

OUR OFF-THE-BOOKS GISP

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There are many ways for students to pursue independent study at Brown: individual Independent Study Projects (ISPs), Group Independent Study Project (GISP), and now even Global Independent Study Projects (GLISPs). But there isn't a direct mechanism for what we have been doing this year: a co-taught, professor-designed and directed, year-long Group Independent Study Project centered around a research project—in our case, the politics and policies of fisheries management and seafood consumption in the US. Think of it as a research GISP without the pre-approval process.

We called it the Fish GISP, but that is the unofficial name. Officially we recruited ten students to take the Fish GISP in the Fall and Spring semesters, half of them with each of us. There are eleven students this Spring. (Only one student didn't return in the spring and two new students joined.) It is an eclectic group of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Environmental Studies and Public Policy students are well-represented, but Classics, Math, Applied Math, Economics, International Relations and Biology are also represented.

We are a decidedly aquatic group: two kayakers; two members of the Sailing team, one from the Swimming team; one student with ties to commercial fishing, three with strong recreational fishing backgrounds; and a student whose parents were professional lifeguards and competitive in free diving and spear fishing.

We meet weekly for a seminar-length session. In the fall, we began with assigned books and papers representing divergent views about the values of fish. Then we broke into subgroups organized around the questions: *What are the competing conceptions of success in fisheries management? In what ways has the Magnuson-Stevens Act of 1976 changed over the past 40 years? What does the concept of "fishing communities" mean in terms of meaningful access to decision-making? How has fish consumption changed in America in the last 100 years?* We each oversaw groups and met with groups individually. The weekly meetings became a combination of progress reports and larger group input and discussion.

Many of the discussions in the fall focused on competing conceptions of success for fisheries management. Tim Whalen ('16) and Alex Swanson ('16) developed a multi-dimensional conceptualization of success that helped us understand the difference between, say, Maximum Economic Yield and Optimal Yield, while keeping in mind the difference between ecological and fisheries-based success.

Students also took on individual projects so that they could pursue a topic of their own choosing and interest. Amelie-Sophie Vavrovsky ('18) became absorbed in the life history and management of eels, while Caroline Vexler ('17) is studying the literary life of oysters. Jane Jacoby ('18) reconstructed the supply chain for the menhaden fishery, which takes 80% of the fishery to produce fish meal, fertilizer and fish oils. Several took on fisheries they know really well, e.g., commercial Alaskan salmon (Evan Gross '16) and recreational striped bass (James Corbett '17). Clare Peabody ('18) and Cyrus Maden ('18) chose problems with a geographic frame – delineation of *de jure* and *de facto* fishery conservation areas in the Atlantic, Gulf and NW Pacific regions relative to areas “zoned” for offshore industrial and commercial uses. Kayla Weststeyn ('17) is drafting comments on NOAA's by-catch proposal in the Federal Register, and Tim Whalen ('16) is looking at certification of US aquaculture.

This process evolved like a hyper-text game. Discoveries led to new questions and new policy puzzles, e.g., the role of fish processors in fisheries management decisions, or the significance of foreign-access payments in the price of tuna. As a result, we ended up in places that we would not have imagined had we been required to plot this all out in advance. In addition, students were able to develop and pursue their interests and influence the direction of the project.

We added several components that made the spring semester different. We decided which topics to focus on in advance. We still met weekly, but we added guest speakers and field trips. Guests included our colleague Bruce Berman, the Outreach Coordinator for Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Boston (and a Visiting Scholar at the Watson Institute), as well as a fish importer (Olafur Gislason '74), the Chief of RI's Division of Marine Fisheries, and a commercial charter boat captain with many years of experience on the New England Marine Fisheries Council. In addition, we attended several state hearings on commercial fisheries issues and the international Seafood Expo in Boston. These field trips energized students, and provided many of them with useful contacts.

There isn't an official name for what we did. So maybe we could call it the un-GISP or a Research GISP. In either case, this academic adventure launched some wonderful things. Jessie O'Dell ('16) and Natalia Ginsburg ('18) presented a poster on conceptions of *community* in fisheries at an undergraduate research conference at Colby College, after conducting in-depth interviews of twelve academic and professional anthropologists, fisheries managers and fisheries scientists. Jessie O'Dell, who is staying for a fifth year, also obtained a summer UTRA to work with us on issues concerning litigation and fisheries management. Caroline Vexler ('17) landed a terrific fisheries-related internship at Resources for the Future, and she oversaw a simulation exercise about striped bass in *The Politics of Food*. James Corbett ('17) is working on summer plan to work with the RIDEM to draft regulations to separate governance of party and charter boats from the recreational

fishery. Kayla Weststeyn ('17) is planning a capstone project on disaster payments and fisheries subsidies. Finally, we are planning to use what we learned this year to write a book proposal for an academic book (with Bruce Berman) on politics, policy, and fish. To that end, we will have another off-the-books GISP next fall, directly centered on research for the book.

It is fortunate that we were able to invent this course informally through the Independent Study mechanism. We are also fortunate to have the support of the Watson Institute. But this approach has its limits. It is harder to find a room outside the official room-assignment system. The professors have to offer the course as an add-on. And the students end up with a generic entry on their transcript (Independent Research and Writing) that does not do justice to what might well be one of the most meaningful and memorable learning experiences at Brown. Perhaps the CCC should designate a new "research" or "project"-based line of courses to encourage professors to recruit students to exploring new ideas or new dimensions of old problems and to facilitate less traditional classes. Although the university can't assign rooms retroactively, maybe there is a way to give credit, where credit is due.

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