

RATIONALE

Understanding how we got to be where we are today, the rise of modernity, should arguably be central objectives of a general university education. The course proposed here – ‘Geographies of Modernization: The Making of the Modern World’ – comes at these issues from a distinctive and fresh viewpoint: that of contemporary geography. In short, modernity has its geographies and those geographies have a history.

The Model Curriculum argues for ‘the development of a refined historical consciousness’; this proposed GEC offering provides a geographical angle on this – ‘a refined *historico-geographical* consciousness’. This means attention to the geographic differentiation of the world as we know it today; the transformation of nature through, among other things, the spread of cultivars and diseases; processes of urbanization; diaspora and cultural hybridization; colonialism; and the, still ongoing, creation of global interdependence. In this course these are approached through an examination of processes which, again, any educated person should be aware of: the development of capitalism, the rise of the modern state system and of abstract thought and the various contradictions that they have entailed and which have been important to their further development.

The approach taken is emphatically critical: the rise of abstract thought is counterposed to the continuing relevance of more indigenous, local knowledges; Western triumphalism is eschewed by a critique of Eurocentricity; oversimplified notions of globalization, of cultural homogenization, of the contemporaneity of the process are subject to critical examination.

More specifically:

- Quoting from the Model Curriculum: “General education must bear responsibility, but by no means all of the responsibility, for developing a sensitivity to social concerns and, in particular, for fostering sensitivity to race, ethnocentric, and gender biases; it should enhance a student’s awareness of, and respect and appreciation for, the physical and cultural diversity of individuals within society and of societies within the larger world community.” The course engages with issues of difference including those of race, nation, colonialism and culture more generally (see Modules 1, 4, 5, 8, 10 in the

accompanying syllabus). It does this through an emphasis on ideas of social construction, demonstrating that difference is through-and-through social rather than a matter of birth; that difference is socially produced.

- In turn the emphasis on social construction segues into an enhanced awareness for the student of the way in which knowledge in the form of particular concepts, is embedded in social practice. This also applies to more formal modes of knowledge construction, as is made clear in Module 7 on Consciousness and the Rise of Abstract Thought. This accords with the specification of the Model Curriculum that “General education should introduce students to contemporary knowledge and also give them a sense of the historical context in which it arose.”
- Rather than inter-disciplinary, the course has strong *trans*-disciplinary aspects. While it is a geographer’s view of the making of the modern world, its approach to understanding is emphatically both historical and holistic. In particular, it emphasizes the way in which the cultural, the political, the engagement with nature are structured by the limiting and facilitating characteristics of a particular way of organizing production. This historical emphasis is what makes the course particularly appropriate for the Arts and Humanities / Part A. Historical Survey section of the GEC.
- As is appropriate to a course with the title ‘The Making of the Modern World’, there is an emphasis on global relations that takes the student well beyond North America or Western Europe, for that matter. There is, *inter alia*, discussion of the diffusion of cultural forms, of people and the settling of the so-called New Europes; of the debate around Eurocentric understandings of the making of the modern world and theories about how the making of the West was on the backs of other parts of the world such as China; the formation of the world market; trans-state forms of organization; and of the globalization of culture (see *any* of the Modules in the syllabus below).

In the Model Curriculum and under ‘Social Science Learning Objectives’ it states as goals: “To appreciate the contemporary world from an understanding of the past and to make cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparisons” and “To develop a sense of the world’s social, political, economic and cultural diversity, with special attention to the institutions of the United States and other nations as well as to international perspectives.” In our view ‘Geographies of Modernity:

The Making of the Modern World' will not only provide an approach to realizing these goals, but a fresh, critical and exciting one.

Note that there are no specific course prerequisites for The Making of the Modern World. As is appropriate to a course with a strong trans-disciplinary character, no specific disciplinary competences are required. Where first principles are necessary, as in the discussion of markets in Module 2, they are presented. Corroboration for these points can be gained by going to the written narratives that accompany the Modules (<http://geog-www.sbs.ohio-state.edu/courses/G450/>).