

# UNST 151: Making Sense of Beliefs and Values: A Guided Tour for Global Citizens

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## Course Description

Designed for Madison International, a vibrant Learning Community at JMU, this course explores the origin and nature of beliefs and values, and how they are linked to actions, policies, and practices around the world. These processes are examined through a range of "big picture" issues (e.g., religious, political, environmental, gender-based, cultural) that are relevant to all global citizens. Class Notes: restricted to Madison International Learning Community students only.

Because this course has been developed under the auspices of the non-profit International Beliefs and Values Institute (IBAVI) ([www.ibavi.org](http://www.ibavi.org)) – and is a core expression of the Cultivating the Globally Sustainable Self Summit Series (<https://summitx.org/>) – we are well aware that the path toward global citizenship is not to be taken lightly. That is because human beings are not neutral actors but are driven by all sorts of needs and issues of which we may or may not be aware, and which often are a direct result of the life experiences, personal characteristics, and sociocultural influences that make us who we are – what we call “formative variables.” So, it is very important to grapple with questions of why we are who we are, and why that matters in terms of the specific paths we take in our relationships, work, and lives.

But if the Socratic admonition to “know thyself” is necessary, it is not sufficient for global citizenship as we define it through this course. Rather, we also must apply this awareness effectively to the “wicked problems” of our day. These are big picture issues like climate change, gender equality, or racial conflict, which are best understood and addressed by multiple disciplines working collaboratively together at home and abroad in the pursuit of common means and shared ends. For example, in this course, you will have the unique opportunity to get to know a cohort of same-age Japanese students at Kansai University in Osaka, Japan. Specifically, through a grant-based collaboration between the U.S. and Japanese governments, students in both countries will use “Collaborative Online International Learning” or COIL to learn together and address the “wicked problems” we collectively face (see <https://www.acenet.edu/Programs-Services/Pages/Communities/US-Japan-COIL-Initiative.aspx>).

## Course Objectives

Our overarching goal in this course is to begin facilitating the development of self-reflective, socially aware, and globally engaged citizens who have the necessary dedication, knowledge, skills, and experiences to make a demonstrable difference in the world. We do so through the application of informed scholarship and thoughtful practice across the following five areas of concentration: 1) Conflict Resolution, 2) Global Education, 3) Human Rights, 4) Religious and Cultural Understanding, and 5) Sustainability. This unique approach – the Applied Global Studies or “AGS Model” (see <http://www.ibavi.org/content/applied-global-studies.php>) – is characterized by a number of learning-based components (e.g., student-centered learning, project-based learning, field-based learning), all of which are informed by international and interdisciplinary knowledge, skills, and practice.

Ultimately, we want our students and graduates to become local and global change agents, who exemplify, value, and demonstrate: 1) self-awareness (e.g., understand who we are as human beings, why we believe / value that which we do, and what our motivations are for assuming the “change

agent” role); 2) other-awareness (e.g., the capacity and inclination to apprehend and respond appropriately and sensitively to the needs of others); 3) global awareness (e.g., a sophisticated understanding of, and abiding interest in, the *what*, *why*, and *how* of global affairs); 4) domain-specific knowledge in one or more of the “wicked problems” of our day (e.g., cultural understanding, human rights, sustainability); 5) domain-specific skills (e.g., in advocacy, communication, scholarship); and 6) professional development (e.g., an abiding commitment to learning and growth throughout our lives and careers). In short, we seek to use the most current and innovative approaches to international and interdisciplinary learning in order to help our students gain the confidence and competence necessary to become successful change agents across a wide range of settings, both locally and globally.

### **Field-Based Experience**

Students will go into the community on a Saturday to visit with representatives of leading NGOs who work in one or more of the five thematic areas that are central to this course. After an orientation discussion together in the morning, students will break off into smaller groups to spend the day with leaders in an area that is the focus of their final video project, described below. Typical sites for this field-based experience have included a refugee resettlement program, an organic farm focusing on sustainable agriculture, an interfaith dialogue organization, a conflict mediation center, and a program to promote rural outreach and education. Students will determine their topic area in class. If a student is unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts or other circumstances, they are asked to notify the Faculty in Residence as soon as possible in order to arrange for an alternative assignment.