Engaging in the global is a mission shared across Honors programs at the Seattle and Tacoma campuses of the University of Washington. Experience and comfort within diverse cultural, political and social contexts are key to student success in an interdependent world. Globally-focused core seminars, globally-engaged faculty research, study abroad opportunities, and local and global service-learning are some of the elements that enrich both programs. While the small, seminar-style classes encourage the classic student-driven Honors learning model, our emphasis is on active student engagement in the local and global community, a shift from the aging elitist notion of Honors education as exclusive or separate from the rest of academic life. The moment is now ours, to find ways to leverage our shared approach and enhance the impact of what we do in Honors for the university at large.

Director of the UW Honors Program Professor Vicky Lawson and I sat down to explore deeper cross-campus connections and find exciting ways to integrate and innovate our curricula across campuses.

“When we talk about Honors education, it is hard not to talk in meta concepts. It is about the practice, not just the credential. It is about developing habits of the mind, about unsettling conventional modes of inquiry and creating new ones, about identifying new ways of engaging students in knowledge-making,” Lawson said.

While innovation thrives on risk-taking, Honors students, ironically, have achieved success by playing it safe for the most part. The high GPA is produced in an academic environment that privileges rules and standards. How do we reimagine Honors education that promotes creativity and non-conformity, oftentimes critical elements in developing new solutions to pressing challenges? Lawson responded, “through supported risk-taking, by encouraging intellectual painting outside the lines, through interdisciplinarity. We should teach medicine through knowledge of poverty, biology through philosophy, we need to stretch intellectually and ask, ‘What do you know and how do you know it?’”

Supported risk-taking in the UW Tacoma Global Honors Program emerges in its interdisciplinarity and its emphasis on experiential learning, whether study abroad or globally-focused internships. It is demonstrated in the classroom through co-teaching models where faculty and community partners work with students to trouble shoot and problem-solve real-life case studies. Experiential learning is also a way to dismantle the legacy meaning of Honors, which is, as Lawson put it, that “the Program is for the best and brightest, for the high achieving in a narrow academic sense. While academic performance and the credential of being an Honors student is important, we give it meaning through our narrative. We make strong connections between academic work, leadership and service. We challenge students to reimagine what a responsible life looks like.”

Tied to this reimagining, is the experience of the global. Understanding the range of experiences that flow between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is critical. Lawson believes that “students (should) destabilize the idea of the global elsewhere. (We should) encourage students to think hard about problematizing the global. They need to think through issues as global citizens, of service as learning. We need to bring in voices from elsewhere. We need to destabilize simple binaries of here and there, and connect lessons elsewhere to here. Study abroad is an essential way to understand the histories that produce the people in our communities.”

The Global Honors Program serves more and more students each year with its double sections and now four-year curriculum. It will be further enriched through collaboration with the UW Honors Program, among the top 50 in the nation. “I am thrilled and excited to explore ways we complement each other. We are good partners and have great staff. We are very outward looking, we are innovators and catalysts, not just for Honors, but for the whole university,” said Lawson.

This is a critical time for us at UW Tacoma, as the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), which runs Global Honors, receives increasing attention as a portal for global learning within the campus and externally. Lawson is a member of the IGE’s newly formed Community Advisory Board comprised of academic, business, and community leaders. We look forward to building momentum and enhancing impact through our rich and growing cross-campus collaboration.

—Divya McMillin
Our brains do some things very well and other things very poorly. Much of this difference in ability is dependent upon brain biochemistry, organization, and evolution. Over the past year, I have developed a syllabus that invites students to think from a neurobiological perspective. The course (TGH 303 Global Challenges) explores these ideas in a way that hopefully translates into employable skills and creative thinking that may lead to the formation of start-up companies. Students were encouraged to brainstorm ideas in controversial areas, such as biodefense, vaccination, and GMO technologies for food or gene editing, using some of the new, science-based critical skills that they acquired in class. To illustrate this further, students need examples and stories of failure and success and this is where the Superheroes of Science come in to the equation, but first I need to explain why I taught the course in the Institute of Global Engagement.

Why Teach this Course in the Institute of Global Engagement (IGE)?

The faculty in the Institute of Global Engagement, which runs the Global Honors (GH) Program, inspire innovation and scholarship and attract top performing students at UWT. Students opt into the program and take on extra course work and community projects while maintaining a high GPA. They are from diverse backgrounds and manage complex personal lives; they are heavily involved in student government and community work. They organize, lead, mentor and exemplify as students. They are the cohort that will be our future leaders in government, military, industry, academia and community. These are the students I wanted to introduce to the technologies and ideas that I had been trained in. Few students at UWT have had any formal exposure to biotechnology education, and until now there have been no biotechnology laboratories on campus. My solution was to bring in the Superheroes Lecture Series to illustrate to the students what is possible with the right tools and training.

What Makes a Superhero?

The first lecture series this fall semester introduced the students to science-based approaches to solving very complex problems, as told by the scientists, researchers, program managers, and inventors that have had early access to advanced technologies and have been part of multidisciplinary research. Thirteen of these Superheroes volunteered to come out to UWT, give a lecture, and meet the students. They came from industry, private companies, government, and national and defense labs. They have worked in countering biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction, in public health, medical diagnostics, environmental monitoring, vaccine development and data communication. The goal was to motivate the students’ inner scientists: to learn, manipulate and integrate so that they can more effectively make leadership decisions on technologies that affect our planet. The Superheroes shared stories of how they have been successful throughout their careers. They shared even more stories of failures and how they learned from those failures to eventually succeed. A larger goal is to solve problems and optimize solutions locally and then scale the solution to solve global problems.

In Dr. Hirschberg’s section of TGH 303 Global Challenges, students learn about extraordinary advances in biotechnology from experts. The course is designed to address major challenges facing the world community in the 21st century.
The Student Perspective: Navigating a Complex World

When first offered the chance to attend the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) 50th Anniversary Conference, I was both excited and confused. I did not understand why I — a junior who had not even completed my first Global Honors assignment — had been chosen to represent our new Global Honors cohort! However, even in my first quarter of discovery and enrichment, I have already learned that abundant opportunities are here for the taking and can lead to life-long friendships and networking opportunities.

While Chicago was a beautiful, vibrant, and diverse city, the experience was far more than just that. Meeting people from all over the country and the world, was truly an eye-opening and enriching experience. Remarkably, even though there was a diverse representation from across the country and globe, there seemed to be shared themes and issues.

First, honors programs that had a foundational basis in community service not only helped their local communities, but provided clear advantages to their students. This approach enriched students’ lives by giving a sense of fulfillment and helping them secure future employment opportunities. Second, some honors programs had well-defined mentor-mentee programs, which enabled them to recruit, and, more importantly, maintain honors enrollment levels. Data showed these programs had higher graduation rates, higher grades, and better immersion within the programs.

Through these shared lessons at NCHC, I realized how our program here at UWT can—and does—make the world seem smaller and thus a little easier to navigate.

—Levi Reinwald

Global Honors’ innovative sophomore gateway, TGH 203 Themes in Global Honors, utilizes the National Collegiate Honors Council’s ‘City as Text’™ experiential learning method to introduce students to aspects of globalization within their home communities. By critically exploring the urban landscape around us and drawing upon the expertise of community speakers, global phenomena that might otherwise be considered abstract or remote are shown to be locally relevant.

Group excursions in Autumn ’15 included ‘global urban patch’ walks around Tacoma’s Theater District and Lincoln International Business District, and guest speakers from the Pierce County Crystal Judson Family Justice Center and Lutheran Community Services Northwest. Connections between academia and professional practice were also enriched by the co-teaching arrangement between Paul Carrington and Kristina Maritczak, Founder and Managing Attorney of Maritczak Legal Group.

In addition to framing global challenges within specific localities, TGH 203 asked students to consider how they are personally connected to the topics under consideration. This innovation, supported by a Curriculum Enhancement Award from the UW Tacoma Center for Leadership & Social Responsibility, entailed a Place-Agency-Cause-Action model of inquiry. By imagining our local urban patch as part of the global whole (place); understanding our personal responsibilities, objectives and leadership strengths as critically engaged citizens (agency); and better knowing the pressing needs that pervade our home communities (cause); we are better positioned to effectuate meaningful change (action). This culminated in Community Engagement Action Plan presentations in which each student proposed sustainable solutions to a global challenge of his or her choice. The results have been inspiring, and our students have proved themselves to be emergent leaders with tremendous potential.

—Paul Carrington
The world is changing, becoming more complex far too quickly for any institution—even one as global and well-resourced as the University of Washington—to fully prepare students for it. The good news is we may not need more, so much as different ways of using what’s already around us. The elements of globalization that are driving the pace and complexity of change are also increasing the opportunities for collaborative solutions.

At UW Tacoma, as one of two gateway courses to the Global Honors (GH) Program, TGH 300: Re-orienting the Global opens up for students new ways of learning and connecting to the world, sooner and deeper than they might have expected. Describing her experience in this class last Fall, GH Senior and ASUWT Director of Finance Bronwyn Clarke said the approach “of starting with your ideas, then refining and substantiating them—was both daunting and electrifying. Being told that my voice matters was an experience I won’t soon forget.”

Co-taught by Divya McMillin, Director of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE) and Global Honors, and Brian Golob, Global General Counsel and CCO of Russell Investments, a global investment firm, the class promotes creative collaboration through three practices: the academia-industry co-teaching partnership, the consultancy-style discussions of guest-speaker-introduced case studies, and a model of inquiry created by McMillin and Golob that urges students to first specify an action or change that would lead to a solution.

Active engagement in the creation of solutions requires students to be imaginative, empirical, and borderless. Students are encouraged to be imaginative by “having a go” as Sir Ken Robinson would put it, by beginning their thinking with a possible action they could take or a change they could make, before they’ve engaged in exhaustive research or deep analysis of the problem. The idea is not to ignore the complexity of the real world, but rather to view it through a lens of possibilities. Research on such hefty topics as food and nutrition, media globalization, finance and economics, health, the environment, and labor mobility and governance for example, has to be empirical, where students should “feel the ground” and demonstrate they understand the potential impact of their proposed action on real people. The borderless element is inevitable to an extent. Globalization challenges borders of all sorts, from geographic borders between nation states, to less tangible but just as real traditional lines between governments and private institutions, profit and non-profit organizations, industries and academic fields. Often this blurring of traditional lines is viewed as a threat, but in the class, students are encouraged to embrace the possibilities they engender. Such opportunities are produced in the classroom through expert speakers on a variety of topics and through a new community engagement program that McMillin and Golob are developing for the IGE, which connects students to internships, externships, and executive-level mentorships, and other modes of experiential learning. Driving these efforts is the belief that divergent thinking—approaching problems from multiple perspectives—is critical to diversity.

—Brian Golob and Divya McMillin