

PHILOSOPHICAL/CONCEPTUAL STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AT EVERGREEN

John Perkins            26 October 1988

Some years ago the wildlife biologist Ray Dasman made a distinction between people who lived primarily upon the materials available nearby their dwelling place and those whose life style depended upon materials drawn from all parts of the globe. Advanced industrial societies are of the latter type, because they depend upon trade to bring food and minerals into their regions from many far-off places. In turn, they manufacture or grow things that they export to pay for their imports. The United States, Japan, and Europe are pre-eminent "Biosphere People" today.

Less-developed, third world countries tend to depend more upon materials and crops grown within or near their boundaries, but increasingly even these countries are now making the transition to becoming "Biosphere People," too. By some point early in the next century, few peoples will remain on the Earth that do not have at least some important attributes of "Biosphere People."

Many of the students Evergreen will educate in the next few years will be in their active work years during the transition in which all Earth's people will become part of a global, Biospheric political economy. It remains an open question whether people will gain the skill and wisdom to avoid plundering the Biosphere and fouling it to the point of collapse (and the demise of many people). This very question opens an avenue towards a new conceptualization for international studies: the future "Global Citizen" will of necessity have to understand both the human cultures and the functioning of different parts of the Biosphere in order to create a world society that can survive for the indefinite future.

Much of the motivation for previous efforts in international studies has been the sheer curiosity each of us feels about someone who speaks and lives in different ways than we do. As a result, international studies has had a heavy emphasis on language studies, literature, history, and politics. Increasing economic trade has recently increased the efforts made in teaching about the international economy.

This proposal does not eliminate any of the previous components of international studies. Instead, it posits that an environmental dimension needs to be added. In addition, the environmental aspects need to be seen as integral to the functioning of all cultures. In a sense, educating the Biospheric Citizen provides a concept that can integrate all aspects of international studies.