

It's the shot heard 'round the world:

International studies professors, students see value in teaching current events

Melissa Kansky
Assistant News Editor

Professors agree that the recent political unrest in North Africa and the Middle East provide international studies students with a greater understanding of course material, prompting them to integrate current events into the curriculum.

Following the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, revolutionary groups have organized in Libya in an attempt to end Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's 40-year rule over the nation. Unlike the revolt in Egypt, which was met by relative neutrality on behalf of the military despite a violent response from police, the Libyan military is pushing back hard on protesters.

"The difference that Libya has the power to really go after these revolutionaries could be the difference between them toppling the government, as in the case of Mubarak in Egypt," said freshman David Oleksak, an international studies student.

Incorporating discussions about these recent events

enables students to see ideas as tangible products, said Rudy Zarzar, professor of political science.

"It seems to me, when I teach political theory, for example, people tend to think that theory is up in the sky and not relevant to the real world," Zarzar said, "but we want to show how theory can help us understand and explain things going on in the world."

When teaching classes concerning the theory of nonviolence and international terrorism, Zarzar frames the recent events to explain instances when nonviolent revolutions are effective and when they fail.

Ismail Lagardien, assistant professor of political science, calls upon recent events to illustrate international politics and global issues in terms of political hegemony.

And in Oleksak's international relations class, he said Sean Giovanello, assistant professor of political science, reserves time to focus on current events.

The marriage between academics and news helps students better understand

both the theories and foreign relations, Oleksak said.

"Prior (to the international studies class) I had an understanding of what was going on in the world," he said, "but now I see how the pieces fit together."

While placing current events in the frame of international relations theory helps students comprehend theoretical explanations of international relations, the melding of the two also illuminates individuals' own influence regarding world events.

"We have seen the potential our generation has with all the communication and social networking," Oleksak said, "and how we can utilize it and make our voices heard in the world in general."

Lagardien also approaches international studies courses as a way to enhance students' awareness of world events and acknowledgement of human possibilities.

"When the students leave my class they go back into society," he said. "Part of my teaching is to empower them to better deal with issues in the social world."

The unrest in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya demonstrated the disjunction between the citizens and the political leaders, and this over-arching belief enables Lagardien to incorporate it into most of his international relations classes, he said.

"It challenges the assumption that international relations is only about super power politics or the politics of great powers," he said. "The voices of the poor and the marginalized and the weak have to be heard in international relations, and this is the reason why I think it is important (to teach)."

Zarzar said he interprets the series of reactionary forces as a movement toward democracy. Oleksak said he also views these events as monumental historical moments.

Given the influence of the revolutionary groups, both argue that not only international studies students should have an interest in the current political climate.

"It is important for anyone (to understand) because this is going to be the world we are inheriting in five, 10 years," Oleksak said.

POLITICAL UNREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST

DEC. 17, 2010:
Tunisian citizen, Mohamed Bouazizi, 26, sets himself on fire to demonstrate his dissent concerning unemployment.

DEC. 19, 2010:
Bouazizi's death ignites protests in Tunisia.

JAN. 25, 2011:
Egyptians take to the streets, calling "Down with Mubarak."

JAN. 27, 2011:
Thousands in Yemen protest 32-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

FEB. 14, 2011:
Demonstrations begin in Bahrain.

FEB. 17, 2011:
Libyan revolutionaries organize protest against Muammar Gaddafi.

Information courtesy of CNN and Al Jazeera

Chemistry professor receives national grant

Rachel Southmayd
Opinions Editor

Joel Karty, associate professor of chemistry, was recently awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation for his research in the field of chemistry.

Karty's project is titled "Resonance and Inductive Effects in Fundamental Chemical Systems" and will study two phenomena that occur during chemical reactions.

"When they take place together, we can know what the sum total effect is but we don't know what each one is doing in its own part," Karty said.

Karty said \$36,000 will go toward stipends for three undergraduate research assistants for three summers.

The money will also go toward purchasing new computers to accomplish computations more quickly, both during the summer and the school year.

After a month of writing the proposal, Karty receives the NSF grant on the first attempt.

If it hadn't been awarded, he

would have been forced to wait another full year to re-apply.

He said the organization looks at an applicant's past performance and the proposal to make a decision.

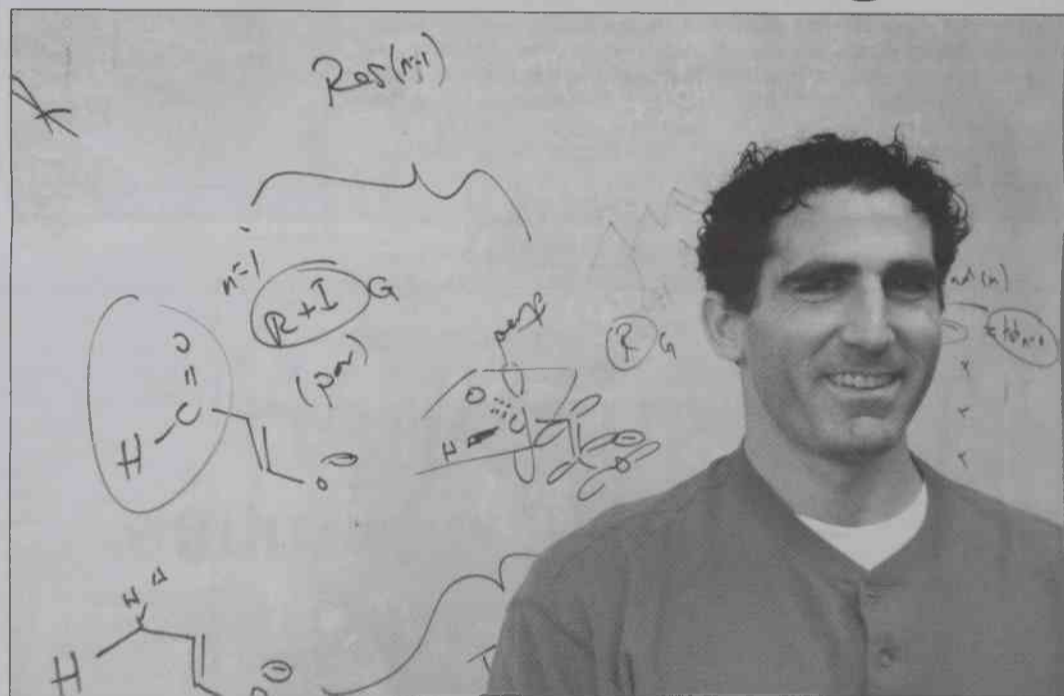
"It's much easier to convince them that this is going to be a good project if your track record is solid," he said.

What Karty is doing is known as fundamental, or basic research. This is different from applied research, which Karty said most people are more familiar with.

"Basic research, fundamental research does not have an immediate societal problem to solve but is taking place for the primary reason of better understanding of the science," he said.

While there are no immediate implications for this research, Karty said they could have greater effects later down the road because applied research is often based on, or utilizes, fundamental research.

"It's important to be able to keep contributing to the fundamental research without having an immediate problem



Joel Karty, associate professor of chemistry, will use the \$36,000 he received to study two phenomena that occur during chemical reactions.

to solve so that later on, a problem we don't know about now might be tackled using the stuff we learn about today," he said.

Karty said one of his incentives for applying was creating quality educational experiences for students.

"The grant-getting stuff

itself I think stems from what it is that we do as professors. It all goes part in parcel with undergraduate research," he said.

University deans challenge requirement changes

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of Communications, Business and Education will not fulfill these requirements.

Paul Parsons, dean of the School of Communications, said many classes in the School of Communications have value as general studies courses and he has written a letter asking the review committee to consider this.

"Our philosophy is very akin and consistent with arts and sciences," Parsons said. "I believe we have courses that appropriately belong under the general studies banner."

The challenge the revised curriculum poses is that all students would potentially be required to either major or minor in the College of Arts and Sciences, which could be very difficult to do, said Kenn Gaither, associate dean of the School of Communications.

"Our belief is that the importance of communications should be a part of this proposal more than it is," Gaither said.

"The School of Communications is very much left out of this proposal."

Such a requirement would mean more advanced planning for students, according to Mary Gowan, dean of the School of Business.

"This new proposal may require that students begin planning their majors and minors a little earlier," she said. "It will require students to make choices earlier if they wish to study different subject areas."

The proposed curriculum opens doors for many interdisciplinary opportunities, Gowan said.

"We believe it's important for students to be able to discuss topics other than

business," she said. "We value the arts and sciences and by taking courses in that area, you become more aware of what's going on in the world."

Tom Mould, associate professor and general studies review committee co-chair, said he believes there is always room for improvement.

"The changes we are proposing will allow students to make connections within each class they take," he said. "It will encourage integrated learning."

If the proposed curriculum is finalized by a faculty vote in May 2011, the committee would expect to see changes develop within the school in the fall of 2013.

Another proposed revision is to

increase the foreign language proficiency from the 122 level to the 221 level.

"To better prepare Elon students to become global citizens, they truly need a higher proficiency in foreign language," Warman said.

The committee is also proposing to change the distribution in the arts and sciences categories and hours. While 32 credit hours in the arts and sciences are currently required under the current general studies curriculum, 24 are required under the proposed curriculum.

The last major change proposed in the general studies curriculum is expanding the Experiential Learning Requirement so students are required to complete at least two of the Elon Experiences. One of the completed requirements must involve diversity or community engagement.

Kassandra Cloos contributed to this article.