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**Education, PhD - Specialization in International Education/Education Leadership**

Goals Statement

Six years ago, I conducted a preliminary study examining why those academic systems reporting top ten scores in the 2012 (PISA) exam were successful. What was different? Having lived abroad for almost fifteen years -- volunteering at international schools, teaching and implementing student immersion programs, or working on education and foreign policy for the United States Agency for International Development and the Department of State -- I had become keenly aware of the sharp discrepancies between US education and other countries’ systems. Analyzing the PISA exam results offered a window into understanding the growing gaps in learning between higher scoring school systems and the U.S. system. Two crucial elements I found were first, the inclusion of early second language learning (typically grade one) and second, how global issues were integrated into coursework, particularly the humanities. Students in these top performing school systems were effectively part of a low-level experiential immersion program. These students were gaining skills in questioning assumptions, addressing challenges while incorporating a variety of factors, and reflecting on the differences within their own cultures and that of another. I recalled my intensive coursework at Harvard under Dr. Fernando Reimers, where we, an international body of students, focused on the question: how do we develop global citizens who will lead with compassion, wisdom, and intercultural knowledge?

I am passionate about integrating global awareness, understanding, and shared compassion among our next generations in the hope of minimizing bias, prejudice, and assumptions in our communities. In my work in the foreign service, I see directly the consequences of our K-12 and even university-level education frequently failing to equip our students to consider multiple points of view, embody cross-cultural understanding, approach newness with inquiry rather than fear, and recognize the lack of a uniform norm of experience and its implications. In my experience, a highly effective tool to generate this understanding is through experiential education, and more specifically, through immersion programs introducing different cultural and socio-economic environments. Given the value of these immersion programs, my next question asks what are the necessary components and attributes of an immersion program to provide the maximum benefit of developing global citizens among students? Further, how might we design and use immersion programs and/or local (in-class or in-community) experiences for teachers so that they are better equipped to support their students in becoming global citizens?

These questions are grounded in my past teaching experience, which has been primarily at the secondary, undergraduate and graduate levels. I have initiated, implemented, and taught several immersion programs in Zimbabwe, which included teaching Sub-Saharan African history, global studies, cross-cultural studies, Sub-Saharan literature, public speaking skills, and expository writing to both Zimbabwean and American university students. I also have taught international relations and comparative religion at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and Luther Seminary as an Adjunct Professor. At the University of Pittsburgh, I taught college level courses and served as Deputy Director of the Institute for International Studies in Education (IISE) center, at which I launched and oversaw a peer-mentoring program for Chinese and Eastern European international students. For nearly a decade, I also have tutored high school students in English, expository and creative writing, social studies/history, and global studies. My interest in creative writing has led to a handful of publications in the South Africa Airways magazine and multiple blogs. Currently I am a Debate Coach for the debate team at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. In my current position with the US government, I am intimately involved in how our political system and type of governance operates as well as compares with other traditions.

In 2003, I was asked to teach several seminars to the newly-arrived Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) posted to Tanzania, where I was living as a Foreign Service Officer. As I taught the PCVs, a diverse group of ages, backgrounds, and interests, about the country’s political-economic conditions, visas, and the Embassy in general, one of the PCVs asked me what my most pivotal professional experience had been. Instead of talking about my diplomatic role – which was expected, I shared with them a story from my five years living off and on in Zimbabwe, where I was an adjunct professor. One day, I explained, about sixteen students and I were stuffed in an old jalopy bus, careening down a paved road, headed to a rural village deep in the Zimbabwean bush. Suddenly, a student spied a chimpanzee in a jacaranda tree. She was ecstatic, and quickly all sixteen faces were pressed against the window, searching the trees and the African veld for more animals. I quietly listened to their excited realization that we were truly “in the wild,” where unpredictability and newness was the rule. As they chattered and looked – seeing distant smoke from cooking fires, smelling the exhaust and heat and sweat, hearing the engine roar and an occasional bird dive to a rodent below, a subtle but perceptible shift began to sink into their demeanor. Hours later, when we drove up to the village and saw the community gathered along the road, singing for our arrival, I noticed fewer cameras, and instead saw students clapping and waving to our hosts. They piled out of the van and folded into a community of welcome, a flurry of dancing and feet pounding and singing, a loving chaos of the arrival tradition. The students’ eyes were wide, and yet their hesitations about dancing in public or singing out of tune forgotten. I sat on the van for a few moments, watching. With a well of gratitude, I saw preconceived assumptions fall away among my students. I saw learning happening – and knew *this* was the greatest thing I had done, and what I needed to do. Opening up the world to students, experiencing their learning with them, helping them see their own potential – and realizing I had the gifts to do this, to teach, was my pivotal moment, and has grounded me to never forget my purpose: to teach.

My interest in the International Education/Education Leadership (IEEL) program at George Mason University stems from a lifelong passion to teach, lead, and contribute to the field of international education. George Mason is one of the few schools in the country that offers a specific focus in international education at the doctoral level, and the expertise, network, and experience among the faculty is phenomenal. My professional goals are to teach at the collegial level, both in the States and abroad, to lead schools invested in integrating global education in their curriculum, to consult with school systems around the world, and to directly implement immersion programs for teachers and students. I take the privilege to apply to this IEEL program seriously, and look forward to bringing this passion to fruition.