



### **Chris Migliaccio**

I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.

– John Muir

In 2006 during my seventeenth year on the Natural Science faculty at Miami Dade College and after teaching for the first three years of our Honors College, I was selected to attend the Global Citizenship Seminar and serve as our delegation's Lead Faculty Advisor. That meant I would be working

closely with the GCA (then Salzburg Global Seminar) administration in planning many of the curricular and logistical aspects of this Seminar. Little did I know then that this would be the start of a long personal and professional friendship as well as a life changing experience. As we worked together long distance on a weekly basis in the three months prior to our Session, my anticipation grew because I knew intuitively that this was going to be something so different from and so much more rewarding than anything I'd ever done before.

The long flight from Miami to Frankfurt, the short hop from Frankfurt to Munich, and the bus ride from Munich to Salzburg all contributed to a heightened sense of anticipation in our forty two students and my three faculty colleagues. The fact that the ground was covered in snow and the Alps loomed over us all added to our excitement. Upon arrival at the Schloss, we hit the ground running with an introduction and tour of our Seminar setting to get everyone in the spirit and to deal with jet lag. After a welcome night's sleep we began our first plenary session with an introduction to global citizenship and I sponged up every word and every image I could. Terms such as *worldview*, *ethnocentrism*, *global citizenship* were all new to me but I instantly began to see how I could incorporate them into my environmental science and Honors Leadership Seminar courses. Before the Seminar, I had always approached the concept of interconnectedness from a primarily ecological perspective, but at the Seminar I was introduced to the four legged stool model of sustainability. This model suggests that for any community / human system to be healthy (i.e. sustainable) in the long term, it's four environments (i.e. legs: natural, economic, social, and cultural) must all be healthy and connected to one another. We did an eye-opening activity where four groups of students and faculty each described in detail what a healthy "leg" would look like in our own bioregion. Then we tallied how many connections each leg had with the other three. The number was astounding. When I returned to Miami, I began to use this exact activity in my environmental science course and the students responded enthusiastically because it helped them understand that the "environment" was not just the natural world. Students studying business, the arts, education, the sciences, and history began to see how their academic and career interests were all interlinked and that they had a civic responsibility to engage in the future of our community.

When I had some free time at the Seminar, I wandered Salzburg's Old City camera in hand making images of sustainability to include in my courses at MDC. The majority of our students have a perspective from the Americas so seeing images from Europe were new to them. I had long considered myself a warm climate "outdoor" photographer but Salzburg's Old City is so rich, that I just had to take advantage of it and shift my own field of view to that of cold weather "street" photography and be open to new possibilities. Initially, it was a challenge that eventually led to a coffee table book of images.

Adding ethnocentrism to my classroom discussions of factors contributing to one's worldview enriched my classes because our Miami Dade College student population is exceptionally diverse. My students loved sharing

their culture's views of family, Nature, the workplace, education and learned a great deal from one another. One year's Seminar theme of the push and pull factors of immigration gave me an entirely new way to approach human population demographics. A lecture comparing free trade with fair trade provided me with ideas for a classroom activity using coffee as a case study. Prior to coming to the Seminar, my understanding of the Holocaust was limited to an intellectual one informed by books and movies. Walking through the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial museum and then standing outside in the blowing snow gave me a glimpse of what it must have been like to live and die in that grim place. Sadness and loss gripped me and on the long bus trip back to Salzburg and through the evening's debrief. And then some years, we visited on beautiful sunny Spring days and I saw messages of hope and rebirth in the camp. Each visit contributed its own unique set of understandings of the past and visions of the future. These were just a few examples of how Seminar lectures and discussions over six different Sessions shifted my worldview and what I taught.

The Seminar's small group capstone project work changed the way I approached group projects in my own classes. I learned how to provide enough of a framework of instructions without being overly prescriptive and how to evaluate work so that everyone was able to take group ownership while being held accountable for their own contributions. I learned a lot about group dynamics by watching the students at work and withholding judgement. With limited time to get to know teammates for the first time and produce a work of merit, students (and I) learned the value of process. "Failing forward" became a valuable lesson and I took this home to my own classes. After an MDC Honors College faculty colleague attended a Seminar, we began to jointly re-organize our two Honors Leadership Seminars to align with GCA concepts of global citizenship. We began to use the Seminar lessons on asking good questions as frameworks for academic enquiry and civic engagement. We developed an in-depth community needs assessment activity as a pre-requisite for our students' civic engagement projects.

As I look back on these Seminar experiences, I think my greatest takeaways came from the students. I knew some of them from our Campus before the Seminar but with three other Campuses sending students, I met most of them for the first time at our Orientations. Living, working, and relaxing with them in the intellectually-charged Seminar environment enabled me to develop relationships not possible in the usual classroom/Campus life setting. During the Seminar, I watched students come out of their shells and develop greater self-confidence, responsibility, and demonstrate understanding of complex ideas. I heard some students share deep emotions in our Dachau debrief and then weave those experiences into powerful transfer application essays a year later. I saw quiet students stand up in post-plenary Q&A sessions and ask deep questions that wowed us all. I saw shy students take leadership roles in group projects and then return to Miami as changed people. I watched First Year students become Campus and community leaders in their final year at MDC and openly credit their Salzburg experience as the tipping point in their own development.

My very first GCA *Global Citizenship Seminar* gave me significantly greater takeaways than any other professional development activity I experienced in my thirty two years at Miami Dade College and then I had the good fortune to participate in five Sessions. Each one reshaped my worldview to have a much more global and interdisciplinary perspective and gave me greater understanding of the issues we all face. These Seminars often placed me outside of my own comfort zone by challenging my beliefs and then both gently and intentionally helped me to go within so that I could find deeper meaning in my work and in my world. They showed me how a small number of dedicated educators and leaders can change the world. Each time, I left a changed person and I saw that in my students. Year after year.

*Chris participated in the Global Citizenship program six times between 2006-2019. He retired from teaching at MDC in 2019 and was conferred the title of Professor Emeritus of Ecology & Environmental Science.*