

Toward a Humanistic Approach in the Teaching of Area Studies

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Abstract: The notion that the 21st century is the Pacific century connotes an increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific region in the global economy and international relations. As such, the region stands as a witness to the complexities, paradoxes, and other challenges emanating from the interactions and exchanges among peoples of diverse cultural, educational, religious, ethnic, geographical, and historical backgrounds. These existing diversities and knowledge gaps stand as a barrier in the pursuit of collaborative resolutions and cooperative ventures toward peace and development.

Studies designed to mitigate the challenges accruing from diversity and distinctions among interacting actors could pave the way for promoting more meaningful understanding, appreciation, and cooperation. The humanistic approach to area studies as applied in Asia-Pacific Studies (APS) is the University of Asia and the Pacific's contribution toward this end. Enlightened by liberal education, the APS area studies which highlights the commonality among actors as dignified human persons and downplaying their sociocultural distinctions makes a great difference.

Keywords: Area studies, humanistic, Asia Pacific Studies, Christian dimension, multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary, "Other"

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In an increasingly globalized world and unprecedented technological advancements, which virtually blur national boundaries and shrink international spaces, the field of area studies appears to pose as a pertinent tool for academic investigations. Area studies refers to the multi- and interdisciplinary social research, investigation, or study that focuses on particular regions, culture areas, or communities, the largest of which are African, Asian, European, Latin American, and Middle Eastern studies with subfields such as Southeast Asian, Japanese, Russian, Indian Studies, and others. Szanton, in his work *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, stresses the use of a multidisciplinary lens “as no single academic discipline is capable of capturing and conveying a full understanding of another society or culture” (Szanton, 2002). As practiced today, area studies facilitates the holistic understanding of a given area’s culture and physical realities through an integrated study of the various dimensions of its society. At its core is socio-cultural analysis which examines the interweaving socio-religious, geographic, or politico-economic factors for an in-depth understanding of a given society or culture. Through comparisons and contrasts as well as more detailed analyses of segments or parts, area studies attempts to identify the prominent and fundamental features as well as the patterns of transformation and development in a particular area, oftentimes guided by theories from the social science and humanities.

Area studies finds its beginnings from the seminal works of Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt, a Prussian/German naturalist, geographer, polymath, scientist, scholar, and explorer who also studied botany, mineralogy, and philosophy. Humboldt personally financed scientific expeditions in South America and reached Mexico and Central America in the process of observation and data collection. From 1804 to 1827, Humboldt published the data collected from these expeditions. His *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* revealed a wealth of material not only on the geography and geology of Mexico, but also on its political, social, and economic conditions as well as population (Kellner, 2020). Unknowingly, Humboldt blazed a trail in the field of social research—that is, area studies. In 1829, Humboldt undertook geographical, geological, and meteorological observations in the Central Asian region, which was then a largely unfamiliar area to the Western world. Humboldt’s works became of paramount importance to the Western colonialists who were building and maintaining empires across the oceans. It is no surprise that area studies is considered as a “child of empire.”

Area studies gained prominence during the Second World War as an “enterprise designed to achieve an encapsulated understanding of the unknown areas of the world that the Westerner’s military command found themselves involved” (Schwartz, 1996). Area studies was brought from Europe to North America where it received tremendous government support and private sector patronage most especially from the Ford Foundation. Not long after, this field also gained prominence in Asia. Whether in Europe or in the United States, area studies was associated with the search for knowledge and information about the “Other.” Thus, geographically fixed units were investigated to learn more about them, to generate information contributory to one’s broader knowledge of the “Other,” as well as to reaffirm one’s distinction from the “Other.” It carried the “us-them” [Filipino, *tayo-sila*] dichotomy. In Europe, area studies was based on the traditional Oriental studies (Orientalism) or on the interest to study the European colonies—the “uncivilized” tribes—under the discipline of Anthropology. In the United States, the field was anchored on the country’s superpower position in the bipolar Cold War era and was concerned with understanding the enemy through its utilization in strategic and tactical intelligence for national security (Szanton, 2001), setting aside both socio-cultural focus and on comparative or global context (Gordan, 2004). For Europe and the United States, enhanced comprehension, exploitation, and control of the “Other” while reaffirming the differences between the “Self” from the “Other” served as the common driving force for generating knowledge about the “Other” (Mielke & Hornidge, 2017). Moreover, the interpretation and analysis of data pertaining to the “Other” were based on Western standards, models, and other analytical tools. Again, Szanton observes that, most often, American social scientists and humanists have imposed on foreign countries and cultures “concepts, theories, models and other analytic fashions derived from the West European or US experiences” (Szanton, 2002).

Come the post-Cold War period, area studies as a field of research was viewed in a new light. As more nation--states engaged in regionalism and banded together in their own initiatives to create regional organizations, as people more openly recognized the need to connect and interact with the rest of the world, and as societies reached political maturity and gained confidence to reclaim their place in history or in the world map, the homegrown scholars of these societies have become emboldened to privilege their own voices in the clamor to rewrite the books that brand their societies as the “Far East,” “Oriental,” or even the “Third World.” They have started to challenge the

images painted of the “Other” by the West and called for the reinterpretation of Western narratives about them. Moreover, the need to trace the global in the local—or the global-local interactions—to demonstrate “the benefits of local area analyses for understanding global dynamics” (Slocum & Thomas, 2003) was raised. This revisionist stance has continued to surface among the homegrown scholars up to the present. Singapore’s Institute of Southeast Asian Studies takes pride in scholars who have identified revisionist trends in approaches to Southeast Asian Studies, a thriving strand of area studies in and outside of this region. Such trend involves studies that entail “a preference for globally oriented approaches, with attention paid to external influences, the mobility of people, ideas, capital, and goods, the fluidity of identity politics, and the porosity of territorial borders, in attempts to revise understandings of the region [Southeast Asia]” (Goh, 2011).

The revisionist understanding of Southeast Asian area studies also calls for local specialists who could give more justice to this region as ideational and socially constructed (Acharya, 2010). This emic perspective on issues such as subject positions is crucial. Van Schendel argues the need for inhabitants of Southeast Asia to rethink their idea of Southeast Asia as a “region” (Van Schendel, 2012). Moreover, he proffers the conduct of trans-area conversations as an indispensable avenue for gaining a more profound knowledge of area studies.

It is in this context that this essay is framed. This essay was based on a curriculum evaluation of an area studies program called “Asia Pacific Studies” (APS), developed by and taught at the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P), located in Metro Manila in the years 2000 to 2010. The evaluation involved a thematic analysis of student feedback, department memoranda, course syllabi as well as key-informant interviews of former faculty members.

A Humanistic Approach: the APS Way

The University of Asia and the Pacific introduced the APS in the year 2000 as its academic contribution toward the complex process of community building in the Asia Pacific. At the same time, it seeks to redirect the epistemological goals of area studies from “othering” humans to humanizing the “Other,” i.e., from underscoring distinctions to magnifying commonalities. While running parallel with the humanistic approach to education, a student-centered approach that underscores each student’s dignity and worth, the APS goes

further by furnishing a Christian dimension in its curriculum. It invests on its students the Christian moral standards, values, and conduct aimed at making them aspire for “productive personhood” as well as developing their sensitivity to view other people as human beings with dignity and as objects of manipulation and insidious agendas. The Christian dimension of the APS as explained in the working papers of the APS curriculum enables students to anchor their knowledge on three moral questions:

- 1) Do these societies have Universal moral values consistent with the Christian faith?
- 2) Are the changes that these societies undergo for the better or for worse?
- 3) Does the cultural framework of each civilization uphold the dignity of the human person?

These questions also serve as reference points when faculty members choose reading materials, discuss lessons in class, and set project requirements. The APS promotes the University’s goal of instilling responsible citizenship by providing students the avenues for learning more about neighboring societies, encouraging inter-faith dialogue, and sympathizing and empathizing with people they learn about and learn from. This also includes the development of respect for and appreciation of the local customs these students may encounter in their travels.

The APS henceforth strives to transform the learners into future “global citizens” instilled with a Christian outlook within the larger Asia-Pacific community. The Christian view of the human person is applied in the pursuit of the APS’s aims of promoting knowledge about neighboring societies, seeing identities converge rather than diverge, and understanding historical experiences that meet rather than collide. The APS validates the students’ learnings from their core curriculum based on the goals of liberal education. This core curriculum includes theology, philosophy, and the arts which all provide in-depth insights into people’s moral and ethical value systems as well as myths and rituals reflective of their psyche, spirit, or soul. Moreover, the APS seeks to develop informed and responsible citizens who are capable of accepting and respecting the multiplicity of cultures in the Asia-Pacific region, interacting meaningfully in various social settings, and hopefully bridging cultural knowledge gaps and forging ties while guided by the Christian perspective. Harmonizing the Christian perspective on intersections in this

region constitutes the unique stamp of UA&P in response to other brands of area studies in local and foreign institutions. By locating the APS within the ambit of the Christian perspective, students would be able to regard the universal characteristics of human societies as bearers and agents of civilizing and humanizing processes. This undertaking is concomitant to the University's mission statement involving "an interdisciplinary synthesis of humanistic, professional, scientific, and technical knowledge, inspired by a Christian view of man and sense of life" ("Mission Statement," 2015). Along this line, the APS seeks to emphasize the best and most humanistic contributions of societies in the Asia Pacific which in turn continues to shape its own identity as a full-fledged region.

Area Studies in the Philippine Tertiary Education

The University of the Philippines Diliman campus is one of the pioneering institutions which developed a multidisciplinary Asian Studies in 1955 with the creation of the Institute of Asian Studies which we now know as the Asian Center. The Asian Center offers graduate degrees in Asian Studies with specializations in various areas such as Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and West Asia, focusing on selected core country per area. Meanwhile, another UP campus offers an undergraduate course in the Social Sciences with a specialization in Area Studies. Other Philippine universities such as the Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, the University of Santo Tomas, and Centro Escolar University have their respective programs in Asian Studies, but none has the widest orientation and choices as the programs offered by the UP Asian Center.

The University of Asia and the Pacific, on the other hand, created the Asia Pacific Studies program for the undergraduate level and expands beyond Asia to cover the wider Asia-Pacific Region. Through scientific inquiry, APS seeks to establish the countries' interconnections as members of the Asia-Pacific community. The APS exists as a set of required courses taken by students from freshmen to their junior year. These courses feature the areas of North America (focusing on the United States), Latin America (centered on Mexico), East Asia (covering China, Japan, and South Korea), Southeast Asia, and Australia, which are considered as civilization blocs.

Schwartz in his defense of area studies as a critical discipline considers "area" as "some portion of the earth's surface inhabited by *human collectivities*

[italics ours], more or less marked off from other collectivities by virtue of the fact that they constitute relatively autonomous fields of human interaction among various life-realms” (Schwartz, 1980). Rob Wilson contributes to the debate in understanding the “larger community” (Wilson, 2002) of the Asia-Pacific region. He notes the assumption of the Asia-Pacific as a region while at the same time suggests an act of imagining in giving sense to the realities, conflicts, histories that link countries in the Pacific Rim. For Wilson, understanding the Asia Pacific can mean regionalizing a space. But this space is not an empty space as far as the forces of globalization are concerned. In fact, as Watters and McGee argue, the idea that Asia Pacific as a region exists comes from the strong economies located in the Pacific Rim (McGee, 1997). These strong economies then fuel movements of people, ideas, goods, and services that continuously make and remake this vast space into a thriving community of nations whose agenda involves that of interdependence rather than independence. This interdependence in turn impinges on the knowledge of one polity vis-à-vis the neighboring polities which should be made concrete by knowledge production in tertiary education.

The APS in Liberal Education

As stated earlier, the APS is geared toward producing global citizens out of its learners. This concept of citizens is in the Aristotelian mold of *liberi* (free men or citizens). There was a critical observation from university administrators when the APS was being developed that if we are to develop a community among Asia Pacific economies, then Asia Pacific economies must first get to know one another as peoples. With intensifying globalization, the university has also perceived the necessity of producing global citizens who are equipped with a thorough knowledge of their neighbors' cultures and are capable of forging peaceful, harmonious, and productive relationships. The APS courses are designed to provide a coherent curriculum for undergraduates as the courses provide a channel for cross-cultural examinations that enable one to elicit comparative views and to critically appreciate the history and culture of peoples inhabiting the different parts of the world. Through these courses, the student, therefore, learns to accept, respect, and live with diversity and to gain openness to multicultural issues. By fostering a broader understanding of the distinctly myriad but increasingly interdependent, philosophical, socio-cultural, economic, and political systems in the region, the APS courses facilitate the cultivation among the student population of a sense of regional identity yet

strengthening their national identity; of the capacity to empathize rather than to judge on the face of gross differences; of enhancing tolerance for the cultural idiosyncrasies of other nations while feeling proud of their own culture; and of understanding the soul or spirit beneath the physical appearance of their neighbors and the Other. The overall theme of the program involves constancy and transformation in the multicultural region—what institutions, structures, and processes, technology, beliefs, customs, values, and perspectives have remained or continued, and what has changed or been replaced, which enable one to better comprehend and relate with the region's societies. The thrust is to understand the countries in focus as they relate with their region of location.

To uncover these transformations and constancies, the key historical factors such as colonization, modernization, nationalism, wars, and neocolonialism that have challenged human growth and development are examined. Discussions also dwell on common themes that cut across all APS courses such as community building, political systems, external relations, trade and commerce, development strategies, regionalism, arts as well as religious and philosophical beliefs, among others. The APS relates the Philippines with societies that have considerable links to the socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious formations of its citizens throughout its modern history.

The course on Southeast Asian Studies takes on a critical position in the APS menu of courses in the light of the ASEAN economic integration. This course allows the students to trace the compartmentalization of Southeast Asian politics from Western colonization and the effects of such compartmentalization in Philippine society, which makes this community appear close yet still distant from its neighboring countries. One of the striking features of Southeast Asian Studies is the debunking of certain fallacies and the correction of misconceptions spawned by non-Asians about Southeast Asia (McCloud, 1995). An important discovery and realization of students is the fact that the region had already achieved a relatively high level of civilization prior to the coming of the West as reflected by the many marvels of Southeast Asian architecture such as the magnificent Angkor Wat, the awesome Borobudur stupa, the majestic Ananda temple, and the fabulous syncretic Schwedagon temple. In the area of agriculture, the *barays* of Angkor and the rice terraces scattered in Southeast Asia, particularly the Banaue rice terraces, which are still in use today, demonstrate the advanced irrigation technology of early Southeast Asia. A shift in students' attitude toward Southeast Asia is observable after

finishing the course. They develop a sense of pride as Southeast Asians due to their newly acquired broader comprehension of the region and its peoples as well as its past and present realities. Students likewise realize the need to touch-base with Southeast Asian societies in the light of economic integration. The APS in this context prepares the students to embrace the plurality of cultures in Southeast Asia yet look forward to effective cooperation. As Rafael Espinoza (Rafael Espinosa, personal communication, 2nd semester SY 2013-2014) claims:

APS103 (SEA Studies) taught me that regardless of beliefs, we can achieve a lot through regional cooperation; that some people should not be treated as “others” just because they are different. Despite our religious, cultural, and historical variance, we can manage to cooperate with one another.

The course facilitates the students’ rediscovery of the region’s arts and literature which they often take for granted or are unaware of. Hence, students now can revisit the characters and contexts of the novels penned by Pramodya Ananta Toer, particularly *This Earth of Mankind* (Toer, 1980), and relate them with the same elements of Jose Rizal’s novels. They can now understand the constant battle between light and darkness in the *nyang* theater or compare the Indonesian *slametan* with the Filipino fiesta celebrations. The APS also presents the localized versions of religions as distinct products of acculturation, which in turn enriches the manifestation of popular religiosity that is ingrained in Christianity, Islam, and Hindu-Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Themes like these enable students to be more circumspect about their role in the greater Southeast Asian community of nations and to enkindle their desire to visit cultural heritage sites to validate the ties that early societies have forged among them, preceding the modern-day regionalism.

All APS courses are lodged in the College of Arts and Sciences as part of the General Education program. To complement the content and structure of this program, all students in the five-year program (graduating with a master’s degree in Humanities after five years) take foreign language electives in Mandarin, Spanish, Nihongo, and Korean from the University’s Asia-Pacific Language Center which used to exist as a separate entity. Those in other programs may enroll in a foreign language course of their own volition.

As to supplementary activities, the APS sustains the APEC Networking Series involving talks by invited diplomats from APEC member countries

particularly those covered by the APS courses. Every semester puts the spotlight on specific civilization blocs or specific countries in which the foreign envoys from these places come and lecture about certain matters of mutual concern and interest. For instance, the former US ambassador to the Philippines, H.E. Ambassador Philip Goldberg (2014) explained the US role in maintaining peace and security in Southeast Asia in the midst of territorial disputes involving Southeast Asian countries and China. H.E. Ambassador Julio Camarena Villaseñor (2016) of Mexico pointed out the common heritage between the Philippines and Mexico and emphasized the deeper and wider cultural exchanges and influences between the two countries than with colonial Spain. The galleon trade that linked the two Spanish colonies for 250 years witnessed these mutual exchanges. H.E. Ambassador Ma Ke Qing (2013) of China presented China's priority for ASEAN in its overseas economic development assistance while H.E. Australian Ambassador Bill Tweddell (2015) encouraged more students and researchers in the field of science and technology to apply for scholarships in Australia in order for them to contribute to the advancement of technology and the betterment of life in the region.

Magisterial lectures by scholars, researchers, and professionals are likewise held for the purpose of analyzing and elucidating pressing issues such as national elections, freedom and democratic practices, media and nationalism (Nery, 2015), territorial boundary conflicts (Sta. Romana, 2016), and a lot more. These encounters with diplomats and scholars enable the students to understand more the socio-political, economic matters, and current issues affecting their country as well as the wider regional community of Southeast Asia. Moreover, the students realize the role that other countries play in the development of the Philippines and Southeast Asia as well as what the country and the region can offer.

Based on informal surveys conducted among students over the years, the relevance of APS courses has been acknowledged by students. They find APS courses supporting or enriching their courses in Integrated Marketing Communications, Philippine Politics and Governance, Business Ethics, Macroeconomics, Human Behavior in Organization, Christian Civilization, and the citizenship courses which aim to make students aware of their surroundings in order for them to develop a sense of civic responsibility. As one student observes (Maria Erika D. Bernales, personal communication, 2nd semester SY 2014-2015),

... APS courses, which give a history of nationalist sentiments in different countries, are relevant because they create an appreciation for the past. Once the past is appreciated by the students, it would be easier to develop a sense of civic responsibility. The same holds true for the citizenship courses. Together with APS, they helped me become a better citizen by inspiring me to do my duties as a citizen. This includes obeying the laws and patronizing local products to show support for the local industries. I can also say that I have developed a sense of nationalism through the said subjects.

For a future marketing specialist (Czarina Figueroa, personal communication, 2nd semester SY 2014-2015):

My APS subjects are relevant to citizenship subjects such as Philippine Society and Culture, Philippine Politics and Governance, and Political Thought. These are all related to government institutions, structures, and processes that are important in maintaining the stability of a country. These subjects have helped me become a better citizen of SEA and [the] Asia-Pacific [region] because they taught me how to be a productive citizen who is sensitive to and appreciative of other cultures. Someday, I hope to promote unity within the region through my professional work in marketing.

Moreover, APS courses are said to have trained students “to do a thorough researching job in regional market analysis,” “enhance ... analytical and thinking skills needed in Business Law,” and helped them “to become smarter in understanding the relationship of countries and the interactions of persons” (Ramon Cesar Boquiren, personal communication, 2nd semester SY 2014-2015).

Another student (Jeano Cruz, personal communication, 2nd semester SY 2013-2014) comments:

APS courses have helped me to become a better citizen of the Asia Pacific because now I understand the different cultures in the region, especially the Southeast Asian cultures. I'll be more sensitive and respectful to the people around me.

The abovementioned testimonies may be considered as proof that the APS courses' goal of molding students with a more open attitude toward other

nationalities and willingness to establish profitable ventures with them in the future is coming to fruition. Making this possible is the exposure of students to cultural diversities and commonalities among the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region. This also enables the APS to contribute to the efforts of building a new Humanities education that cuts across cultures, languages, and disciplines and which respects pluralism while securing one's identity. APS thus serves as a bridge that narrows down, shortens, and reduces the cultural knowledge gap between and among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The learning gained through APS has proven beneficial not only in the academic realm but in the practical aspects as well. It is useful in government, business, law and politics, journalism, and public service as well as in international careers or employment. Graduates or former students of the existing APS program have attested to this. One graduate attests that his knowledge of other countries gained from the APS has placed him in a position of frequent travels to his company's subsidiaries abroad and communication with foreign visitors at the office. Moreover, his knowledge, experience, and skills in this specialization have even expedited his promotion. Another former student taking Political Economy reveals that he finds some Political Economy courses (under UA&P's School of Law and Governance) easier to comprehend due to his background in APS. Moreover, former students taking up management say that their understanding of the management styles of the Japanese is broadened by their lessons in Japanese Studies as a course under the APS. For graduates who would go into international business, the APS equips them with the knowledge of various cultures of Asia Pacific societies thereby guiding their selection of products to market or facilitating their conceptualization of more effective ways of promoting these. This is apart from making them understand and experience more meaningfully the issues of universalism and globalization which, according to Pope Benedict XVI, should not be seen only as a socio-economic process but as a tool for advancing a cultural process of global integration which is person-based and community-oriented (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009). The "us-them" dichotomy in area studies may be a formidable view to deconstruct or replace with the all-embracing "us, we" standpoint. The Christian perspective of according dignity and respect to all human persons provides an alternative means to narrow the gap between the Self and the Other—to realize a seamless community of humans capable of empathy and appreciation instead of discrimination and partial judgment.

Challenges and Prospects

One quality that is expected of faculty members in APS is that they must have advanced interdisciplinary degrees. They may have their comfort zones in specific disciplines but they commit to an interdisciplinary orientation. A faculty member who specialized in anthropology or history for instance would not be wary of reading about or teaching themes in literature, the arts, or even political economy. With the exception of Korean professors sometimes handling the APS Korea component, the rest of the faculty are Filipinos who have traveled to the areas that they are teaching.

Since the APS calls for an interdisciplinary orientation, the faculty members take on different research interests that reflect the needs and affairs of the Asia Pacific such as migration, globalization or worldwide interdependence, inequality, work and society, popular culture, the conflation of science, technology and society, climate change, urbanization, disaster and risk management as well as interfaith relations. To continuously develop its own critical mass, the university supports faculty travel to their area of specialty. However, faculty flight has been noted in the APS program since its inception. It is a daunting task to recruit highly qualified faculty members who are willing to devote a life-time commitment to area studies and research. This problem is commonly faced by colleges and universities offering this multi- and interdisciplinary type of social research as more academics still feel more comfortable with single discipline studies. In some cases, the faculty member has a so-called “dual citizenship” in certain fields; for instance, a faculty member can be both a political scientist and Southeast Asianist, a historian and Latin American specialist, or an economist and Sinologist at the same time. Moreover, in a number of universities offering area studies, faculty members ought to speak and read at least one dominant language of the region they specialize in and furthermore conduct relevant research and get published, do fieldwork, or both.

Based on what we have seen thus far, the relevance of the APS courses cannot be ignored. It has been observed by faculty members that students have become more sensitive toward the cultural traits and stereotypes associated with Southeast Asia and East Asia. Some of these undesired stereotypes include Southeast Asia as a backward region prior to the European encounter and East Asia as a home to major powers who abhor each other, respectively. The APS courses have also helped students to critically appraise themes like

pop culture beyond face value. Instead of just associating a particular area with its usual touristic stereotypes, students are now able to discuss important ideas such as the historical and cultural processes that shaped and influenced these areas. With more than ten years of the APS invested on faculty recruitment, training and development, acquisitions of library holdings for subjects on Asia Pacific, and curriculum development, the APS serves as a hallmark of UA&P's pioneering efforts in re-branding its own area studies program, which responds to contemporary opportunities.

Well-prepared for the Pacific Age

Toward the end of the 20th century, the Asia Pacific started to occupy a niche in the world's political consciousness as evidenced by the appearance of terms of varying degrees of homogeneity, commonality of interests, parallel historical and contemporary experiences, and a shared future in literature. Thus, the terms "Pacific Basin," "Pacific Area," and "Asian Pacific Rim" denote unity and cohesion. The notion that the Pacific area has become the hub of the world economic activity is reinforced by the view that the 21st century is indeed the Pacific century or the commencement of the Pacific Age. The Asia-Pacific region, therefore, serves as an avenue not only for international trade and commerce but also for cultural understanding among peoples of diverse cultural, educational, ethnic, and historical backgrounds. As such, the region is a living witness to the issues, conflicts, and problems emanating from these variants that have to be addressed by cooperative efforts and interactions among the countries in the Asia Pacific. Bridging and sustaining these efforts for peace, harmony, and progress guided by a Christian perspective then become the burning inspiration of the Asia Pacific Studies program as it contributes toward crafting a "humanistic" approach to the teaching of area studies courses enlightened by liberal education.

NOTE: An undergraduate program, the Bachelor of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies (ABAPS) and two graduate programs, the Bachelors of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies leading to a Master of Arts in Political Economy (ABAPS-MAPE) and to Master in Political Economy (ABAPS-MPE) proposed by the Department of Asia Pacific Studies are now undergoing pre-approval processes. Once formally approved and offered, the APS course that will remain in the College of Arts and Sciences General Education (CAS GE) curriculum is the Southeast Asian Studies. The North American Studies

focusing on the United States will be offered as an elective. All the rest shall be offered as required courses in the proposed ABAPS, ABAPS-MAPE, and ABAPS-MPE.

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