A Conversation with Bill Philip

“Practice Integrity.” Simple. And, “Be honest with people.”

Mr. Bill Philip takes a sip of his favorite chocolate mocha and waits for me to get my black tea to exactly the right level of bitterness. We’re deep in another of our intense and fun conversations about education, our exciting city, and the UW Tacoma Institute for Global Engagement (IGE). People bustle around us, cups clink behind the counter. We’re usually oblivious to the swirl of activity, there’s much to share during these regular check-ins, much for me to learn. This sun-filled morning, I have students in mind as they prepare for the final stretch of the academic year and as we support Global Honors seniors in completing their capstones to present at the May Colloquium.

Over the years I have shared with Mr. Philip developments in the Global Honors Program; I have relied on his advice while building the Institute for Global Engagement for sustained success. He is, after all, William Philip, one of the founders of UW Tacoma, with only the biggest hall on campus named after him. He has led key institutions to great success, retiring as CEO of Columbia Bank in 1999 and continuing his legendary fundraising for his twin passions of health and education, for years beyond.

“The initial vision of the campus was to make higher education possible for place-bound students. We wanted to give families a chance to improve their lives, for non-traditional students to get a degree. Now it has changed, it is a four-year school, a very good development because it provides access to a broader group, to younger students. My original vision was that UW Tacoma would grow into the Stanford of the northwest with small classes with access to excellent professors and models of learning that integrated community and industry expertise,” he says.

Today, I want to know the essential elements that have guided him through complex environments, and the values he has held steady through challenging conditions.

Integrity developed through speaking the truth, stands out. That and an understanding of the integrated nature of personal and community success.

“I have been blessed with a ton of common sense,” Mr. Philip says. “I have always had a vision together with common sense, and a willingness to work extremely hard for what I believe is right. I wanted Tacoma to be a better place to live in. Whatever I could do to accomplish that, like start UW Tacoma, I did. I got involved with the university because I wanted young people to have access to higher education right here. This means a richer life for all, the whole community benefits.”

We discuss various developments across the city; I try to picture what things must have looked like before I started at this campus in the then Liberal Studies Program in 1998, as a brand new assistant professor in Communication. I could relate to the ethic of hard work, of single-minded focus for something I believe in. I wanted to hear more about how Mr. Philip’s childhood experiences might have nurtured that quality.

“I had to go to work at a young age, at around 13-14 years,” he reflects. “I worked in the lumber mills all summer, hard physical labor. I learned to work hard for what I wanted. I learned at a very early age to be honest. If my mother caught me lying, she would kill me. It is easier to tell the truth because you will always remember what you said. Everybody benefits. The person you are talking to will always know what you think.”

In an academic environment, success is measured by grades, by mastery of content. How do we train our students for a world that demands lateral thinking? To make ethical decisions most often in contexts that produce incomplete information?

“If I decided on a course of action, I pursued it and made it work,” says Mr. Philip. “I was never afraid of making a decision.” This approach is certainly something that evolves over time through conviction of core values, and a commitment to lifelong learning. “Young students need to learn and practice integrity, they need to develop people skills and learn to communicate well. They need to continue to learn even when out of school,” he says.

Mr. Philip’s brief and straightforward style of communication took him quickly to the heart of far-reaching initiatives in

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The Global Reach of Global Honors

Patterns amidst Chaos

2015-16 Bamford Fellow, WA State Legislative Intern, two-time GH Paper Competition winner, and finalist for the Fulbright-Oxford Clarendon Scholarship, Bronwyn Clarke ’16 was recently accepted to Oxford University in the UK. While there she hopes to pick up a few ideas for solving the world’s problems while pursuing an M.Phil. in Comparative Social Policy.

One of the first insights I gleaned from my global education was how to navigate the immense complexity of global dynamics. In TGH 300, my classmates and I were continually advised to look for patterns amidst the chaos. One of the dynamics I quickly became attuned to was how the local interacts with the global, a relationship often characterized in development economics as a dichotomy between top-down versus bottom-up development. Different expertise shapes the contrasting perspectives: local actors are aware of how a global problem impacts their community, while global actors see the intricate web of interdependencies entwined with each proposed solution.

During my time as a Senate intern at the Washington State Legislature, almost all of the policy debates focused on state policy questions. For most of these issues, it was difficult for me to determine their global impact at first glance. However, once I began paying attention to the process of prioritizing problems, I recognized familiar patterns.

I observed how lawmakers balanced their power with the actual needs of the localities they represented by bridging the gap between the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom.’ Most spent a significant amount of time listening to their constituents, discerning which local problems could be fixed with legislation, and convincing other lawmakers of the need for corrective legislation. At times, lawmakers had the difficult task of bringing a “global,” nuanced perspective to something their constituents only saw through a local lens. There was a constant tension between these viewpoints, but, as I watched, it became clear that both the view from the top and the experience of the bottom were integral to creating good policy.

— Bronwyn Clarke ’16

Diving into the Deep End

Never expecting to study abroad, Beleqsa Tamaami ’16 took the plunge last summer by joining a UWT program to Beijing. Winning a 2015 Gilman Scholarship, she quickly followed-up with a quarter in Ifrane, Morocco. After graduation, she will continue her global education in Madaba, Jordan, as a U.S. State Department Critical Language Scholar. She is also an inaugural recipient of the tri-campus Husky 100 Award.

I still remember my Global Honors interview and, specifically, the questions about whether or not I wanted to study abroad and, if so, to what country. Now, that I have been on two study abroad programs, I look back and realize how much my answers have changed. For one, I remember answering that, although I wanted to study abroad, it would not be an option due to personal and cultural reasons. Two, I remember saying that I would love to go to South Korea, because of my interests in Korean drama and K-pop, or Indonesia, because it has the largest Muslim population of any country. I am still a fan of Korean dramas and my Muslim faith continues to shape my travel destinations, but I have grown in my perceptions of study abroad and global education.

Through my Global Honors courses and other work at UW Tacoma, I have discovered countries that honestly were not on my radar before. By learning about globalization and other major world concepts, such as post-colonialism and hegemony and their relationship to places and people, my understanding of the world changed. I became more critically conscious and aware of the way concepts I learned in class manifest in real life. Furthermore, by challenging myself to get out of my comfort zone, I realized the breadth of learning opportunities available wherever you go, and that every opportunity to interact with different cultures and people enhances insights at home. — Beleqsa Tamaami ’16

Local Issues Through a Global Lens

A winner of the Aut ’15 Global Honors Core Course Paper Competition, Ngoc Thai Kien ’16 spent winter quarter 2016 at the Washington State Legislature, where she applied lessons learned in Global Honors to the policy issues she analyzed as an intern.

What I appreciate most about Global Honors is the stimulating discourse among students and teachers within the classroom. When you’re around highly motivated individuals, who possess well-honed critical thinking skills, the dialogue you have can be enlightening. Each student brings unique characteristics, perspectives, and background, which foster diverse ideas and solutions. Through meaningful dialogue, my cohort has challenged, reinforced, and helped shape my thinking and understanding of the interconnected world we live in. I think it’s this kind of engagement within Global Honors, along with my prior life experience as a legal assistant, that has helped define my legislative internship experience.

Working at the State Legislature, I dealt with an array of policy issues that were contentious, from gun control to abortion to environmental matters. Irrespective of my personal take on these issues, I had to be open to other viewpoints in order to develop my understanding. We live in a world that is filled with different values, ideologies, and doctrines, so I think diplomacy – like that developed through respectful discourse in Global Honors – is a valuable skill to possess, vital in harmonizing our differences so that we can establish good relationships on a local, national, and global scale. — Ngoc Thai Kien ’16
Voice for the Voiceless

Traveling to Rome in winter quarter 2016 on a Gilman Scholarship from the U.S. State Department, Diliman Abdulkader ’16 delved into questions of European security and refugee migration. Having spent seven years in a Syrian refugee camp as a child, Diliman is passionate about international relations and human rights. While at UWT, he has served as a student senator, intern for U.S. Representative Derek Kilmer, and advocate for the stateless Kurdish community via “Kurdish Voice.”

It is impossible to ignore the fact that we live in a globalized world. Global education has provided me the resources necessary to tackle the issues that matter, and Global Honors has introduced me to peers that share my motivation and preparation to wrestle such issues. During my time at UWT, I have taken full advantage of the opportunities presented to me by Global Honors, an enriching program that enables internationally-minded students to flourish and become proactive members of our community. As I prepare to graduate this spring, I look back and realize, through these experiences, I have learned many important life skills for use in graduate school and beyond. Global Honors has truly prepared me for immersion within my chosen profession.

I have also used my time to enrich my academic career through study abroad. My first study abroad was to Beijing, China, where I enjoyed an unforgettable experience studying Chinese economy, history, and politics, while exploring with a group of focused individuals with similar career goals. I recently returned from a second study abroad to Rome, Italy, where I analyzed European policy and Muslim immigration. To any student considering participation in a study abroad program, I highly recommend doing so, as it will only enhance your understanding of the world we live in. — Diliman Abdulkader ’16

Creating Global Community

Global Honors juniors and Bamford Fellowship for Global Engagement (BFGE) candidates, Haley Anderson ’17 (photo below, front row, 4th from right) and Heather Swanson ’17 (back row, second from right), got an early start on their research into the treatment of refugee women while studying in Rome through the UW Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity (OMAD)’s Academic Enrichment Program during spring break 2016.

I’ve also become more aware of immigrants and the refugees fleeing violence in Syria and elsewhere in the world.

This awareness has blossomed into a passionate interest, which I attribute to two of my professors, Dr. Ali Modarres (Global Labor Migration) and Dr. Rachel Hershberg (Immigrant Youth Development). Dr. Hershberg is the faculty advisor for the Bamford Fellowship in Global Engagement (BFGE) proposal that I submitted with Haley Anderson, a fellow Global Honors student. We will research the treatment of women refugees, specifically in regards to domestic violence, in the United States and various parts of Europe, including Italy, where Haley and I recently studied. I decided that traveling to Italy would provide me an opportunity to observe the locals and refugees, and also seek first-hand information from Telefono Rosa, a domestic violence hotline and shelter based in Rome.

I am thankful to the UW Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity Rome Academic Enrichment Program for providing such a wonderful opportunity for me to enrich my education. Prior to visiting Italy in March 2016, I had never traveled outside of the U.S., and I’m fairly sure that I never would have done so were it not for my being in Global Honors! — Heather Swanson ’17

I came into the Global Honors Program not knowing all the wonderful opportunities there would be for study abroad. Nor did I know much about the current situation concerning the global refugee crisis. What began in the introductory course (TGH 300) taught by Dr. Divya McMillin and Brian Golob as a short paper on the Syrian refugees has now turned into a possible undergraduate research project through the Bamford Fellowship in Global Engagement (BFGE).

Applying for the BFGE sparked an unanticipated excitement, a thrill deep in me at the thought of conducting yearlong undergraduate research. My partner, Heather, and I will investigate the treatment of women refugees, focusing on their experience of domestic violence. We were fortunate enough to be selected for an opportunity directed to us by the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), which is home to the Global Honors Program. Thanks to this opportunity, we spent spring break studying in Rome, Italy, where we observed the conditions of refugees within the Eternal City.

With the possibility of research through the BFGE, I was encouraged to do more and decided to apply for a UW Jackson School program to Greece. Closely aligned with my research interests, the program will explore “Greece in Relation to Europe and the Balkans: Travelers, Migrants, and Tourists.” I was accepted to this, and, with the support of the BFGE, I hope to make my global dreams come true... more than once.

— Haley Anderson ’17

While minoring in Global Engagement, I’ve learned about global labor migration, globalization, and transnationalism. I am now more knowledgeable about how people in the U.S. are connected with people in other countries.
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the city. While Vice President of Puget Sound Bank, Mr. Philip learned, through a personal friend then serving as Chair of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, that the city was floundering. Experts were hired to consult on strategies to energize the city. Their foremost recommendation was that strong leadership was needed to revive various sectors.

“I said to myself, ‘I could do that,’” Mr. Philip states simply. “I got involved. We set priorities. First was parking garages downtown. Then we had to bring the University of Washington to Tacoma. Hospitals were in need. I got involved there, with Mary Bridge. I love children, I believe if kids have good health and good education, they can become whatever they want. There’s nothing more heart-rending than seeing a little kid sick.”

Get involved. That’s what we tell our students in the Global Honors Program. That’s why we are creating a Student Engagement Program for all UW Tacoma students through the IGE’s high-functioning Community Advisory Board. What promotes sustained engagement? I wonder out loud.

“Get students involved in what they are passionate about,” says Mr. Philip. “My specific interests are health and education.”

As we wind up our conversation about decision-making, leadership, community engagement, and core values, I have one more question, what advice can we and our students take away from Mr. Philip’s larger-than-life career and service?

“You can’t do it yourself,” he says succinctly. “Hire and surround yourself with the most competent people, that makes an enterprise successful. Don’t be afraid of competition. I have never been afraid of competition. The IGE has a good vision. You have to know and understand other cultures. Every nation’s culture is different, people think differently and are motivated by different desires. You have to adjust; that can be difficult. You have to be flexible, and that comes with experience.” We spend a few minutes reflecting on those points. Collaboration and understanding. Each needs the other.

It is time to go. We are already looking forward to our next coffee shop conversation.