

# ‘Globalist Scumbags’: Composition’s Global Turn in a Time of Fake News, Globalist Conspiracy, and Nationalist Literacy

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For those whose teaching and research take part in what has been termed the “global turn” (Hesford, “Global” 787) in rhetoric and composition studies, our current political moment is one characterized by a simultaneous sense of hope and fear. Work in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies has explored comparative perspectives on the teaching of writing and writing programs (Thaiss et al.), the “internationalization” of composition research (Donahue 213), research on transnational rhetoric (Hesford, *Spectacular*; Dingo), research in world Englishes, code-meshing, and translanguaging (Guerra, Emerging, “Language”; Canagarajah, Place, “*Translingual*”; Horner and Trimbur), research that draws on post-colonialism as a critical framework for composition studies (Lunsford and Ouzgane), and work that explores transnational perspectives on writing program administration (Martins). Such work responds not only to the pedagogical exigencies brought about by globalization but also to a significant increase in the number of global programs and efforts to bring global knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to the undergraduate curriculum. Brian Ray and Connie Kendall Theado note in the introduction to their recent special issue of *Composition Studies* that the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies reflects and responds to the broader globalization of the university as it also charts out new directions for research in the field (10). As scholars in our field chart out the global turn, they must do so in relationship to a wide range of national and institutional efforts to globalize or internationalize higher education.

Over the past twenty years, American higher education, as well as higher education in many other nations, has witnessed a sustained movement to develop undergraduate and graduate curricula that can enable students to respond to the globalization of economic, intellectual, and civic life. Higher education researcher Peter Stearns has recently summed up the scope of these initiatives, stating that “it would be hard to find an American community college, college, or university that has not devoted serious new thought, in recent years, to some aspect—often, to many aspects—of global education” (1). The influence Stearns notes can easily be observed in the copious references to global citizenship and global education in the mission statements of many colleges and universities. Rebecca Hovey and a range of other scholars have broadly referred to this phenomenon as a *global*

*turn in higher education* (241); and, perhaps more often, as “global higher education” (NAFSA “The Changing Landscape”). The global turn and global higher education are both grounded in what is often described as the process of “internationalization.”

In contrast to more traditional global education programs, such as study abroad and student exchange, contemporary global higher education programs encompass a more extensive project often referred to as “comprehensive internationalization”—“a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education” (Hudzik 6). This broader movement to globalize higher education has gained significant influence over the past twenty-five years. Organizations like Campus Compact and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) have launched well-funded and significant initiatives to shape integrated university curricula for global education. Projects like the AAC&U’s *Shared Futures*—a global learning partnership with 32 colleges and universities—seek to develop commonly shared educational goals and frameworks for global higher education. Despite attempts to articulate such common frameworks, global higher education, as I will explore here, encompasses a wide variety of sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting pedagogical and institutional projects aimed at preparing students for disciplinary, vocational, ethical, and political participation in an era of globalization. The scope and influence of this movement provides scholars and teachers working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition with an immense amount of opportunities to contribute to the global, civic mission of US colleges and universities.

On the other hand, global higher education and its visions of global citizenship are increasingly taking place against a political backdrop that positions their projects against a resurgent, populist rhetoric of American exceptionalism.<sup>1</sup> Shortly before his inauguration as 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, President Elect Donald Trump told an audience in Cincinnati, Ohio, “[t]here is no global anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship. We pledge allegiance to one flag and that flag is the American flag” (Redden). A month before the speech in which President-Elect Trump made his views on global citizenship clear, the *New York Times* ran an article, “Globalism: A Far-Right Conspiracy Theory Buoyed by Trump,” that reported alarm by organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center over the use of the term “globalism” by alt-right media outlets like *Breitbart News* and *InfoWars* (Stack). Here, globalism becomes, in its more extreme versions, indicative of a leftist conspiracy to promote a one-world government and, in its more moderate versions, an attempt to sow disloyalty to American values and promote hatred of country. Such arguments are mobilized against both higher education and K-12 education. Looking back at hard-right news sites over the past several years, we see a range of arguments against Common Core as a globalist conspiracy and global higher education as fostering a new world order. In this media, the term globalist is used to signify a progressive plot to indoctrinate American students with anti-American beliefs. In a 2012 conversation with Colin Gunn, creator of the film *IndoctriNation* about the state of the public-school system, Alex Jones, host of the fake news online network *InfoWars*, put this point bluntly: “you’re handing your kids over to a bunch of globalist scumbags” (qtd. in Dickson).

Arguments in a nationalist vein against global citizenship and global education are, of course, not new, but the articulation of anti-global rhetoric from a president-elect cannot help but resonate

deeply with both global educators and their political adversaries.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it did not take very long for threats against global higher education to become clear. In his December 5, 2016 public letter, “My Counsel to President-Elect Donald Trump on American Higher Education,” Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), made a case for defunding service-learning and global higher education programs. While the National Association of Scholars is not an alt-right or hard-right organization and does not endorse political platforms, Wood nevertheless argues that “[t]opics such as ‘civic engagement’ and ‘global learning,’ which operate essentially as devices to make students conform to progressive political views, should be examined skeptically. Federal money right now rewards such conformist ideology. That needs to be stopped” (Wood, “My Counsel”). Following Wood’s message, the NAS issued its 500-page report *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* in January of 2017. The stark contrast between positive depictions of global learning that we see in the mission statements of our colleges and universities and the palpable sense of leftist conspiracy and the positioning of global education as anti-American is deeply troubling.

The global turn in rhetoric and composition studies has not fully engaged the broader global turn in American higher education; but, as I will show, work in our field is fully implicated in the anti-global education arguments of the right. In the same article where she pointed to the “global turn” in rhetoric and composition studies, Wendy Hesford also pointed to specific “cautions” (795) for global research in the field. In this article, I add another central caution for the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies: the populist rhetoric advanced by the right-wing organizations aligned against global education. I trace out how this rhetoric positions global higher education, including work in rhetoric and composition studies, as anti-American, anti-intellectual, and opposed to the aims of traditional higher education. This populist rhetoric not only poses political threats to the global turn but also obscures the range of conflicting political, economic, and vocational interests that have shaped global education in the American college and university system. As scholars continue to advance the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies, we must not only develop critical responses to the anti-global education rhetoric of the right but also critically interrogate and respond to material and political motivations that have animated the broader global turn in higher education.

## Populism and the Production of Civic Education and Global Education as Empty Signifiers

Anti-globalism has recently been mobilized with exceptional force in hard right and alt-right discourse, but its specific connection to global education can be seen in arguments waged against global education over the past thirty years. These populist arguments have been mobilized against global education programs in both K-12 and higher education and are developed most often through conspiracy rhetoric. Though different versions of this argument are mobilized at different times and in different places, the argument generally follows these broad strokes: education, already a bastion of leftist radicalism, provides an opportunity for radical educators to indoctrinate students with a negative view of America’s greatness and legacy in the world and to promote students who are disloyal to America while loyal to global organizations and corporations. Such an education leads to

discrimination against conservative students and faculty on campus, radical group-think, and violent protest, all of which can play to the advantage of America's enemies.<sup>3</sup> This thumbnail sketch does not hope to characterize each response on the right to global education; but, as the examples below will show, it does capture many of the recurring claims against global higher education. Literacy plays a central role in the articulation of these claims, especially in relationship to courses in writing and rhetoric, as functional and nationalist forms of literacy are often brought together in arguments that point to the role of global education in distracting students from learning to write.<sup>4</sup>

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It is tempting to simply point to these characterizations as false representations of global higher education and to position those who might accept those characterizations as members of an easily swayed and misguided political public. Global higher education has received its fair share of fake news, in this case a range of articles and other media circulated through alt-right news platforms such as *Breitbart* and *The College Fix* that misleadingly portray global education as a progressive conspiracy. I would like to suggest that there is more than false representation going on in this discourse and that this discourse travels further than the audiences of alt-right news

organizations. Problematic representations of global education are not a rhetorical end in themselves but part of a populist rhetoric that seeks to unsettle the educational hegemony of global higher education and replace it with nationalist alternatives. While responding to the fake news accounts of global higher education is important, scholars in rhetoric and composition studies need to turn their attention to how populist political rhetoric on the right functions as a framework for conservative think tanks and policy organizations to portray global education as a distracting, anti-intellectual, and anti-American enterprise. Such rhetoric, I argue, functions through a process of rhetorical simplification that constructs global education and its often-stated goal of producing global citizens around a set of political binaries—global citizen/American citizen, global learning/civic learning, radical/non-partisan, disloyalty/loyalty, activist/citizen, deception/transparency. By mobilizing these binaries against global higher education, both far-right groups like the John Birch Society and conservative educational organizations like the National Association of Scholars seek to create an aura of disloyalty and anti-American sentiment around global education initiatives. What we are encountering in our current moment is not simply, I would argue, a false framing of global education, but rather an outgrowth of populist rhetoric aimed at restoring American exceptionalism to the classroom.

Understanding populism as a discursive process of reducing complexity is particularly important for our discussion of global higher education, as it enables us to recognize how the complexities of global life and global citizenship can be juxtaposed against a simpler vision of national belonging and unity. Such processes of rhetorical simplification are central to populist rhetoric. Following the work of political scientist Cas Mudde, sociologist Bart Bonikowski recently defined populism in his “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States”: “at its core, populism is a form of politics predicated on the juxtaposition of a corrupt elite with a morally virtuous people” (10). In addition to this juxtaposition, Bonikowski also points to “institutional suspicion” as another defining feature of populist politics (11). In order for populist rhetoric to gain traction, it needs to successfully reshape the ways a broad group of people in society conceives of their social identity and their trust in institutions. In her landmark article “Trust the People: Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” Margaret Canovan argues that “[p]opulists claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people: that is to say, they claim to represent the democratic sovereign, not a sectional interest such as an economic class” (4). Speaking for the people, in the sense Canovan defines it, requires a rhetoric of simplicity that resists more nuanced approaches to political problems. Populist rhetoric simplifies the complexities of politics by constituting its arguments in terms that construct a unified people from an intentionally simplified rhetorical and political situation. In fact, populism seizes upon simplification as a central political value. Canovan explains that populists combine “simple and direct” rhetorical descriptions of social and political problems with claims for simple solutions (6). In contrast to nuanced depictions of the complexities of political and social problems, populists argue that “complexity is a self-serving racket perpetuated by professional politicians, and that the solutions to the problems ordinary people care about are essentially simple” (6). Institutional suspicion and arguments against needless complexity are central to political populism but are also tailor-made for arguments against educational institutions and initiatives, which have been positioned by hard right and now alt-right discourse as disconnected from the beliefs, values, and needs of the American people.

As I will show in the analysis below of the National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, a central tactic of populist rhetoric is re-articulating the central terms of an opponent’s rhetoric in ways that position them against the values of a people or a unified vision of a public. We can easily see how this process can be turned against our own calls for global literacies. For example, NCTE’s *Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment* argues that in order to be “active, successful participants in this 21<sup>st</sup> century global society,” students need to be able to “[b]uild intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought” (NCTE, emphasis in original). Compare this use of the term “cross-cultural” with the way the NAS defines the term in their report’s expansive glossary of progressive code-words used in civic and global education initiatives in US colleges and universities. The report defines “cross-cultural” as “progressive advocacy focused upon disaffecting Americans from Western civilization” (Randall 347). By seeking to rearticulate “cross-cultural” in this way, the report works to provide a framework for interpretation for its conservative audiences, one in which references to the terms “global” and “cross-cultural” can be read as signifiers

for processes of progressive indoctrination and, as I will show below, disloyalty to American values. While this example is used simply to illustrate how these populist rhetorical practices might be placed into action, we will see that such rhetoric has already been mobilized against existing programs. Here, the populist rhetoric of organizations like the NAS works to reduce the complexity of the relationship between globalization and the demands it places on higher education by mobilizing a conservative rhetoric of institutional suspicion against higher education.

Ernesto Laclau's work on populist practices of signification can help unpack how this rhetoric achieves its effects. In *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau argues for turning attention away from ethical condemnations of populist reason and rhetoric and towards an understanding of populism as "a constant dimension of political action which necessarily arises (in different degrees) in all political discourses" (18). Laclau argues that populism is not connected to any particular position or party but instead a form of reasoning through rhetorical discourse. Populist rhetoric operates through the production of what he terms "empty signifiers" (60). For Laclau, the function of empty signifiers—terms like "freedom," "order," "justice"—is not to "express *any* positive content but . . . to function as the names of a fullness which is constitutively absent" (96). What is important, for Laclau, is not that the terms are absent but how this absence is created and mobilized: "the empty character of the signifiers that give unity or coherence to a popular camp is not the result of any ideological or political underdevelopment; it simply expresses the fact that any populist unification takes place on a radically heterogeneous social terrain" (98). Empty signifiers, in this way, are not weak or vacuous discourse, but rather rhetorical strategies that reduce the heterogeneous elements and contexts of discourse in an attempt to present a unified populist identity. Joscha Wullweber provides a helpful description of the process: "This is the basic essence of an empty signifier: a signifier which becomes detached from its *particular meaning* in order to provide an empty space that can be filled with *universal meanings*" (81-82). Signifiers don't just become "empty." They are emptied through agonistic discursive contests over the production of meaning. In the discussion below, we will see examples of these agonistic discursive contests over the signifiers "civic education" and "citizenship."

## Populism, Conspiracy, and Patriotism in Anti-Global Higher Education

Drawing on Laclau's discussion of empty signifiers in populist rhetoric, we might examine how signifiers like "global education," "global higher education," and "civic education" are contested and reframed by anti-globalist rhetoric on the right. Global higher education is often used as a shorthand for a variety of different initiatives that sometimes overlap and sometimes directly conflict. In this field of competing visions, we see forms of global education rooted in liberal education that promote a form of ethical global citizenship, but we also see significant initiatives to link global learning to American economic interests and national security. In addition, it is also vitally important to note that the rhetoric of global higher education can also be mobilized to serve the economic interests of colleges and universities. One example of this can be found in how rhetorics of global education are often used to support initiatives to recruit high numbers of international students in order to benefit

from their tuition dollars. It is important to recognize global higher education not simply as an educational good but as a field of overlapping interests and perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Anti-global education discourse from the political right can sometimes lead us to forget this by constructing a conflict between global higher education and nationalist visions of civic education. Anti-global education rhetoric also empties out gradations in political positions within global higher education advocacy by framing seemingly all of global higher education as “radical.” If we take this rhetoric at face value, we risk missing the significant ethical and political problems that stem from a variety of global higher education programs. As scholars in rhetoric and composition studies work out the global turn in our field, it is important that we resist the oversimplified rhetorical framework imposed on global education through right-wing, populist rhetoric.

The history of global higher education and international education in the American university is far too expansive to address here, so I will focus instead on a few key examples of the complexity that anti-global higher education rhetoric seeks to simplify and obscure. The first of these is the relationship between higher education

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and national interests and defense. Claims against global higher education often portray global higher education as a singular movement of radical intellectuals working against American security. Reductions of global education like these seek to empty out the sustained presence of national security and its attendant discourses of economic security in global higher education. The roots of global higher education can be found in the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The passing of the NDEA in 1958 served as a watershed moment for contemporary global education programs, as it provided funding for research centers on international politics and international education programs. Arguments for the role of global higher education in promoting America’s international interests and foreign policy have remained a stable part of global higher education discourse since the early days of the NDEA. Following the 9/11 attacks, arguments for the role of global education in shoring up American national security and protecting American interests gained greater force.

Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry A. Giroux, Sophia A. McClennen, and Kenneth Saltman have argued in their 2015 collection *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism* that since 9/11, global education has been subject to “the most invasive higher education legislation in US history” (27) through bills such as the International Studies in Higher Education Acts proposed in 2003 and 2005. These acts mapped out the need for additional resources for higher educational programs and bodies of disciplinary

study that could advance the interests of American national security. Di Leo et al. suggest that “even though these versions of the law did not pass, the debates over them reveal much about the political lobbying regarding the teaching of global studies since 9/11” (27). Key portions of the acts called for the training of US students in international studies so that they can serve in departments such as Homeland Security (27). In his chapter in the same collection, “Militarizing Higher Education,” Henry Giroux argues that “what is new today is that more research projects in higher education than ever before are being funded by various branches of the military, but either no one is paying attention or no one seems to care” (37). Populist rhetoric papers over both the continued presence of higher educational programs that promote American national interests, security, and militarization, and the tension between these programs and those that seek to bring the complicity of national security’s relationship with education into question.

This vision of international education as necessary to support the aims of American militarization and national security is also present in discourse on K-12 education. In a 2012 report sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, entitled *US Education Reform and National Security*, a panel of experts in K-12 education chaired by Condoleezza Rice and Joel Klein characterize the “problems” of K-12 education as a “grave national security threat” (4). This report carries forward the focus on defense-focused education from the NDEA by noting the need for students in K-12 and higher education who will be educated so that they can contribute to intelligence agencies, defense industries, and the military in an effort to protect America’s “national interests” (9). In this way, the report shows that though the political contexts may differ, the rhetoric of national defense and education has remained strikingly similar to the era of the cold war. However, it is important to note that discourses of security also shape global higher education organizations and initiatives as well. A November 2003 report from NAFSA’s (the Association of International Educators) Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad captures the staying power of cold war logics of global education:

We are now in another Sputnik moment. We can remain as ignorant of the outside world as we were on September 11, or do the work necessary to overcome this handicap. That grim morning took us by surprise, in part, because we had closed our eyes and ears to the world around us. We could not hear or understand what our enemies were saying. We need to reverse this dangerous course by adequately preparing our youth to understand and deal with the problems of today’s world. (“Securing” 3)

Another example can be found in a recent article in the AAC&U’s magazine *Liberal Education*. Here, former Congressman David Skaggs sums up the implicit connection between education, security, and economy: “The ability of the United States to protect itself and its interests around the world—our national security, broadly defined—depends directly on the strength of our economy. And it is clear that economic strength in the era of global competition depends on a nation’s educational attainment. . . .” (Skaggs). What we see in examples like these is that the process of rhetorically framing global education involves a range of different, sometimes conflicting discourses. The danger here for global educators is not simply an external attack from the right, but rather that significant ideological, material, and national interests that already shape global education will be subsumed into a singular vision of global education as a radical or progressive project.

The second example of how the rhetoric of the anti-global education right seeks to simplify the complexities of global education involves reframing global educational programs as a radical conspiracy. The rhetoric of radical conspiracy infuses many of the major arguments from the right that circulate throughout alt-right and hard-right discourse in venues like *Breitbart* and *InfoWars*, but it can also be found in the reports from conservative educational organizations like the NAS. In his brief history of the backlashes to global education, Kenneth Tye shows how conspiracy rhetoric has been part of global education in both higher education and secondary education since the 1980s. Tye argues such conspiracy rhetorics are the strategies of “movement conservatives,” who “reject the notion that there is any kind of equivalence in the world; the United States is superior in all ways” (20). Such rhetoric positions any educational attempt to complicate students’ understanding of global politics or responsibilities as a conspiracy to sow disloyalty. David Horowitz’s *Discover the Networks* provides an example of a contemporary organization that links higher education to notions of liberal conspiracy”. Developed shortly after 9/11, at a time when the nightly news was filled with descriptions and images of networks of terror, Horowitz capitalized on this rhetoric to chart out networks of liberal academics alongside networks of those he claimed supported political terror. Despite claiming in the section “What This Site is About” that the site is not a “snitch file,” a term used against the site by Gail Schaettner, a former Lieutenant Governor of Colorado (Discover), the site nevertheless contextualizes its critique of the left in terms of the rhetoric of the communist or terror cell. For example, “the problem of deceptive public presentation is common enough to all sides but applies with special force to the left, which has a long and well-documented history of dissembling about its agendas. In the past, for example, the Communist party operated through ‘front’ groups that concealed the radical agenda of those who controlled them” (Discover). *Frontpage* magazine, a publication founded and edited by Horowitz, often features articles on higher education that advance the hidden network theory of left indoctrination in education. Such rhetoric creates a framework of interpretation where *keywords* used in global higher education literature and programmatic literature can be transformed into *code words* of a radical conspiracy.

Framing global higher education as radical obscures how global citizenship and global higher education are contested concepts on the left as well as the right, and completely obscures their critique by a number of left intellectuals. Indeed, a significant portion of global higher education initiatives are shaped by a more moderate cosmopolitan ethics than anything resembling radical politics.<sup>6</sup> One of the most often-cited authors in the program literature of the global higher education movement is Martha Nussbaum, whose cosmopolitanism is grounded in political liberalism rather than radicalism. In her 1997 book *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum describes cosmopolitan education as extending the Stoic project of cultivating recognition of “the dignity of humanity in each person” (*Cultivating* 61) by providing curricula that enable students to perceive the human similarity across difference, develop critical thinking skills for evaluating difference, and develop understandings of the economic, historical, and cultural forces that shape cultural difference. Nussbaum argues that this morally constrained but engaged vision of cosmopolitan politics provides a more hopeful paradigm for acting in a world shaped by political factionalism and conflict. In her discussion of the motivation for including the study of other cultures, Nussbaum argues that “[w]orld citizens will

therefore not argue for the inclusion of cross-cultural study in a curriculum primarily on the grounds that it is a way in which members of minority groups can affirm such an identity. . . . Only a human identity that transcends these divisions shows us why we should look at one another with respect across them” (*Cultivating* 67). Such a universalist ethic of global education and global citizenship proceeds from a logic of ethical consensus that has been critiqued by radical democratic theorists for ignoring political conflict (Mouffe) and for abstracting global education from material contexts and disciplinary complicity with state power (Harvey).

National global higher education projects like the AAC&U’s *Shared Futures* encompass a significant range of global education projects across a wide number of campuses, and these projects frame the goals of global higher education and global citizenship in different ways. Few of these programs, however, resemble the descriptions of radicalism advanced by the anti-global education right. Many of these programs reflect, instead, the politics and aspirations of liberal education and see their work as extending rather than replacing liberal learning. According to Kevin Hovland’s brief history in *Shared Futures: Global Learning and Liberal Education*, the work of the AAC&U on global curricula can be traced to *The Project on Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities*, which began in 1990, and “brought together sixty-three institutions eager to broaden notions of a ‘common cultural heritage’ as traditionally manifested in core Western civilization courses” (1). These efforts often define global citizenship and global education in the same cosmopolitan terms as Nussbaum, even as they attempted to develop measurable educational goals. Despite the fact that programs like those of the AAC&U often reflect moderate cosmopolitan values and seek to augment rather than overthrow the structure or values of liberal education, populist anti-global education rhetoric often works to recast global education as a univocal progressive conspiracy.

These brief examples illustrate how global education can be emptied of its heterogeneous perspectives, discourses, and conflicts through populist rhetoric. By reducing global higher education to a radical pedagogy that seeks to distance the affection of students from America and American values, the populist rhetoric of the anti-global education right seeks to advance the identification of a common enemy of academic elites and elite academic organizations who hide their motives behind statements about the complexity of global life and the need for global knowledge and capacities. Such rhetoric is much less about academic engagement and curricular reform and more about an attempt to generate enough political will to replace these programs with nationalist alternatives. I now turn to one of the most substantial recent efforts to mobilize populist rhetoric against global higher education, the National Association of Scholars’ report *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*.

## Anti-Global Education in the National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens*

The National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, researched and prepared by Director of Communications David Randall, mobilizes many of the same arguments against global education that have circulated since the 1980s and uses a range of rhetorical tactics that are employed by groups such as Horowitz’s *Discover the Networks*. At the same

time, *Making Citizens* does introduce a new political signifier and target for this discourse: the New Civics. The term New Civics is used in a variety of ways throughout the contemporary literature on civic education and does not have its origins in the NAS report. In addition, like most scholarly terms, it has its close variants, such as “civic studies,” and encompasses a wide-range of projects, such as service-learning, action civics, and global civics.<sup>7</sup> Many civic studies programs distinguish the New Civics from more traditional forms of civic education by synthesizing the civic knowledge of government and democracy found in earlier visions of civic education with opportunities for civic engagement through service-learning. While work in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies is most often not referenced in the literature of the broader global higher education movement, the NAS report clearly aligns work in rhetoric and composition studies with the New Civics and offers disturbing portrayals of global higher education that resonate with global research and pedagogy in our field.

The 500-page report makes claims to scholarly rigor through its analysis of educational policy documents and through its case studies of civic education programs at the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado State University, the University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Wyoming.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, however, the report describes itself as targeting a “general audience” (36), and the solutions that it offers are clearly targeted at public stakeholders and state and federal legislators. In addition, the title of the press release following the report makes the populist tone of the report exceptionally clear: “Radical Activists Hijack Civics Education, Study Finds” (NAS). This press release was circulated widely by NAS, and news of the report was covered not only by educational sites such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*, but also by *Breitbart* and *Frontpage Magazine*. News of the report was also picked up and circulated through right-wing student media such as *The College Fix*. Seizing on the kairos of Trump’s election, the NAS report suggests political and legal action against a range of contemporary civic programs labeled “New Civics.” Again, following populist logic and rhetoric, the problem is simple—civic education and global education inspire activism and disaffection from America—and the solution is equally simple: defund these programs at the federal and state level, or sue when this is not an option (35).

The report portrays “New Civics” through negative and politically suspect discussions of the national literature on service-learning, civic engagement, and global higher education, but it consistently deploys “civics” as an empty signifier that can be filled with specific political values of American patriotism and national interest and differentiated from the New Civics. Patriotism, in this context, becomes the binary of “disaffection,” which is aligned with New Civic pedagogy: “good civics instruction must also teach civic virtues. We teach civics to make students into competent, confident, and patriotic participants in our nation’s public life. Civics courses and programs should not aim to sow disaffection or foster resentment” (286). In the preface to the report, Peter Wood suggests that the term New Civics functions less as a term that signifies a heterogeneous body of study or group of programs than as a form of “anti-civics” (11) that is “grounded in broad antagonism towards America’s founding principles and its republican ethos” (13). In contrast, the old civics, or traditional civics instruction, “was supposed to provide basic information about the structure of government and the nature of society, and it was also supposed to form an active citizen capable

of taking part in that government” (54). In the recommendations section of the report, the NAS suggests that mandatory courses in the old civics be placed in the core curriculum of universities (290) and that remedial courses be developed for students who do not satisfactorily complete a civic literacy entrance exam (289). This ambitious list of courses (six courses total in the core curriculum) would focus on the history of Western Europe, the history of the United States, and the core political ideas and texts of American democracy (290-92). According to the report, the old civics teaches this knowledge in non-partisan ways, though the depiction of this non-partisan knowledge is interesting: “All of this can and should be taught without favoring any political party or cause, except the cause of fostering the integrity of our free and self-governing republic. Civics education should teach students how and why to love America, with both head and heart” (286). This statement points to more than just the nationalist tenor of NAS’s rhetoric. Instead, NAS constructs civic education out of a rhetoric of patriotism and a rhetoric of the intellectual tradition of American democracy that allows them to position global higher education as not only disloyal but intellectually vapid.

In making its case against global higher education, the NAS draws on the populist rhetorical playbook discussed above, positioning global higher education as a radical liberal conspiracy to promote disloyalty to America and as a threat to American exceptionalism. New Civics (including global education) is projected as a form of progressive activism designed to move students away from national feeling and towards feelings of antagonism against and shame for America. Further advancing the rhetoric of liberal conspiracy, the report provides a “Dictionary of Deception”—a compendium of “camouflage vocabulary” that the left uses to portray their programs (14). In this dictionary, we find global citizenship defined in the following way: “Global Citizenship’ is a way to combine civic engagement, study abroad, and disaffection from primary loyalty to and love of America. . . . A global citizen seeks to impose rule by an international bureaucratic elite upon the American government, and the beliefs of an international alliance of progressive non-governmental organizations upon the American people” (22). Two aspects of the rhetoric of this definition are important to note. The first is that it portrays global citizenship as a shared, unidimensional goal of global education rather than as a contested term. The second is that, while the NAS is a scholarly organization that is not affiliated with hard-right news sites or organizations, its rhetorical characterization of global education is similar, in this instance, to the globalist conspiracy rhetoric that we find in the pages of *Breitbart* and other hard-right news sites.

Framing global citizenship and global education in this way serves as a key rhetorical means for advancing NAS’s arguments against other elements of the “New Civics,” especially service learning and community literacy. While service-learning and community literacy do play a role in many global higher education programs, the rhetorical strategy of the report is to position global higher education as an outgrowth of service-learning that makes the end goals of liberal civic education clear. Two examples from the report illustrate this rhetorical move. The first argues that “the origins of ‘global citizenship’ practically lie in the impulse by service-learning advocates to spread their programs to suburban and rural campuses” because the faculty who developed these programs “found it easier to persuade students to go overseas for a semester than to drive 50 miles to an urban ghetto” (108) and supposedly needed a term that would enable them to extend their local programs.

This is, of course, simply false. Around one percent of US college and university students study abroad in any given year (NAFSA “Trends”). However, advancing this claim allows NAS to draw service-learning and global education together in its rhetoric and portray both as fostering anti-American values.

For NAS, global higher education, which is emptied of its differences, conflicts, and heterogeneous discourses and recast as global citizenship education, offers a form of citizenship hostile to American values. The populist logic developed in this report is worth quoting in full:

Global Citizenship actually directly subverts the purportedly civic goals of civic engagement, because it substitutes loyalty to the globe (defined around progressive policy goals) for loyalty to country. The campaign for Global Citizenship demonstrates most clearly that the transformation of *service-learning* into *civic engagement* results in an education that not only hollows out traditional civic literacy but also actively disaffects students from love of their country. Civic engagement is worse than service-learning precisely because it now encompasses and encourages such actively anti-civic movements. (94)

It is important to note here that no direct evidence is ever cited showing that global higher education, service-learning, or any of the other educational endeavors labeled “New Civics” actually inspires disloyalty to country or a lack of patriotism. Instead, the framework of liberal educators as part of an anti-American global elite is simply assumed and carried forward.

Another troubling rhetorical move also requires attention—the construction of a rhetorical relationship between New Civics and violence on campus. This a particularly disturbing rhetorical move, one that can be put to use to devastating effect against civic educators who teach principles of collective action and community engagement. In an editorial published on February 6, 2017 on the website *RealClearEducation*, Peter Wood develops this rhetorical framework in response to the February 1 protests at UC Berkeley over Milo Yiannopoulos’s speaking engagement: “New Civics, your time has come. We see you taking your selfies in the light of the arson-lit fires in Berkeley. President Trump. I’m glad you noticed. What we do next is indeed the question. But clearly, the status quo in higher education cannot stand” (“Berkeley Ablaze”). I pause here to consider this rhetorical move because it underscores the importance of recognizing how work in rhetoric and composition studies, work clearly linked to the New Civics in NAS’s report, is subject to being aligned with acts of campus violence in order to advance a hard-right educational agenda. Curiously, despite their daily presence in the national news, Woods’ article fails to mention the hate crimes carried out on college campuses following the election, nor the numerous, peaceful protestors at the Berkeley protests. The point, of course, is not to discuss campus violence or peaceful protest, but to further a rhetoric of suspicion against a range of programs that fall under the capacious category New Civics.

It is important that scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition studies recognize *Making Citizens* as a compendium of right-wing populist arguments that can be mobilized against our work, especially work in service-learning, community engagement, and the global turn. The report’s specific identification of rhetoric and composition programs and courses with the work of New Civics positions our field as part of a radical conspiracy to sow disloyalty to America among students. Unfortunately, the report also gives us a sense of how scholars in our field will be portrayed as

intellectuals through its exceptionally disturbing depiction of Veronica House, Associate Faculty Director for Service-Learning and Outreach in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. In a style that resembles the rhetorical tactics of David Horowitz's *Discover the Networks*, the report places Professor House's faculty photo next to a bio that states, in bold, "her presence registers the New Civics' infiltration of introductory and remedial writing programs" (282). Such rhetoric lets us know that our work and our identities as faculty are not above being described in frightening terms. As a field with commitments to community engagement, global education, and civic literacy, rhetoric and composition studies should not take these claims lightly, but rather formulate our own agonistic responses.

## Towards an Agonistic Response to Anti-Global Education

Formulating a critical response will require us to engage not only anti-global education discourse on the right but also visions of global higher education and international education that make up the global turn in the contemporary American university. Articulating the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires defending our work against the populist rhetoric of the right while also engaging the conflicts and discourses that shape the broader global turn in

***“Articulating the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires defending our work against the populist rhetoric of the right while also engaging the conflicts and discourses that shape the broader global turn in higher education.”***

higher education. This is, of course, an exceptionally difficult rhetorical situation. Political threats to our work from the anti-global education right make it necessary for the scholars in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies to forge alliances with programs and initiatives that

have significant support, both national support and support from our own institutions. At the same time, however, we must recognize that global higher education is also infused with discourses and motives that require critique. In other words, we need to reconceive our own global turn not simply as a “turn,” but also as hegemonic, agonistic work that critically responds to the visions and programs of global higher education nationally and on our own campuses, even as it responds to critiques, false characterizations, and conspiracy from beyond the walls of the university. Chantal Mouffe describes this type of agonistic politics in *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* as a “double moment,” one of “dis-articulation” and “re-articulation” (74). Agonistic politics requires not only the work of critique (dis-articulation), but also the work of “engagement’ with institutions, with the aim of bringing about a different hegemony” (71). Contrary to the picture of global higher education painted by NAS and others, global higher education encompasses a range of distinctive and overlapping perspectives and initiatives. By engaging national global higher education initiatives and programs on our own campuses, we can gain powerful allies for our work, but we will find that such engagements will require us to critically articulate our own visions of global education in ways that are sometimes agonistic with other visions. For now, I want to suggest that in order to engage the broader global higher education movement, scholars working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies

will need to develop outward facing arguments for the value of our work.

A key starting point for engaging this movement can be found in the more recent shift of global higher education programs towards capacities of global engagement. Recent reports and initiatives from programs like the AAC&U's *Shared Futures* have sought to develop concrete civic goals for global higher education based on performative capacities rather than civic knowledge, as well as strategies for assessing students' learning. Kevin Hovland, former director of *Shared Futures*, notes in a 2014 report for AAC&U and NAFSA, the Association for International Educators, "By focusing on students' capacities instead of the institution's programs, departments, courses, and trips, however, it is possible to begin a more inclusive and generative conversation about how better to match

***“Advancing and defending the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires a dual response, one that critically disarticulates the knowledge of our courses from their characterization as intellectually vacuous by the right, and one that also critically unpacks the black box of ‘global communication skills’ that are often portrayed neutrally and pre-politically in the literature of the broader global turn in higher education.”***

the values expressed in the mission statement with the expectations of faculty, student affairs professionals, and students” (“Global Learning” 7). Later in the report, Hovland presents AAC&U's Global Learning Rubric, which envisions students as global learners who possess communication skills that enable them to engage in “meaningful interaction with people from other cultures in the context of a complex problem or opportunity” (“Global Learning” 6). Here, work in translingualism and cultural rhetorics might help unpack the rhetorical and linguistic capacities students need. Work on global literacies and translingualism could expand understandings of communication across borders by exploring how translingual practices are configured by and configure “translocal space” (Canagarajah, *Translingual* 160) and how rhetorical strategies of “transcultural repositioning” (Guerra, “Emerging” 8) can enable students to engage rhetorically with others across cultural difference and communities. Work in transnational rhetoric could expand students' understanding of how communication flows through transnational networks in which “rhetorics travel and are dispersed across the globe” (Dingo 14). Such work can also enable students to develop capacities for reading the cultural texts that travel through these networks “intercontextually” so that they can learn to be “reflexive about the social codes and habits of interpretation that shape the composition or a performance's meaning . . . and to comprehend how texts are formed by the institutions and material contexts that produce them and through which they circulate” (Hesford, *Spectacular* 11). These are only a few of many examples of work in our field that can be used to illustrate the importance of our discipline to the broader global turn in higher education.

This project is not simply one of engaging national programs but also one of engaging global higher education programs on our own campuses. For this, we need to examine how our institutions symbolically, materially, and spatially frame global higher education on our campuses in an effort to look for local allies. Such an approach will also require us to unpack assumptions and descriptions

about communication, literacy, and rhetoric in an effort to argue for the value of our work for specific programs. On my own campus, for example, global citizenship was a strand of a campus Quality Enhancement Program, and my university has developed a wide range of resources that are designed to promote global citizenship. In addition, the university has recently established a Human Rights Institute to support its already established programs in civic engagement and global education. Here, a key activity is seeking out opportunities for collaboration that speak to the value of literacy instruction and rhetorical education for the university's global programs. At the same time, small steps, such as collaborating with global education initiatives on our campuses to sponsor writing contests can be an achievable initial step. Through such collaborations, we will have ample opportunities to share our knowledge and research on literacy, rhetoric, and civic engagement with our colleagues and forge strong alliances on campus that can help not only advance but also protect our work.

Critical alignments such as these are particularly important during a time when a significant amount of antagonistic discourse is being aimed at work in global higher education and civic engagement. The repetition of globalist conspiracy theories and anti-global education arguments across various media and networks can also create resistances inside the classroom. The circulation of these ideas already comes at a time of growing polarization among students. The most recent publication of the UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program's well-known survey, *The American Freshman*, reported that "the contentious 2016 U.S. presidential election dominated the news cycle in 2016, and findings from the 51<sup>st</sup> administration of the Freshman Survey reveal one of the most politically polarized cohorts of entering first-year students in the history of the survey, with a larger proportion of students placing greater importance on life goals of influencing the political structure and social values" (Eagan et al. 3). Teaching during a time of polarized politics, one shaped by discourses of globalist conspiracy, makes us prone to risks not only outside of the classroom but inside the classroom.

Student resistance can, of course, be part of a productive, agonistic process of engaging understandings of national and global citizenship, but it can also manifest itself in terms that pose particular threats to global educators. Such risks will manifest themselves locally in different forms, but I would like to explore two central examples. First, if we are to truly extend the reach of transnational literacy and global higher education we must provide opportunities and options for a wide range of writing teachers, including adjuncts, non-tenure earning full-time faculty, and graduate students, to explore global rhetorics and questions of citizenship in their classes. Without recognizing this point, we risk developing an exclusive focus on classes, initiatives, and programs that advance the global turn in rhetoric and composition most fully for the minority of us who occupy privileged positions as professorial faculty and who enjoy more protections from our institutions. At the same time, arguments from the political right against global higher education are often grounded in arguments against diversity. *Making Citizens* argues, for example, that "civics that embraces the ideology of diversity" sees "the ideals of American unity and common experience as illusions" (30). With such a view of diversity, it is easy to see how perceptions of teachers' race, ethnicity, gender, and class might lead to antagonistic encounters inside and outside of the classroom.

Threats of vocal student resistance, negative student evaluations, and lawsuits could have a chilling effect on the desire to explore global issues and questions of global citizenship. A central part of the local work of developing a critical response to such resistance should be work that brings a wide range of writing faculty, writing program administrators, graduate students, and departmental and university administrators together to collaboratively to seek out structures of institutional support and protection.

## Conclusion

As I hope I have illustrated, scholars and teachers contributing to the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies must seek out opportunities for engagement with the discourses, programs, and networks of power that shape the global higher education movement in the contemporary American university. Such work should not abandon the transnational focus of current work in the field, but it should take on the public role of articulating both the value of the knowledge of our field to this movement while also forging critical responses to the myth-making of the political right about both our field and global higher education. Such a project cannot be accomplished by singular actors or confined to one particular role in the field. As arguments against global education continue to be circulated, scholars working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition need to play a significant role in addressing both the global higher education movement and its hard-right critics. In particular, those in our field with significant ties to service-learning and community literacy need to develop public responses to reports such as the NAS's *Making Citizens*. At the same time, we need to provide students, parents, and the public with clear arguments about the value of rhetorical education in a world shaped deeply by globalization and take the time to listen to their responses. Ultimately, however, we need to recognize that advancing the work of the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies will require a continuous process of conflict, or the agonistic work of politics.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Major foundations like the Heritage Foundation and the John Birch Society have pursued their own anti-global education efforts. These efforts are also supported by several organizations of conservative academics, some of whom have connections to hard right news sources. One example is *Dissident Prof*, founded by Mary Grabar, a PhD in English who has written multiple articles for *Breitbart* on global education in colleges and universities and in the Common Core. However, arguments against global education can also be found on conservative higher education sites that features writing by more established academics, such as *Minding the Campus*.

<sup>2</sup> See Elizabeth Redden's January 10, 2017 *Inside Higher Ed* article, "No Certificate of Global Citizenship," for contemporary responses to this statement on the left and right.

<sup>3</sup> Similar arguments can be found across a range of sources. See the discussion of the National Association of Scholars' *Making Citizens* below, but also see works such as David Gelernter's *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered in the Obamacrats)*.

<sup>4</sup> An important strand of this argument that I have not addressed due to space limitations is the relationship between academic freedom and politics in the classroom. Stanley Fish's recent response to the NAS's *Making Citizens* in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Citizen Formation is Not Our Job," is a good example of this perspective.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Justin Lewis for this important insight regarding how this important financial motive often gets buried in the rhetoric of global higher education programs.

<sup>6</sup> The cosmopolitan vision of education Nussbaum outlines in *Cultivating Humanity* and other works is often cited in the organizational literature and research of initiatives like the AAC&U's *Shared Futures*. A range of scholars has worked to define more critical theoretical and educational approaches to cosmopolitanism. See Walter Mignolo's "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis," Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins' *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, and Sharon Todd's *An Imperfect Education: Facing Humanity, Rethinking Cosmopolitanism* for three important and representative critical approaches.

<sup>7</sup> For a clear overview of the aims of Civic Studies, see the often-cited "Summer Institute of Civic Studies-Framing Statement," composed in 2007 by Harry Boyte et al. For an example of New Civics initiatives and foundations, see the Spencer Foundation's New Civics Initiative, which is described on their website in "The New Civics Program Statement."

<sup>8</sup> For more substantiated sociological research that challenges some of the reports' assumptions about radicalism and liberal conversion, see Neil Gross and Solon Simmons' collection, *Professors and Their Politics*, and Jon A. Shields and Joshua Dunn's study, *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University*.

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