



The Global Learning Distinction: an Experiential Learning Research Project

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of integrating global learning and culturally-responsive teaching as part of a University curriculum to prepare graduates to enter a global workforce. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), global learning programs are an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching which help students to “understand and engage the diversities and commonalities among the world’s peoples, cultures, nations, and regions” (AAC&U, 2018). The objective of this experiential learning project, implemented at the College of Business at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, USA, was to research ways to engage students in active global learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Specifically, the problem being explored included needs to assess student attitudes toward global learning (1), understand perceived benefits of a Global Learning Distinction program (2), and identify an opportunity for students to get involved in the promotion of this program prior to the full launch in 2018 (3). Focus group research results are discussed and recommendations for future research in Global Learning.

1. Introduction

Student populations at colleges and universities across the United States are becoming increasingly culturally and globally diverse. This diversity has created the immediate need for more culturally responsive teaching at the nation’s colleges and universities. Through the examination of global trends and best pedagogical practices, a practical framework is presented to help institutions develop, implement and assess faculty development programs focused on developing competence in culturally-responsive teaching and dedicated global learning programs.

1.1 Diversity on College Campuses

In 2013, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that over 42% of Americans aged 18-24 were enrolled in colleges and universities as compared to only 31% in 2000. Campus populations are now more culturally representative of the U.S than in the past, with 37% of African-Americans and 35% of Hispanic-Americans aged 18-24 enrolled in college in 2013, versus 26% and 18% in 2000 respectively (NCES, 2013a). In 2012, the NCES reported fall enrollment of U.S. residents to be 60.3 % White, 14.9% Black and 15% Hispanic. Based on shifting demographic trends, the NCES forecasts fall domestic student enrollment in

2024 to be 56% White, 16.7% Black and 17.5 % Hispanic (NCES, 2013b). Unfortunately, most instructors at colleges and universities do not reflect the same trend, with only 6% Black full-time faculty and 4% Hispanic full-time faculty employed at degree-granting institutions in 2013 nationwide (NCES, 2013c).

1.2 Teaching in a Global Environment

In addition to increasingly diverse domestic populations in the United States, colleges and universities are also challenged by the diversity represented by a growing number of international students on campus. Globalization and heightened government awareness of the links between education and economic competitiveness have inspired countries to invest billions of dollars to boost enrollment numbers for students studying abroad (UNESCO, 2014). It has also spurred a trend toward internationalization at higher education institutions worldwide (UNESCO, 2014). The International Development Program (IDP) of Australia projects global demand for international higher education to nearly double by the year 2025 (IDP, 2014). On the receiving end of this rapid increase in demand are primarily English-speaking institutions.

Over 60% of overseas students are studying at colleges and universities in the United States, Australia and New Zealand alone, with more international students studying in the U.S. than in any other country (IDP, 2014). There are also significant trends within the demographic profiles of international students, with China representing the largest single overseas group of students in U.S. colleges and universities (UNESCO, 2014).

These international student populations, along with their diverse languages, cultures and learning styles, represent enormous teaching challenges in the classroom. In response to both international and domestic trends, a wide range of culturally-responsive teaching initiatives are spreading across campuses in the United States (Basbay, 2014; Coryell et al, 2010; Gopal, 2011; Pope & Mueller, 2005; Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2012; Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010; Zeichner et al, 1998). These initiatives combine different methodologies for improving global learning and cultural competency, attitudes, pedagogies, and curriculum in addition to developing assessment tools to measure improvement and outcomes resulting from these programs.

2. Literature Review

Culturally-responsive teaching is an important aspect of any global learning program. Global Learning initiatives have been broadly described by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as a help for students to "understand and engage the diversities and commonalities among the world's peoples, cultures, nations, and regions" (AAC&U, 2018) and encouragement of integrative global learning programs by its University members.

The review of global learning programs, therefore, must include an examination of culturally-responsive and multicultural teaching best practices, was conducted using the Levels of Knowledge Construction framework (Banks & Banks, 2003). Research data from several programs are discussed below, including studies from community colleges in the United States and colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.

The assessment of the curriculum at Georgia State University (GSU) was a qualitative study, which identified and tracked multicultural themes that occurred within their curriculum. Georgia State is a rare example of multicultural efforts taking place at the transformational level (Basbay, 2014). The main benefit the researchers at GSU discovered as a result of these multicultural course improvements was a "positive shift in students' attitudes towards diversity and different cultural values" (602). Although the study was somewhat limited in that it only sampled ten different syllabi and six different courses, it identifies and connects pedagogy to improved student learning outcomes.

A qualitative review in Canada examined the relationship between faculty and student cultural perceptions, cultural dimensions framework including monochronic/polychronic time orientation; power distance; individualism/collectivism; uncertainty

avoidance; generative/replicative; and aggression/consideration (Prowse & Goddard, 2010). This study was also conducted at the additive level, with only selecting faculty found to include multicultural approaches in their courses (Prowse & Goddard, 2010). Not surprisingly, this study also found inconsistencies in the faculty's ability to motivate students of diverse backgrounds. They also found that their engagement and motivational approaches to learning were too different from the memorization approaches; some students were accustomed to in their native cultures (p. 46).

A study conducted by Harder (2010) found disturbing results for multiculturalism at community colleges in Virginia. An analysis of urban, suburban and rural community colleges in the state found that over 80% of rural community colleges had a low level of international activities and opportunities on campus (Harder, 2010) and low level of faculty involvement in those activities - barely meeting the definition of operating at the contributions level of Bank's knowledge construction model. Urban and suburban community colleges fared slightly better, with a wide range of diverse and international activities available for students and some additive examples of faculty involvement and multicultural course content (157). Overall, this study confirmed the concerns of scholars such as Green and Siaya (2005), that community colleges are in the most need of increased focus on international and multicultural initiatives.

A study conducted at a "large university in the Western United States" with a culturally diverse population was found to have contributions approach with intermittent programs offered to some students, such as study abroad (Coryell et al., 2010). They concluded that university leadership did not support changing the curriculum to reflect their diverse populations as it was a departure from their long-standing and traditional approach (p. 85-86). Coryell and colleagues conducted another similar study at a large university in the Southwestern United States and again found an intermittent contributions approach, with increasing access to study abroad programs was their only effort at multiculturalism (Coryell et al., 2010). Further, they concluded that they were in need of developing "attitudinal goals" to help gain "systematic buy-in" at all levels of the university (p.87). Lastly, the Coryell research team engaged in a study of a large university in the United Kingdom. This university was the only found in the review found to have an entire faculty body engaged in some international activities as a matter of regular practice (Coryell et al., 2010).

Also, they reported that their international focus was fully-integrated throughout their curriculum and they even take measures to make sure international programs and travel are available to all, regardless of socioeconomic status (p.89). Although the data in this study was qualitative and more geared toward internationalism than cultural responsiveness, it seems the closest in the review to have achieved a fully-transformational level of knowledge construction with some examples of social action (Coryell et al., 2010).

3. Case Study: Johnson & Wales University

One member of the AAC&U in the United States, Johnson & Wales University (JWU), recently embarked on a global learning program at their College of Business in Providence, Rhode Island. The JWU campus boasts a growing international population, with over 2,000 students on campus from over 88 different countries worldwide. In fact, this U.S. University was recently named the third most diverse university in its state of Rhode Island (Niche, 2017). However, the University was finding it challenging to implement a global learning program that could help engage these diverse populations in a meaningful and integrative way.

Johnson & Wales University had prioritized global learning at the heart of its institutional mission, stating that their Guiding Principles included to "Embrace diversity for a richly inclusive community" and "Model ethical behavior and local, national, and global citizenship," and "Enrich and expand opportunities for global learning," and "Enhance opportunities for local, national and international citizenship" (JWU, 2017). JWU's position reflects an acknowledgment that universities are increasingly international in intent, and that successful graduates must be able to think and act with awareness of the world around them.

3.1 Global Learning Distinction Pilot Research

The launch of a "Global Learning Distinction" certificate program for students has emerged from this mission. It was recommended that JWU implement a certificate or distinction that is based on a system which assigns varying numeric points to global learning activities that have been predetermined and clearly articulated, making the completion of a certificate or distinction feasible for a wide range of students.

However, the 2015 pilot launch of this program discovered that students find the Global Learning Distinction (GLD) program difficult to understand and that they do not clearly recognize the benefit of earning a GLD. The problem that needed to be addressed was to understand global learning from the student point of view.

Specifically, the problem included a need to:

- Assess student attitudes toward global learning
- Understand perceived benefits of the GLD program
- Identify an opportunity for students to get involved in the promotion of this program prior to the full launch in 2018.

To address the need to assess student attitudes toward global learning, an idea emerged to have the JWU Director of International and Intercultural Engagement act as a "client" for a series of marketing research and public relations class projects which would enable the students to actively participate in the launch of the Global Learning Distinction while also engaging in experiential education.

At the start of the Spring 2017 term, the director visited three classes for an "input meeting." By the end of the term, the students made a presentation to the client and summarized results which included the following:

- Marketing Research: Focus Groups (11) student-directed focus groups (N=82)
- Marketing Research: Online survey research (N=300).
- Public Relations: Student-directed messaging and social media strategy.

4. Participants

This class research project was conducted using student participants (N=300) as well as student moderators. Student moderators and survey facilitators were responsible for recruiting fellow students (from outside the class) to participate in the focus group and survey research. The resulting participants were a convenience sample of mostly marketing and management undergraduate students, aged 18-22. However, the combined results of student research which was conducted across three classes provided a range of Millennial participants and responses and was distributed across gender and ethnicities, including international student populations within the College of Business. It should be noted that no students from the College of Hospitality or College of Engineering & Design participated in this research.

5. Insights and Results

Valuable insights which resulted from the GLD student projects included a better understanding of how students define "global learning" and "global attitudes." Overall, these students were somewhat unaware of global learning as a uniquely defined term. When asked to provide a definition in their own words, participants were nearly evenly split in their understanding of global learning as either referring to "global experiences" or a "global mindset." Not surprisingly, those who defined global learning as something achieved through experiences connected the concept to personal travel or study abroad. Those who believed global learning was about developing a global mindset described it as a process of becoming more open to diverse cultures and people. These business majors also perceived the main benefit of earning a Global Learning Distinction certificate as a way to attract potential employers by including the GLD on their resume.

Further, survey participants who responded that they were already involved in student groups and membership organizations were the most likely to be interested in joining the GLD program. Freshmen and sophomores also had more interest in the GLD than juniors and seniors, who responded that they perceived the GLD process of tracking submittals and points to be "too much work." Open-ended survey responses revealed that most students would prefer video and blog submittals over writing reflection essays as a way to track GLD points. Students working on the public relations campaign (the third class project) also recommended that multimedia forms of global learning reflections be used as

testimonials to promote the GLD to other students via social media platforms.

From a teaching and learning point of view, the experiential education aspect of the project was deemed to be a success. In particular, the student-moderators of the GLD focus groups were evaluated by their peers in student reflections as “friendly, engaging and professional,” and were surprisingly skilled at directing the discussions for their first focus group. In addition, many of the students who worked on the GLD marketing and promotion also decided to sign-up for the certificate program themselves. A future recommendation to improve participation in this research would be to stagger the projects throughout the academic year. Conducting the marketing research classes before the public relations classes could also have resulted in better formative research for those promotional campaigns.

6. Challenges and Limitations

At the beginning of the project, there was some difficulty educating the moderators and survey facilitators about global learning so that they could begin building the moderators guides and questionnaires. Like the participants, they also strongly equated the topic of global learning with study abroad. It was a challenge to explain how global learning can actually happen every day on campus and in the classroom through cultural engagement and learning about global financial, economic, government and various social issues. However, it was decided early on that it was important for the students to establish their own definitions of global learning. In hindsight, more time should have been set aside for this formative process.

Some other recommendations for future research include an examination of the use of portfolio technology platforms which could be used to integrate classroom projects into the Global Learning Distinction submittal process. This would reduce the amount of perceived “extra work” by the students, and allow faculty to connect their project assignments to global learning objectives.

Reforming curriculum to support global learning programs is perhaps the most complex barrier as it involves varied and time-consuming processes at different universities and multiple departments within the institution. Once a university has developed its global learning program, implementing this pedagogy will require management support, faculty buy-in and collaboration at multiple levels of the institution (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Future research is still needed to identify strategies to affect attitudinal changes in faculty, along with incentive programs for faculty in the additive stages to lead the charge and help train another faculty to embrace in the best practices proven to enhance student learning across all ethnicities, cultures, and nationalities.

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