

Developing Global Competency across the Disciplines: An Interdisciplinary Project

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ABSTRACT

Educators must find ways to prepare students for the challenges they will face in both their professional and their personal lives as citizens in the 21st century. This paper describes an internationalization project initiated by two faculty members at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. The faculty members represent two diverse disciplines: English/Technical Communication and Political Science/International Relations. The project involved the creation of a series of assignments designed to enhance students' ability to understand issues of communication, power, and negotiation as they relate to addressing global issues at the local level. The assignments were designed so that they could be used either individually or in a sequence.

Keywords: global citizenship, global civic engagement, global competency, international relations, technical communication

INTRODUCTION

Educators must find ways to prepare students for the challenges they will face in both their professional and their personal lives as citizens in the 21st century. The integration of global studies into the core curriculum is "vitaly important for the well-being of individual students, communities, and the world more broadly" [1]. Faculty must create assignments and courses that facilitate the development of students' global competency.

Global competency is a set of skills, abilities, and knowledge. Globally competent individuals know how to communicate effectively with diverse others and to use communication technologies to collaborate across national borders [2]. They possess both cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. Individuals who are globally competent see connections between the global and the local and take a world view of events [3]. Such

individuals also have the ability to think critically about global issues and view them from an interdisciplinary perspective [4]. Finally, citizens who possess global competency are often inspired to take action to address global concerns at a local level.

Instruction that incorporates interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives can help students develop global competency and can enhance their civic engagement both locally and globally [5]. Frequently university faculty need support to help them develop strategies for internationalizing courses and for incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives into their assignments.

AN INTERNATIONALIZATION PROJECT

This paper describes an internationalization project initiated by two faculty members at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. The faculty members represent two diverse disciplines: English/Technical Communication and Political Science/International Relations. The project involved the creation of a series of assignments designed to enhance students' ability to understand issues of communication, power, and negotiation as they relate to addressing global issues at the local level. The assignments were developed so that they could be taught in many diverse disciplines; they incorporated instruction in writing, intercultural communication, negotiation, and effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and collaborative technologies. The assignments were designed so that they could be used either individually or in a sequence.

Several of the assignments were drawn from an interdisciplinary course in global citizenship taught by the two faculty members. A few of the assignments were ones used in other courses that the two faculty members taught including a senior-level international relations course and an upper-division English course, International Technical Communication, in which UCF

students participate in a virtual team collaboration with students in Ireland and France. In crafting the assignments for this internationalization project, the two faculty members strove to make the assignments more generic; each assignment includes a set of objectives for student learning related to the skills and knowledge associated with global competency and examples of how the assignment might be adapted in other disciplines.

There were five assignments included in the internationalization project:

- Internet Research Assignment
- Interview with Subject Matter Expert in Another Culture
- Country Research Report
- Group or Individual Documentation Project
- Presentation

INTERNET RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

The Internet Research Assignment (IRA) is a written research report in essay format, documented in the MLA style with at least three different internet references. Students are instructed to begin by completing the required readings related to the topic. Then, they should answer four major questions about the assigned article: 1) What is the main thesis or argument? 2) What are the basic facts that the author uses to support the main argument? 3) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the article? 4) How is this article related to course texts and discussions?

Finally, students must conduct internet research, in which they answer the question: What is new about this topic? In responding to this fifth question, students are free to take any angle, approach, or point of view, as long as they support their argument with facts, evidence, and examples.

Like an essay, the IRA must start with an introductory statement and must end with a concluding statement. The report should be at least 1000 words. The IRA should include at least three new and different internet references (representing philosophically different views) that students find after conducting their online research. Students should avoid using quotes from their sources. Instead they should paraphrase ideas in their own words and document them. Without exception, all references and documentation must be in the MLA format.

The three internet sources (in the form of news, op-ed article, etc.) must be related to the assignment topic. Students are advised to find sources that present truly diverse ideas or perspectives, which provide the final analysis with a more balanced input. However, they are free to present any point of view (even the most radical idea). Students are not graded based on their views, but

according to the quality of their analysis. The IRA will be evaluated based on these criteria: clarity, organization, comprehensiveness, argument quality, and supporting evidence (examples).

This assignment will facilitate the development of students' ability

- To think critically about global events
- To use technology to locate scholarly sources
- To develop information fluency
- To develop writing skills
- To analyze scholarly sources that present opposing viewpoints
- To evaluate the quality and relevance of information sources

This assignment can be adapted to virtually any discipline by having students conduct research on opposing theoretical perspectives within a particular field.

INTERVIEW WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT IN ANOTHER CULTURE

For this assignment, students are required to conduct a technology-supported interview with at least one subject matter expert in another culture. The interviews may be conducted via email, using Skype, via videoconference, or through some other computer-mediated medium. Students must get the instructor's approval of their interview questions before conducting their interview.

This assignment will help students

- To develop interview skills
- To develop technology skills
- To gain awareness of cultural differences
- To develop an understanding of the practice of a discipline in other cultures
- To view a field of study from a broader perspective

This assignment lends itself to a variety of disciplines as students can be required to interview subject matter experts in any area. They may be required to conduct a general interview to gain a basic understanding of how a particular discipline (e.g., nursing) is practiced in another culture or they may be required to investigate a specific aspect of a discipline, for example, elder care or neonatal nursing.

COUNTRY RESEARCH REPORT

For this assignment, students conduct research on one particular country. The report should present relevant and current information on various aspects of the majority culture of the country. The research report must include a thorough discussion of seven key cultural variables:

political, economic, social, religious, educational, linguistic, and technological. It may also include other variables that a student thinks are significant to the country being studied, such as environmental or recreational.

In the research report students are required to use the Iceberg Model, Hofstede's Cultural Value Dimensions, and Hall's Theory of Contexting to study the majority culture of the country. They may also use other theories of intercultural communication to inform their study of the country and to compare its culture to the US culture. While conducting research, students should remember that beyond gaining an understanding of the majority culture of the country generally, they should be reflecting on how the cultural values they learn about will impact the creation of technical documentation for an audience within the country.

The report should begin with a brief introduction. Then it should discuss the seven cultural variables, the Iceberg Model, Hofstede's Cultural Value Dimensions, and Hall's Theory of Contexting. The final section of the report should discuss how an understanding of the culture will impact the creation of technical documentation for an audience within the country. Students should include a brief conclusion section and a Works Cited page and in-text citations in the MLA format. The report should be between seven and ten single-spaced pages, not counting the Works Cited.

Completing this assignment will help students

- To gain an awareness of intercultural communication
- To access and evaluate non-US research sources
- To learn about key cultural variables (political, economic, social, religious, educational, linguistic, and technological) in another culture
- To develop an understanding of another culture based on these variables

This assignment could easily be adapted to other disciplines. Having students conduct research on another culture could be relevant for many classes. Faculty could consider narrowing the focus of the research. For example, instead of researching all the key variables for another country, faculty in engineering could have students conduct research on sustainability issues in engineering within a particular culture. In nursing courses, students could be required to research global health concerns and the role nursing professionals can play in addressing these concerns within a particular country. Faculty in economics courses could have students research issues related to poverty and microfinance programs like the one started by Bill Gates and Bono in Africa and focus their research on a particular country in Africa.

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

For this assignment students may work individually or in groups to develop a documentation project for an audience within another country. They should use what they learned from the Country Research Report as the starting point for developing the documentation project. An instructor may choose to use this assignment without having students complete the Country Research Report. If so, it will be necessary to build some time into the assignment to allow students to conduct research.

Students/groups may choose to write a short manual, design a web page, or create a brochure. The project should be developed for an audience within the country that they researched in their Country Research Report or for an audience that includes people both within the country and within the United States.

The type of document, the audience, and the purpose should evolve based on what students learned while writing the Country Research Report. For example, if a student researched Norway and learned that the average household has two computers and that individuals in Norway are very environmentally conscious, the student might choose to develop a web page on recycling for an audience in Norway. Similarly, if a student learned that an increasing number of business people from Iceland are doing business with people in the United States, the student might create a guide for business people in both countries interested in doing business with one another. The completed document should be accompanied by a brief summary (not more than one single-spaced page) that discusses how the document was tailored to the target audience.

It is recommended that as part of the peer review process, students be given a lecture on ethical issues in intercultural communication (including intellectual property issues, privacy issues, copyright issues, and issues related to cultural sensitivity). Then they should participate in a workshop on ethical issues in intercultural communication. After the workshop, they will conduct peer reviews of their documents to determine if they have followed all the ethical guidelines discussed in class. The peer review process will help make sure that students apply their cultural awareness and sensitivity to the development of their documentation projects.

This assignment will help students

- To develop writing and design skills
- To gain awareness of intercultural ethics
- To address a global issue at the local level
- To develop a framework for global civic engagement

If the assignment is structured as a group project, in addition to the benefits already listed, it will also help students

- To master the use of communication technologies for collaboration
- To develop the ability to collaborate with teammates to manage knowledge and create shared understandings

In order to adapt this assignment, students in other disciplines can be required to produce other types of deliverables. In an engineering course, students may be required to develop a plan for implementing sustainable development in a particular location. Students in a business course could be required to develop a management plan for working with a cross-functional global team. In an education course, students might create lesson plans for teaching high school students about a complex global issue from multiple perspectives.

PRESENTATION

For this assignment students are required to share what they have learned about global issues, either from the Individual or Group project or from another project given by their instructor, by giving a public presentation to some members of the campus community or to a group in the larger community surrounding the university. This presentation may be given to another class at the university (e.g., an International Relations, Communication, or Honors course), to a class at a local high school, or may be part of International Education Week or another relevant campus or community event. In addition to helping students develop their presentation skills, this assignment also serves to raise awareness of global issues on campus and in the community.

This assignment will help students

- To develop presentation skills
- To disseminate the content of their projects either on campus or in the community

Since presentation skills are valuable to most professions, this assignment would not need to be changed. However, faculty members may wish to have students present at professional conferences in their field or other relevant events.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

In the interdisciplinary course in global citizenship taught by the two faculty members who have initiated this internationalization project, many very positive student outcomes were observed. These outcomes included student projects that addressed global issues at the local

level, increased global civic engagement on the part of students, and students' development of a framework for future civic engagement.

For example, one student team developed a lesson plan to teach elementary school students about the United Nations. They were motivated to undertake this project because they had not learned about the United Nations until they were in high school, and they believed that students should become aware of global issues at a younger age.

Another student team worked on a website for UCF's Office of Diversity Initiatives and Office of International Studies; the website, entitled "UCF Celebrates Diversity," presented information on the holidays, rites of passage, and other celebrations observed by some of the diverse cultural groups who are part of the UCF community. The students researched, wrote, and edited the entries on the various celebrations. The website was designed to allow other members of the community to add their own celebrations. The idea behind the website was to create greater harmony by enhancing an understanding of the diverse cultures represented within the UCF community.

In addition to creating projects like the two mentioned, students also demonstrated increased global civic engagement by participating in events like Diversity Week, International Education Week, and by active participation in organizations on campus (e.g., the Model United Nations) and in the community (e.g., Amnesty International) that have an international focus. Several of the students also applied for study abroad opportunities, were motivated to pursue advanced language study, or went on to complete Honors theses with an international focus. As a result of these activities, students developed a framework for global civic engagement that will be a part of their lives after they leave the university.

PILOT TESTING THE ASSIGNMENTS

Currently the assignments are being pilot tested by a core group of UCF faculty in disciplines that include engineering, hospitality management, history, creative writing, and communication. The authors will assess the usefulness of the assignments based on the results of the pilot tests. The assessment will include both quantitative data on student learning outcomes and qualitative data on students' perceptions of the learning experience. The assessment will also include a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the assignments by the faculty members who pilot test them. After the initial pilot tests, the authors will revise the assignments based on the results of the assessment and will make the revised assignments available to colleagues at UCF; they will continue to gather assessment data from those faculty

members who use the revised assignments in their courses.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this project is to help faculty members create assignments and courses that will develop students' global competency and, thereby, enhance their civic engagement. The assignments described in this paper will be of particular value to faculty members new to the challenges associated with internationalizing courses and with teaching across disciplines. The assignments can be used in a sequence as the basis for an entire course in global citizenship or intercultural communication or they can be used individually and adapted across the disciplines as they have been by the authors' colleagues at the University of Central Florida. In the future, the authors hope to make these assignments available to faculty members outside the UCF community.

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