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Module 13

Concluding Observations

Key Terms and Concepts

- sustainability
- globalization
- interdisciplinarity
- circumpolarity
- diversity
- race related power relations
- gender related power relations

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module you should:

1. Understand the principle and other objectives of the course
2. Be aware of the perspectives underlying the course
3. Be aware of how the modules in each of the modules in *BCS 332* relate to globalization and race and gender related power relations
4. Understand how biases can be shown in the choice of topics for a course such as this
5. Be able to see when biases exist within the content of a course such as this

Overview

This module starts out by reviewing the objectives of *BCS 331* and *BCS 332* as well as their underlying perspectives. By analyzing several other modules, the module demonstrates how the concepts of globalization and sustainability are central to the course. The module then highlights the important issues of race and gender related power relations as they relate to both contemporary circumpolar society and the study of contemporary circumpolar society. The module concludes by asking students to critically examine the course itself.



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Lecture

A Review of the Objectives of *BCS 331* and *BCS 332*

The Principal Objective

We started *BCS 331* with the statement that many people who live in the North want to continue to live there and want to ensure that their children and grandchildren have the opportunity to continue to live in the region. Their ability to continue to live in these communities is not always a certainty. There are many social, political, and economic issues that present obstacles to the continued healthy existence of Northern communities. The purpose of *BCS 331* and *BCS 332* was to try to give students an introduction to some of the most important of these issues. The courses have tried to examine in greater detail those issues that are seen to have an effect on the “sustainability” of communities in the circumpolar regions of the world.

Other Objectives

The principal objective was to inform students about the basic challenges facing the development of healthy, sustainable communities in the North. At the same time, the courses have several other “objectives.”

The first was that the circumpolar region is not a homogeneous region. Each part of it is different. These differences have been shaped not only by geographical particularities but by different histories. It is hoped that by taking these courses you have come to understand these differences. Indeed, it is hoped that you have come to understand that these differences can be seen to be one of the strengths of the region.

At the same time, until recently, the common concerns of the region were often ignored. Colonization of the North by separate countries often meant that communities in the Circumpolar World never considered themselves as part of a distinct region, or that they shared many common aspects of life. Part of the reason that the University of the Arctic came into being was to help shape this regional vision. These courses expressed this objective in that they attempted, not only to point out the differences between communities in the circumpolar regions, but also to highlight the many challenges that are common to most, if not all, Northern communities.

As was pointed out in Module 2 of *BCS 331*, at one time, the objective of those who sought to develop knowledge in the Western world was to try to make things as simple as possible. The belief was that the physical and social world could be seen as the result of several simple laws. The objective of Western science was to discover these laws. These laws could be discovered by dividing areas of knowledge into separate and distinct



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disciplines. Once these laws were discovered, the world could be controlled in a way that would benefit humanity.

More recently, researchers have started to discover that the physical and human world are not simple. These worlds are complex. The only way that we can properly understand them is by admitting that they are complex entities that can probably never be understood in their entirety. At the same time, researchers have come to see that the understanding of this complexity is dependent upon the realization of the inter-relatedness of all the different aspects of life.

In the North, the Western scientific vision has always been challenged by Indigenous knowledge systems. Conflict between these two knowledge systems has often created problems in the region. Some would argue that the dominance of the Western system in the twentieth century led to many of the problems that communities in the region are now facing.

Another of the objectives of these courses was to have the students understand that, as is the case for all worlds, the Circumpolar World is a complex entity where there are few easy solutions to problems created by the relationship between human activity and the environment. At the same time, students must understand that the search for solutions must start with a recognition of the inter-relatedness of human activity and the northern environment.

Following what we said above about the complexity of life in the North, these courses also encouraged students to develop a “critical perspective.” The courses tried to show students that existing explanations of the challenges facing the region can all be shown to have weaknesses. These weaknesses exist for several reasons. Often the weakness exists because the explanation has been developed to support a given viewpoint. These biased viewpoints give certain people, or institutions, power over others.

These courses asked students to look at explanations critically; to become aware of the “political aspects” of these explanations. Once students are able to critically examine an explanation, they are better able to decide which is the best explanation of the key challenges facing the North.

Linked to what was said above, these courses also tried to show that differences in knowledge systems and in viewpoints are often based on differences in culture and gender. The difference between the Aboriginal culture and “Western” culture has been highlighted. Starting with colonization, there has been a conflict between the approaches coming from the different Indigenous cultures in the Circumpolar World and approaches coming from the encroaching European cultures. By the twentieth century, the European approaches became dominant. Recently, researchers have shown that the dominance of the European or Western approaches produced problems in the region.



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Finally, these courses also tried to show that gender is an important source of differences in the Circumpolar World. The experiences and perspectives of women in the region are different than those of men. Many of the current challenges in the region are related to the separation of these experiences and the inability of the dominant male perspective to give proper voice to the female perspective. These courses have tried to give voice to the female perspective yet it can be argued, as we warned in Module 2 of *BCS 331*, that we have not been very successful.

Underlying Perspectives

In addition to the above general objectives, we must also note the three underlying perspectives that guide this course and, indeed, are guiding principles of the University of the Arctic itself. They are interdisciplinarity, circumpolarity, and diversity. Interdisciplinarity refers to the belief that knowledge about the North can best be understood, cultivated, and shared by refusing to limit this knowledge to one or even several disciplines. On any particular issue, knowledge from all disciplines should be used and exchanged. Circumpolarity refers to the importance of looking at issues across the Circumpolar World rather than from a national or a regional or sub-regional perspective. This is a necessary aspect of region-building in the North. Finally, diversity refers to the recognition and valuing of the different perspectives, approaches, world views, and knowledge systems that exist in the Circumpolar World.

Globalization, Race and Gender-related Power Relations, and Sustainability

For most of the modules, challenges currently facing the development of such communities were linked to the processes of globalization. *BCS 331* concentrated on issues relating to the economic base of the region. In order to develop sustainable communities in the circumpolar region, students need to understand the importance, and impact, of natural resource use for these communities. *BCS 332* examined the most important contemporary challenges surrounding governance and politics, social issues, education and knowledge systems, and global issues in the circumpolar regions of the world. In looking at all the issues affecting the sustainable development of our communities, we can see that most are related to what is happening in the world economy.

For a long time now, the vast majority of our communities have been under the influence of economic forces that are outside our region. We have not been able to control our economies locally for a long time. Many people argue that this lack of local control has intensified lately under the influence of a new economic system called globalization.



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As you saw throughout the modules of this course, globalization is not an easy term to describe. It means many different things to many people. In a very general sense it means that national economic boundaries are being erased as international trade becomes more and more important. It also means that the demands of local communities, with particular needs such as those in the circumpolar region, must increasingly take a back seat to the demands of international trade forces. To some people it also means increased economic opportunities for the North as well as exposure to new political and cultural forces.

Analysis of the Modules

Each of the modules in *BCS 332* are somehow related to these two concepts of globalization and sustainability. Several link the notions of globalization and sustainability to other, more profound power relations, such as those of race and gender. Race related power relations are seen in relationships where one's race determines one's ability to control a situation. Relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the North are often based on race related power relations. Gender related power relations are those relationships where one's gender determines one's ability to control or influence a situation. In the following, using three of the modules as examples, the relationships between globalization, race and gender relations, and sustainability are analyzed.

One of the best at sensitizing students to the negative aspects of globalization and race and gender power relations is Module 12 "The Politics of Monoculture and Diversity in the North" by Kaarina Kailo of the University of Oulu. In the following section, the author summarized the main points of the Module.

"The politics of monoculture and diversity in the North" seeks to promote understanding of global processes that prevent or facilitate ethnocultural, gendered, and ecological diversity in the circumpolar/northern context. The module introduces minority/majority relations by elaborating on the specific issues that create the tensions between different actors in the North from local residents to developers. The aim of the module is, above all, to help students identify the key concepts to do with undemocratic processes and asymmetrical power relations including the mechanisms whereby powerful groups subjugate those set up as the "other." The module includes a discussion about the value of biological, cultural and gendered diversity from the point of view of the subsistence perspective and of the gift or "give back" economies. These refer to socio-cosmic covenants characterizing traditional Indigenous communities and (eco)feminist scholars.

At best, Module 12 helps students to read also the other courses offered by the University of the Arctic with a constructively critical awareness, by sensitizing them to issues of power and politics: whose perspectives and interests do they reflect and promote either in open or more concealed fashion? Do they take into account the impact that modern development projects have on local, Indigenous populations and on women? Who



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determines what benefits the North and who has the power to resolve the possibly conflicting views? By exposing students to issues of sustainability the module will increase their consciousness regarding the current global-local problems facing citizens and the nature/ecosystems of the North. Students will learn how the cultural, spiritual, and psychological well-being of northern communities is established and enhanced through an increased understanding of anti-racist and gender-sensitive, ecologically sustainable ways of coexisting and co-operating.

Kaarina Kailo

Many of these same points are highlighted in Module 7 “Women and Gender Relations in the North.”

In Module 7, students are introduced to key notions to do with gender, power relations, and the current issues facing women in the North and the Arctic. The representative examples of issues in Northern women’s lives and culture (especially Finland, Canada, and Samiland) involve both privileged and less privileged women. They have been chosen to reveal the interconnections between economic policies and areas of life seen as independent of political decision making.

The module discusses the ways in which neoliberal trade liberalization and the restructuring of the economy impact on women as care-givers and as the gender that is particularly dependent on social services to be able to combine work and family. The red thread going through the module has to do with multilevel (economic, political, cultural, spiritual, psychological, and physical) violence which is the root of women’s vulnerable position in the North. The current neo-conservative global agenda has exacerbated women’s vulnerability across the world. There are, however local particularities in that oppression: Northernmost women within the Northern regions of the otherwise privileged “North” face particular layers of discrimination and oppression and are also discriminated against by more privileged women.

The module refers also to Northern women’s efforts to organize and network and gives examples of their politics of positive difference, including woman-centred cultural narratives, ecopolitics.

Kaarina Kailo and Vappu Sunnari

Module 8, “Health and Health Care” might not seem to be immediately related to the impact of globalization on the development of sustainable communities. Sustainable communities require a healthy population. Poor health existed prior to the increasing influence of globalization and can not be seen as a result of globalization. In fact, globalization can be seen as helping the health status of the Northern population if it makes health care more readily available to the population through new forms of treatment and health care delivery.

Yet, as the module on health and health care points out, “by far the most important group of health problems is the so-called social pathologies: violence, accidents, suicide, and alcohol and substance abuse.” Can some of these “social pathologies” be related to external influences? Socio-cultural



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stresses caused by external issues are certainly highlighted in the module, not to mention the pathological impact of environmental problems.

The module notes that “Interpersonal violence in all its forms (homicides, assaults, abuse), with or without sexual context, directed at strangers or family members, is now an issue of major public health concern in most circumpolar indigenous communities.” While the authors refuse to point to any one specific reason for this, we see that Kailo and Sunnari, in Module 7, link this to the forces of globalization.

Among the most serious health problems affecting circumpolar Indigenous peoples in the last half of the twentieth century are injuries. In the younger age groups injuries are by far the most important causes of death and, overall, they may account for as much as a third of all deaths. Injuries can be broadly classified as “intentional” (which may be interpersonal or self-inflicted) or “unintentional” (i.e., accidents). Suicides and violence are classified under intentional injuries.

While accidents have always been a hazard of the hostile natural environment experienced by circumpolar peoples, more recent sociocultural changes and the general availability of alcohol have changed the pattern and extent of injuries. Traditionally, Arctic hunters were at risk of hunting accidents (e.g., animal attacks, shooting and boating accidents) and death from exposure or hypothermia. With modernization, motor vehicle accidents and house fires have assumed increasing importance. Studies that have looked into the contributing factors have usually found alcohol use to be involved in some degree.

Interpersonal violence in all its forms (homicides, assaults, abuse), with or without sexual context, directed at strangers or family members, is now an issue of major public health concern in most Circumpolar Indigenous communities. There are different explanations, some focussing on the stress of rapid social change and the inadequacy of traditional conflict resolution behaviours in the new, more urbanized environments. Sexual abuse of children is particularly pernicious, and is probably underreported universally. The consequences in adult life have been documented in health and social surveys, and include a variety of physical and psychosocial ailments.

While suicides were not common among the Inuit before the 1950s, it was not unknown. Traditionally, suicide was practised mainly by the elderly and the infirm. This pattern is in sharp contrast to the now prevalent pattern of adolescent suicide, which often occurs in epidemics. This is not particular to the Inuit, as a similar development has taken place in many other Aboriginal communities in North America and elsewhere. While among the mainstream populations, suicide rates tend to increase with age, in indigenous populations, the peak rates occur at age 15 to 24 years, with males outnumbering females (Fig. 6, Module 8). For every completed suicide, there are several suicide attempts, and perhaps an even broader pool of individuals who have entertained suicidal thoughts. Many causes or risk



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factors of suicide have been postulated, and these can be sought at the individual, family, and community levels, from mental illness, such as depression, to peer pressure, to social disintegration resulting from historical injustice. Unfortunately there appears to be no simple answer, nor are intervention and prevention programs that have been attempted successful in stemming this emerging health problem.

Problems with *BCS 331* and *BCS 332*

This course attempts to look at issues in Circumpolar society from a critical perspective. As such, the course itself needs to be criticized—in terms of both its form and content. In the Introduction to *BCS 331* we noted that the course is still weak in its presentation of Aboriginal perspectives and gender perspectives and that the students themselves need to provide these perspectives during the course. Kaarina Kailo, a member of the course development team outlines some of the weaknesses of the courses in the following manner:

Although *BCS 331* and *BCS 332* do include perspectives on Northern lives from the point of view of marginalized groups, Indigenous populations and women, it must be recognized that the issues and topics that it privileges represent above all the concerns of the mainstream. The social contributions and challenges of women are covered in depth only in Module 7, which limits how many issues of importance to women can be covered. If students were to design a course “Men in the North,” what would they include, what would they leave out? The special modules on “Gas,” “Internal and External Relations” and “Mining,” for example, focus on male activities or interests whereas “Handicrafts” and “Homemaking and Caregiving,” as more typical female occupations, are absent. This reflects the common Western view that women and women’s contributions to economic and cultural life are the invisible, taken-for-granted background on which the male-specific economic and industrial life rests. Native perspectives on fishing and tourism are likewise overshadowed by the mainstream focus on “development” and “job creation,” on which Indigenous people have often alternative, even highly critical perspectives. On the other hand, violence against women is such an acute Northern problem that it would have merited its own course. We recognize these tensions among Northern actors and realize that they are also reflected to some extent in the foci and choices of *BCS 100*. However, we encourage students to adopt a self-reflexive, probing stance and to continue the efforts at inclusivity where we fall short of our ideal (for reasons of time constraints and expertise, among other things).

Kaarina Kailo

Indeed, one of the challenges of living in the North is to try to think outside the mainstream in order to arrive at new and original solutions to the issues that the region faces. This course represents an imperfect start to the process. With input from students living in Northern communities it is hoped that these courses can be continually improved.



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Study Questions

1. How do each of the modules in *BCS 332* relate to globalization and race and gender power relations?
2. What biases are shown by the choice of topics *BCS 332*?
3. What biases exist within the *BCS 332* modules?
4. What important contemporary issues facing the sustainability of Northern communities were not dealt with in *BCS 331* and *BCS 332* that should be dealt with in future courses?