



The Global Learning Podcast

with Dr. Antonio González, PhD
Wesleyan University



As a scholar of Spanish literature and culture Bernardo Antonio González studies theater, film and the performing arts in relation to politics and society in modern Spain. In his publications and teaching, he treats the stage and screen as a site where Spaniards seek to process the dominant challenges they face as a society: how to reconcile minority and dominant subcultures in accordance with democratic values; what role new or foreign modes of thought and style should play in reshaping cultural identity; what strategies to adopt for making amends with the legacy of fascism or for reconciling distinct cultural traditions in an increasingly fluid and interconnected world.

González has taught at Wesleyan since earning his Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures from the U. of California-Berkeley, in 1979. During this period, he has directed Wesleyan's Program in Madrid several times and he has spearheaded the creation of new programs at the U. Carlos III de Madrid, the U. de las Américas in Puebla, Mexico and the U. of Bologna, Italy. In 1992, he was appointed to set up the university's Office of International Studies, an operation he has administered on different occasions. In 2015, he was appointed to create and direct Wesleyan's new [Center for Global Studies](#), a project designed to bring intercultural competency and foreign language proficiency to the heart of Wesleyan's liberal arts education.

Transcript

NAFSA Introduction

Welcome to NAFSA's Global Learning Podcast. Where leaders of international education speak to the bold ideas and innovative approaches that are helping integrate global learning theories and designs into practice.

In this episode, Dr. Antonio González of Wesleyan University, discusses the comprehensive and complex global learning that can occur in foreign language acquisition. Professor González will read our questions ahead of his responses. You can view the full transcript of this episode and the presenter's biography on the NAFSA Architecture for Global Learning webpage.

Enjoy this episode and consider joining us on November 9th for our e-Seminar, *Global Learning in Foreign Language Instruction: More Than Just Talk*. And now I will turn things over to Dr. Antonio González.

Presenter Introduction

Hello, thank you for joining me for The Global Learning Podcast. My name is Dr. Antonio González. I'm a Professor of Spanish and the Director of the Fries Center for Global Studies at Wesleyan University. In this episode, I'll be discussing global learning in foreign language instruction.

1. What was your first exposure to the concept of global learning and what about it resonated with you?

Since graduate school and throughout my nearly 40 years of teaching at Wesleyan, I have been juggling two professional areas of interest. While teaching and conducting research in Spanish literature, I developed a certain expertise in the field of global education working as the Resident Director of the Wesleyan program in Madrid, for over 8 years. Working in the trenches with students who are struggling to find themselves in the world, helping them to "identify" themselves within a global framework, gave me insights that I have attempted to apply in global learning initiatives that I have launched over the years: creating new study abroad programs, setting up and directing Wesleyan's Office of International Studies in 1992 and, since 2015, setting up our new Fries Center for Global Studies.

As we all know, the sheer velocity and scale of cultural exchange today have little in common with the realities of the past. *Area studies* and *International Relations* are certainly not obsolete, but in a sense they are more emblematic of *the pre-Internet era*, when students were taught to think about political interaction between discrete nations, areas and cultures. Borders seemed somewhat less porous to us, perhaps more sacrosanct, at that time. The need to focus on mass migration, on climate change and our ecosystems, world health and social justice or on endangered cultural traditions and

languages: we were aware of these problems, of course, but given the rhythms and scales of contemporary life, the need to focus on them now –and to do so methodically– is all the more critical.

The language and intercultural proficiency that our students can achieve by studying abroad should be taken, therefore, not as a final destination in and of itself but rather as a sort of prerequisite for a broader understanding of the issues we face as human beings. Teaching students to see the world through the value system of another culture and its language should serve as a stepping stone for imagining the logic of the whole, that is, the social, cultural and scientific threads that intertwine discrete communities into a roughly defined organic unit.

2. How have (you/your institution) integrated global learning into your curriculum and co-curricular activities?

Language learning and faculty engagement have been core principles in the various projects that have led to the founding of Wesleyan's new Center for Global Studies, and they continue to be the basis for our new initiative.

Students who study in a country whose language is taught at Wesleyan are required to study through the medium of that language. In other non-English speaking countries, we require our students to study the host-country's language while taking content courses in English. By linking study abroad and language learning in this way, we aim to cultivate a certain ethical stance in our students, regarding how they approach their host community and, what is equally important, regarding their commitment to themselves and to their global learning. These policies are intended to influence our students' goals and facilitate windows of understanding that would probably be unimaginable without any knowledge whatsoever of the host culture's language.

By engaging our faculty in the Center's governance structure, that is, by involving them broadly in the development of this project, we look to increase and enhance their engagement with global learning as well. We hope to win their acceptance of the principle that advancing intercultural competency can only succeed if it is undertaken collectively. And we involve them in our exploration of new ways of embedding global learning further within the framework of the liberal arts education we provide our students. Some ideas we hope to develop further include a new certificate program, the development of global tracks within the various majors, or expanding on the "foreign languages across the curriculum" initiatives.

Technological advancement and innovation have been, of course, a major stimulus for globalization. Technology should therefore be harnessed as a prime tool for the pedagogical innovations that will allow us to enhance our students' global learning. The renovation project that led to the opening of our new Fries Center for Global Studies, in 2015, included the creation of three new, high-tech tele-presence classrooms. In my course on Migration and the Performing Arts in Spain, Mexico and the Hispanic US, for

instance, I have inaugurated these facilities with interesting results. Videoconferencing allows us to debate the many thorny and polemical issues raised by our readings in concert with students at Madrid's Carlos III university, who take the same course at the same time. Turning the classroom into an intercultural contact-zone can produce –and has in fact produced – some challenging moments that might give us pause, as we consider how far to go in recreating the conditions of globe realities in our classrooms. Value systems are often laid bare and, more importantly, the challenges posed by trying to communicate those values clearly and tactfully across linguistic borders can be daunting. Students, in the end, tend to view the classroom as their “safe haven” where they will not really be challenged beyond their margins of comfort. So long as we facilitate self-reflection, the benefits of such experiences, wounding though they may at times be, can ultimately become the basis for real growth.

Through Coursera, for instance, we have done a great deal to project our ideas and voices out across the globe. As the Director of Global Studies, with funding and staff support, we are trying to incentivize other faculty to do the opposite: bring voices and ideas from afar into our classrooms.

3. Why do you think it's important for (your institution/your discipline) to foster global learning?

The post-World War II web of bilateral interactions, with the United States and its language placed at the epicenter, has faded into the past. An increasingly complex web of multilateral exchange has emerged, one that in many of its tangents circumvents English-speaking nodes of knowledge and influence. Societies that fail to acknowledge this reality --that fail to endow their young citizens with the competencies needed for communicating effectively in the global sphere-- are doomed to mediocrity.

4. How have faculty, administrators, and students been challenged by the implementation of global learning in (your discipline)?

The primary challenges we face concern unlearning old habits –in terms of both content and pedagogy – and figuring out how to adapt our teaching to the needs of students whose experiences and outlook are shaped by new knowledges and new modes of transmitting those knowledge.

5. How are you observing /assessing your students use and applications of global learning?

We are exploring and testing various modes of assessment. Our goal is to implement the chosen mode by applying it initially to students who study abroad, before they leave and after they return. Ultimately, we hope that the university will adopt a universal standard for assessing all incoming and graduating Wesleyan students. The fact that we have identified “Negotiating intercultural difference” as one

of our university's four basic "competencies" should give us a strong footing in this regard.

Closing

Thanks for joining me for this episode of The Global Learning Podcast. Register for the Architecture for Global Learning e-Seminar session, [Global Learning in Foreign Language Instruction: More Than Just Talk](#) for further professional enrichment on this subject. Visit the NAFSA Global Learning webpage at www.nafsa.org/globallearning to learn about related resources and programming and email globallearning@nafsa.org with any questions you may have.