, political and environmental effects on the nation.

Finally, we explore how the Vietnamese are negotiating and seeking to reconcile and resolve the contradictions of socialist and capitalist theory and practice, as they seek to improve the

lives of its people, and position themselves as a significant Southeast Asian political and economic force.

### Course Objectives

- (1) Develop a sophisticated sociological imagination as students engage in study of a dissimilar culture;
- (2) Learn to appreciate societal, cultural and sub-cultural diversity and an interest in things and ways of life that are "different," acquiring the intellectual tools to understand these other ways of life;
- (3) Learn how their own national and social location influence their assumptions and how they view the world;
- (4) Become sensitive to issues of personal and social development, the distribution of power and rewards and how the quality of social relationships is a matter of concern everywhere;
- (5) Become aware of how "modernity" has affected societies all over the world and how the peoples of the world are becoming increasingly interdependent;
- (6) Become aware of the transformative power of sociological consciousness and their role as world citizens and seek to arrive

at an understanding of social groups as well as explore social problems and social-justice concerns;

(7) Become more sophisticated as observers, readers, and writers.

(8) Come to understand that ethics and morality require a careful and deliberate analysis in heterogeneous, multi-cultural societies and cross-cultural relationships.

### Methods of Evaluation

Your work will include 3 short (5 page) papers (60%) and a fourth and final (10 page) paper (40%) and active participation in film discussions, guest lectures, and seminars, and positive contributions to class discussion about readings.

### Reading List

Ashwill and Diep, *Vietnam Today*

Borton, *After Sorrow*

Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*

Duong Thu Huong, *Paradise of the Blind*

Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*

Halberstam, *The Making of A Quagmire*

Kolko, *Anatomy of a Peace*

SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*

Templer, *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam*

The Gioi, *The Traditional Village in Vietnam*

### Course Outline:

#### 1. History and Cultural Patterns

Readings:

Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, Chapter 1

SarDesai, *Vietnam...*, Chapters 1, 2

Duiker, *Sacred War...*, Chapters 1-4

#### 2. Organization & Structure: Tradition and Modernity

Readings:

Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, Chapters 2-4

The Gioi, *The Traditional Village in Vietnam*

#### 3. The American War & Its Aftermath

Readings:

SarDesai, *Vietnam...*, Chapters 5, 6

Duiker, *Sacred War...*, Chapters 3-7, Epilogue

Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*

Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, Chapters 5-7

Borton, *After Sorrow*

#### 4. Contemporary Assessments: Is Vietnam on the Right Path?

Readings:

Duong, *Paradise of the Blind*

SarDesai, *Vietnam...*, Chapters 7-10

Kolko, *Anatomy of a Peace*

Templer, *Shadows and Wind*

Ashwill and Diep, *Vietnam Today*

#### Paper Topics:

Paper One: "Distinctive Aspects of Vietnamese History"

Paper Two: "Distinguishing Elements of Vietnamese Culture"

Paper Three: "The American War: An Interpretation"

Paper Four: "The Future of Vietnam & the Vietnamese"

(*North Korean Nuclear Endgame, continued from page 27*)

potential nuclear arms race and potential mass displacement of its citizenry. Resolution of current tensions hinges on greater understanding of the regime's endgame, which begins with recognition of its survival imperatives, intent and perceptual framework.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The North Korean regime has sold missile technology to Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Iran and United Arab Emirates. It has also imported missile technology from Pakistan and Iran.

<sup>2</sup>North Korea's nuclear weapons program is comprised of two components. First, is the nuclear payload, which is derived from plutonium produced as a by-product of nuclear reactors or uranium extracted from mines. Second, is the means for delivering a nuclear payload—ballistic missiles. Consequently, for purposes of this discussion, the term "nuclear weapons" assumes the presence of both components unless otherwise stipulated.

<sup>3</sup>The lack of self-determination in Korea actually can actually be traced back as far as the Koryo Dynasty (935-1392), but space constraints do not permit fuller treatment of the topic.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques L Fuqua, Jr. *Weapons of Mass Destruction or Weapons of Mass Disruption: The North Korean Nuclear Endgame*. (Westport Connecticut: Greenview Publishing, forthcoming), p.24.

<sup>5</sup>Fuqua, p.24.

<sup>6</sup>The irony here is that each of the nations participating in the Six Party Talks, with the exception of South Korea, has historically been and continues to be regarded as a big power in the North Korean view, against which it must protect itself from chauvinistic influence. Such a world view offers at least some explanation as to the regime's inconsistent and unpredictable behavior within the Six Party Talks venue.

<sup>7</sup>United Nations World Food Program, *INTERFAIS. Food Aid Monitor Annual Report (2005)*. Table 15. Retrieved June 2006. URL: <http://www.wfp.org/interfais/index2.html>

<sup>8</sup>Gorbachev's reforms consisted of three components: 1) *perestroika*, which included economic reforms and restructuring; 2) *glasnost*, or openness, which translated into transparency of management practices with regard to the economy; and 3) *novoe myshlenie* or "New Thinking" with respect to Soviet foreign policy pursuits.

<sup>9</sup>Samuel S. Kim, "North Korea in 1994: Brinkmanship, Breakdown and

Breakthrough," *Asian Survey* 35:1 (January, 1995): 21.

<sup>10</sup>Rhee Sang-woo, "North Korea in 1991: Struggle to Save Chuche Amid Signs of Change," *Asian Survey* 32:1 (January, 1992): 59.

<sup>11</sup>North Korea also signed the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula with South Korea in 1991. The Declaration called for bilateral inspections to verify the denuclearization of the peninsula.

<sup>12</sup>Graphite-moderated reactors produce weapons-grade plutonium as a by-product. It is much more difficult for LWR to produce weapons grade plutonium because they use ordinary water as a moderator.

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