

## MAKING POLITICS PERSONAL

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**GEORGE KALOUDIS SHOWS HIS STUDENTS HOW GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUES ARE RELEVANT TO THEIR LIVES – WHATEVER THEIR MAJOR.**

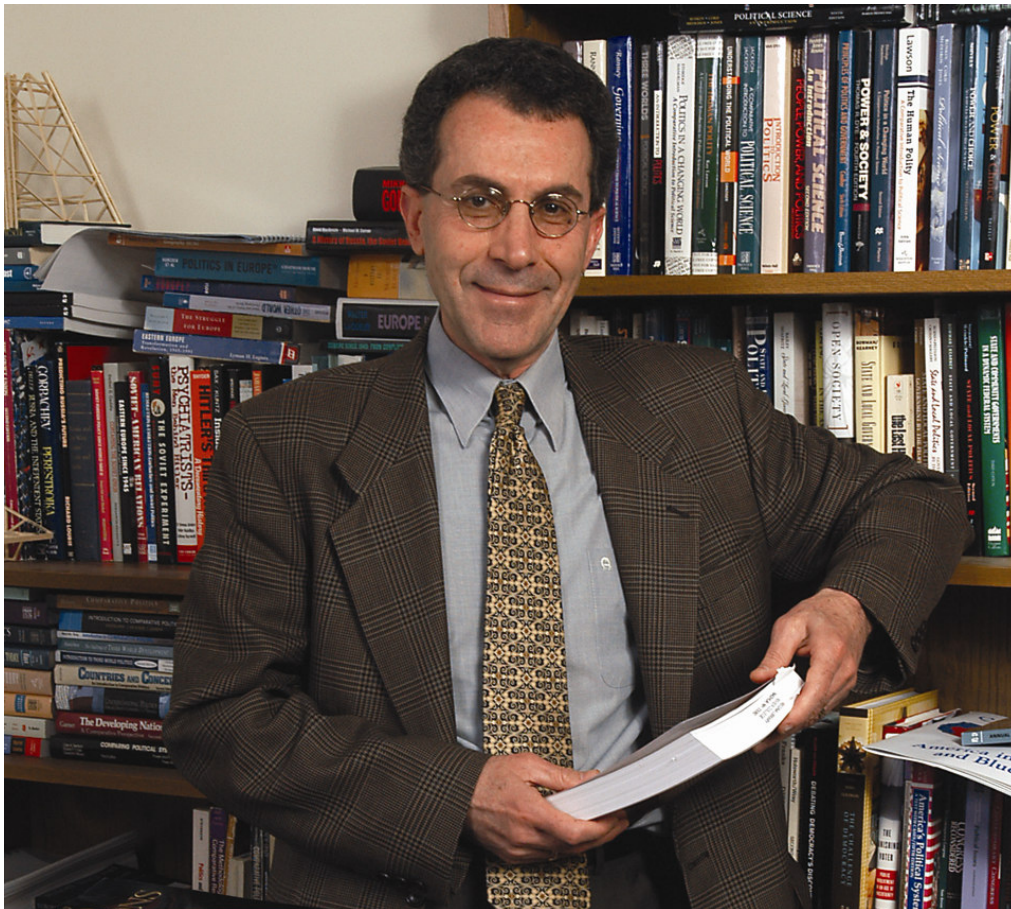


Photo by Jodie Andruskevich

It may seem at times as if the world has become one single, cohesive body of people, with nations trading freely among each other and dictatorships falling in favor of democratic reform. It is a far cry from a time—not very long ago—when walls divided cities, goods were smuggled rather than bought in the open and the governments of so many nations around the world were run by military force. “Globalization” is one of the more widely used words that arose to explain the changing world during the past quarter-century.

But some in the academic and political communities prefer a different term; George Kaloudis, professor and coordinator of Rivier’s Department of History, Law and Political Science, is one of them. “I and many others prefer the term ‘global transformation,’” he says, “because it is easier to confine it and thus make it more manageable.” The use of the word “transformation” in particular is significant, says Kaloudis, because

it helps explain some of the unease and protest that has accompanied much of the changes that have taken place. “My course on global transformation focuses on the technological, political, economic and cultural transformation, especially since the 1970s.”

Kaloudis is particularly familiar with one of those developments. As an undergraduate student living in Greece, he participated in demonstrations that eventually led to the collapse of a military dictatorship that had been in power for seven years. After that regime collapsed, says Kaloudis, “Greeks became more politically mature, not as defensive-minded, and outward-looking.” In the 30 years since, Greece has become a much more visible player on the world stage, becoming a member of NATO and the European Union. “As a member of these organizations,” says Kaloudis, “Greece has a presence in Afghanistan and participates, outside of Iraq, in training Iraqi security forces.”

So does the recent past history and present state of affairs in Greece—or any other country around the world—relate to a student in the United States? Kaloudis believes that in a world shaped by global transformation, it unquestionably does—although it is not always easy to convince his students. “They are preoccupied with domestic issues,” he says, citing a general lack of interest in the Iraq conflict as an example. “My argument to them is that we do not have the luxury of separating domestic from international politics.”

Surprisingly, even after 9/11, most of Kaloudis’ non-major students require some coaxing before they are interested in political discussion. However, he makes a special effort in his class discussions to draw them in. “The easiest way to engage non-majors is to relate their major to politics and history,” he says. “During fall 2005, I taught state and local politics and for about half of the semester most students did not believe that the course had any relevance to their lives and their major. Only when I asked each student to determine the most important issues confronting their town or city did they begin to realize that those were some of the same issues that we had been discussing in class during half of the semester. They finally became more active in class discussions. During spring 2006, some of the nursing majors told me that government was of no interest to them. I responded by asking if government had anything to do with their profession. Their response was ‘yes,’ and their interest in politics became greater.”

Kaloudis is a student of both global transformation and modern Greece, with numerous books, articles and presentations to his credit on both topics. At present, he is at work on a book about the modern-day Greeks who have migrated and made their homes in the United States—a topic on which he can surely bring personal experience. Kaloudis came to the United States to join his future wife, Penelope, whom he met while her family was living in Greece. When they decided to return to California, he went to graduate school. But it was not an easy journey for the young scholar: “[I was] in my early 20s, naïve, completely ignorant of the United States, and not speaking the language.”

He has lived in the U.S. ever since, except for a two-year return to Greece to serve in that nation’s Navy. “The United States is a beautiful country,” he says. “Our children have lived much of their lives in the U.S.—we like ‘visiting’ Greece.” Those now-grown children are following their father’s academic footsteps. Son Stergos is enrolled in the Ph.D. program in politics at the Catholic University of America. Daughter Naomi is finishing her M.A. in art history, archaeology and philology at the University of Missouri, and will begin her Ph.D. studies there in the fall. And Penelope, who brought Kaloudis to the United States, is a Rivier alumna, having earned her M.B.A. in 1993.

As the world continues to change and become a “smaller” place, Kaloudis’ insights and experiences will certainly be highly valued, both at Rivier and throughout the rest of the “transforming” world. ■

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