Mapping the World of Psychology Course by Course

A review of

Internationalizing the Psychology Curriculum in the United States

by Frederick T. L. Leong, Wade E. Pickren, Mark M. Leach, and Anthony J. Marsella (Eds.)


Reviewed by

Gloria Grenwald

Years ago, mapmakers in the United States represented North America as larger than it should be and placed it in the center of world maps. Within the last several decades, mapmakers corrected the distortions. Similarly, the book Internationalizing the Psychology Curriculum in the United States puts psychology into an accurate global perspective. It will appeal to psychologists who want to expand their views of traditional psychology to be more inclusive, contextual, and global.

Western culture has often been the lens through which the psychology curriculum of the last century was understood. It was taught as a universal psychology. The book’s editors believe a more accurate view is to frame Western psychology as the indigenous psychology...
that it is and challenge psychologists to shift the focus from a single-culture perspective. Western psychology is not excised but rather is contextualized.

This book is geared toward the psychology curriculum rather than broader topics such as foreign language learning or study abroad. The editors, Frederick T. L. Leong, Wade E. Pickren, Mark M. Leach, and Anthony J. Marsella, have organized the book with each chapter focusing on a distinct area of psychology, including history of psychology, professional ethics, developmental psychology, social psychology, personality, testing and assessment, women and gender, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, organizational psychology, health psychology, and peace psychology. The 13 chapters are book-ended by introductory and final chapters by the editors.

It took the editors 10 years to put this book together. The effort began with an invited lecture series on internationalizing specialty areas of the psychology curriculum at the 2001 American Psychological Association Annual Convention. Contributors were chosen on the basis of their globally recognized expertise.

Several themes run through the book. First, the context of psychology in the United States is examined and illuminated with respect to the broader world. In the chapter on ethics, Mark Leach and Janel Gauthier explain that codes of conduct reflect values of the culture in which they were developed.

In contrast to standards in other countries, the American Psychological Association’s (2010) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct concentrates mostly on enforceable conduct codes rather than on guidelines for ethical decision making. When there are codes of ethics available in other countries, professionals should become familiar with them. Ultimately, the authors suggest that psychologists working in culturally diverse settings need to be anchored to the most universally applicable ethical guide, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

Second, the validity of psychological theories and the meaning of research findings in a global context are considered. In the chapter on personality, Juris Draguns questions the validity and generalizability of theory and research findings that are most familiar to psychologists in the United States when applied to people in other parts of the world. In fact, personality is so context sensitive that “personality psychology should have been an international and intercultural endeavor from the very start” (p. 95).

Draguns presents examples of how cultural variations fundamentally alter what may be thought of as personality. Theories based on an individually constructed self are not valid for people in societies that are highly collective. In communal cultures, self and family are not separate identity constructions but rather are intimately interconnected. Even methods used to conduct personality research may not measure equivalently in different cultures, thereby limiting validity and generalizability of research findings.

Regarding the third theme in the book, authors give suggestions for classroom applications and faculty resources. In their chapter on organizational psychology, Ann Marie Ryan and Michele Gelfand offer rich classroom suggestions. For example, they suggest that
instructors should consider adopting textbooks with cross-cultural content and selecting internationally oriented readings as supplements. Ryan and Gelfand advise instructors new to global aspects of their field to devote time and effort to improve their own knowledge base. But they also warn faculty to proceed with caution: “In our experience, there are dangers when the enthusiastic instructor attempts to infuse culture into the curriculum without fully understanding when culture matters” (p. 256), leading to student misunderstanding and cultural stereotyping. The organizational psychology section ends with training and research scenarios for the classroom.

The chapter on health psychology by Frances Aboud provides readings and websites for addressing international issues. For example, such diverse topics as maternal mortality and women’s health, environmental health behavior change, hand-washing, insecticide-treated nets, and child malnutrition and development are included in the resource list.

*Internationalizing the Psychology Curriculum in the United States* is targeted for both undergraduate and graduate psychology educators; however, one need not be in academia to find this book of interest. As the editors note, globalization has changed the world and is here to stay. Many nonacademic psychologists are concerned with transforming a primarily Western psychology into a discipline that better represents the entire world. Many also believe revising the education of psychologists is critical to this transformation.

Overall, this is a fine book. Two other excellent books, *Handbook of International Psychology* (Stevens & Wedding, 2004) and *Toward a Global Psychology: Theory, Research, Intervention and Pedagogy* (Stevens & Gielen, 2006) provide a broader view of international/global psychology. They build a strong foundation for this text.

In conclusion, *Internationalizing the Psychology Curriculum in the United States* is the most detailed and targeted resource for course-by-course internationalization. It is an easy-to-use quick reference, as well as an in-depth examination. Most of the chapters are straightforward and easy to read, even while covering complex topics. The book can serve as an important guide for faculty who wish to update their courses. It creates a more accurate mapping of the world of psychology. We can still find Western psychology on the new map, but it is no more prominent than other approaches to psychology.

References

