

# Using Technology to Prepare Students for the Challenges of Global Citizenship

**Dr. Houman Sadri**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**University of Central Florida**  
**Orlando, FL 32816 USA**

and

**Dr. Madelyn Flammia<sup>1</sup>**  
**Department of English**  
**University of Central Florida**  
**Orlando, FL 32816 USA**

## ABSTRACT

In the modern world, everyone must recognize that it is nearly impossible to separate many domestic and international problems and managing international challenges will take the efforts of all nations. As a result, each and every person must think like a global citizen and practice mindfulness in daily life. Using the complex interdependence model as a basis for examining citizen diplomacy, this paper suggests ways that new media can be used to introduce students to a global perspective on the world. Further, it provides faculty members with a set of guidelines for structuring projects that task students with the challenge of taking positive action to effect political and societal change.

**Keywords:** global citizenship, citizen diplomacy, complex interdependence model, international relations, new media

## INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship in the information society brings with it many challenges as well as opportunities for individuals to play a meaningful role as citizen diplomats. The university is one logical place where individuals can be prepared to play meaningful roles in the global society. This paper focuses on the role of technology in preparing students to become citizens who take positive social action to effect political and societal change.

## EMERGENCE OF CITIZEN DIPLOMATS

In contemporary international relations, it is increasingly evident that the art of diplomacy, communication, and negotiation are no longer limited to behavior of state diplomats. In fact, in our global village, even the states themselves do not have the same monopolistic actor status in international affairs that they used to have up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traditionally, political scientists, whose task is to study the behavior of citizens and

governments, have explained the role of states in international relations and their interactions by the state-centric model. The state-centric model suggests that states, representing their own nations or people, behave as the primary actor while dominating the main channels of international communication. In the international scene, the states are represented by presidents, monarchs, prime ministers, diplomats, ambassadors, or other individuals who are influential decision makers and negotiators. Nevertheless, there have been new actors, at the global level besides states since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are not accounted for by this model. The growth of multinational corporations (MNCs), international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have gradually intruded and interfered in the state exclusive sphere of international communication. Beyond the new global actors, the technological revolution has shifted and will continue to shift the nature of international communication through the empowerment of ordinary individuals. The empowerment of individuals is transparent throughout our global community with one's ability to travel with more ease than ever before, the capacity to interact with the most distant parts of the globe in mere seconds, and most importantly the capability to share information effectively throughout the world.

With the exception of national security matters in which the states possess the power of coercion and remain omnipotent, new international developments are challenging and withering away the authority of statesmen. In 1977, two students of international relations, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, reassessed the validity of the state-centric model and advocated the emergence of a fresh model that could more accurately represent the realities of modern international interactions and communication. The new model, known as the complex interdependence model, brought a different interpretation of the interaction among the actors in the state centric model. The difference between the two is best illustrated by Figure 1, which simplifies the

multifaceted international system of communication by focusing on its building block: the relationship between two states.

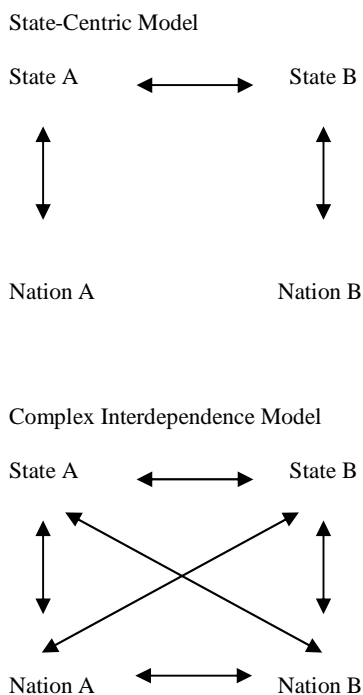


Figure 1 State-Centric Model and Complex Interdependence Model

The figure illustrates that in the state-centric model both states A and B represent their own nations (people or public), as the arrows indicate. Moreover, international interaction is shown by a two-way communication arrow between states A and B. Since the exchange occurs at the state level, then one may portray it as interstate relations, not international relations.

The complex interdependence model inherits the state-to-state channel of communication, but it is superior to the previous model due to its additional paths of communication. The complex interdependence model shows the interaction between state A and nation B (as well that of state B and nation A), since modern states use public diplomacy campaigns to persuade foreign nations to agree with their policy choices, goals, and means. Such campaigns were traditionally called propaganda, a term that has a negative connotation today and thus is rarely used now. Finally, the direct channels of communication between nations A and B are free from governmental channels as individuals from MNCs (like IBM, Sony, and Volvo) and NGOs (such as Amnesty International, Green Peace, and Red Cross) directly interact with one another, along with their counterparts throughout the world. Non-governmental channels of communication are relatively a

new phenomenon in our increasingly global society, as both non-profit and profit-oriented organizations directly negotiate, sign agreements, and conduct programs with one another. In today's society this behavior has become so ordinary that we take it for granted.

With the dynamic changes of globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one primary preoccupation of states is national security, the definition of which has expanded its scope into concerns with the international environment, health, business, drug trafficking, arms trades, as well as international terrorism networks. Hence, the complex interdependent model is under speculation, as types of organizations and individuals increasingly exercise their own abilities to influence decisions of states and global issues. Many cross-border issues and NGOs are deeply involved with key global topics from health to environment or business to culture. Sometimes the resources of various NGOs are even greater than those of the state(s), which attempt to regulate them. It would be negligent to allude to a "borderless world" at this time in history or even a central global governing body. The latter does not exist, as there is much dispute to determine whose and how particular model and philosophy would be globally acceptable or enforceable.<sup>2</sup> Still, the complex interdependent model is viable and to a large extent measurable. It is particularly useful for our purposes of examining intercultural communication, citizen diplomacy, and global citizenship.

In addition to being a member of our own ethnic, national, and religious groups, it is also important for everyone to become a member of the international community. In this modern world, everyone must recognize that it is nearly impossible to separate many domestic and international problems and managing international challenges will take the efforts of all nations. As a result, each and every person must think like a global citizen and practice mindfulness in daily life.

#### USING NEW MEDIA

New media can be used to introduce students to a global perspective on the world. Collaborative software programs (Adobe Acrobat Connect, OneHub, Microsoft Office Live Workspace) make it possible for students to work on projects with students at universities in other nations; faculty can develop projects that task students with the challenge of developing white papers to codify their understanding of global issues (world health, poverty, terrorism, environmental concerns). Developing an understanding of global issues together with students in other cultures will help students develop a global view of these issues and will begin building bridges between cultures that will actually help students begin to develop relationships with other global citizens, and perhaps, start working towards their own contributions to address these issues.

When introducing students to the concept of citizen diplomacy, it is useful to discuss public figures like Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono who have made significant strides toward addressing global challenges like world health and poverty. In June 2006, Bill Gates announced his intention to retire as CEO of the Microsoft Corporation and dedicate his full attention to the work of the Gates Foundation. This is an example of a world citizen's mindfulness in action. Practically speaking, it may not be surprising it took an engineer to create a working philanthropy model that is efficient and effective. If world health and poverty issues were a state, Bono would be its statesman. He has become the credible representative of these issues. He has learned how to bring groups of the least likely individuals together to recognize that they all have a common interest in global issues. Bono knows he must speak the language of the individuals from the "cultures" of which they come. Cultures develop within societies, but they also develop within entities and industries. Business, music, movies, politics and philanthropy all have their own cultures within their fields. Bono bridges the gaps in understanding between them to create concerted efforts. Consequently, Bono's charitable efforts exemplify the primary hope for anyone who develops mindfulness in intercultural relations, to create understanding across cultural divides.

Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono are examples that citizens of all types (and at all levels) can make a difference, and that mindfulness can be the beginning as well as the root for a sustainable, peaceful, and balanced interdependent world. To measure the progress, however, we must examine the result of the programs established by the initiative of global citizens.

For an effective and sustainable program, Gates and Bono have created a partnership like none other to date. DATA is the organization through which Bono facilitates his work and is also where The Gates Foundation initially financed him. DATA is a double acronym for (debt, AIDS, trade, Africa) and (democracy, accountability, transparency in Africa). *Time* described the organization as strategically positioned as a nexus between the nonprofit and development organizational world and the results-oriented political spheres.<sup>3</sup> The DATA website describes its aims in raising awareness about the cause and intends to stimulate response to the crises swamping Africa, including unpayable debts, uncontrolled spread of AIDS, and unfair trade rules which keep Africans poor and discourage African leaders to strengthen democracy, accountability and transparency toward their own citizens.

One of the most successful programs championed by DATA is the Microfinance program. According to the DATA report, microfinance offers credit and financial

assistance to the world's poor and gives them a chance as well as means of working themselves out of poverty.<sup>4</sup> Loans can be as little as fifty to one hundred U.S. dollars to start or expand tiny businesses that offer sustenance for a family and/or community. Along with business investment, micro credit programs offer a combination of services and resources to their clients, including savings facilities, training, networking, and peer support.<sup>5</sup> The 95% loans repayment rate makes the program very successful due to manageable interest rates that are eventually re-funneled back into communities to distribute further loans.

Studies are showing repeatedly the trickle down effect of these programs. While most of the loans are given to women, empowering them to avoid the desperate choices of early marriage or the sale of young girls, it is also showing that recipient's standards of living are improving in everything from nutrition, shelter, education and health care. These improvements further lead into business expansion, which benefits communities at large. Plus, many of the recipients are affiliated with local health education programs for AIDS prevention. Microfinance is considered an integral part of HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. The DATA also reports that there are over 2,500 microfinance institutions servicing over 8 million clients world wide, most of whom are women. This is important, since 80% of world's poor people consist of women and children, based on the UN Development reports. Thus, the extraordinary DATA program is a dynamic example of how small steps of mindful individuals and efforts of culturally-sensitive organizations can assist in empowering individuals in less fortunate societies by allowing them to achieve self-sufficiency—a social value which can easily be communicated over cross cultural barriers.

## SUCCESSFUL STUDENT PROJECTS

Students are inspired by learning about the power of individuals to effect significant changes in the global community; however, they may also feel that their situation is quite different from an internationally-renowned musician or the founder of Microsoft Corporation. For this reason, instructors should stress that these examples are meant to serve as inspiration for students not as exact models for them to follow. Students grasp this difference quite readily and are enthusiastic about finding ways to create small-scale projects locally that have the potential for addressing specific aspects of a global challenge.

One successful assignment is to get students to become involved global citizens by challenging them to develop a project to address a global issue; the assignment requires that students research a global issue and develop some type of documentation to assist other citizens or special interest groups to take action to address the issue. For

example, students might write a white paper to inform their fellow students about a pressing global issue or might design a web site with information on how citizens can be more “green” in their every day lives and thereby protect the planet that we all share.

Political Science students interning at International Council of Central Florida (ICCF) established a website that is very accessible to the general public. The website aims to involve ordinary people in the local programs that students organize for dignitaries who visit Central Florida via the U.S. State Department International Visitors Program. The ordinary citizens are involved by hosting dinners or cultural events for the foreign dignitaries. This way, ordinary people get the opportunity to interact with individuals who are usually way out of their league. The reviews of this program show extraordinary results for foreign guests, local hosts, and of course the students who are present at all levels of activities.

One of the most successful projects completed by a student team in one of our classes addressed world hunger. The team of four students created a manual for a nonprofit relief organization based in Fort Myers, Florida. The Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO) combats hunger in 140 developing nations by distributing seeds and educational literature, and by advancing agricultural technology. The team developed a manual describing the seed plants which ECHO cultivates and provides to its clients in developing nations. The team translated their booklet into Spanish and Creole because they learned that these were the languages spoken by the majority of ECHO’s clients. This project was particularly ambitious, as few of the other students teams actually translated their documents; however, this team included a foreign language major.

Students may also develop a much great awareness of world issues when they have the opportunity to discuss these issues with other students outside their own country. Virtual team projects that involve collaboration among students from two or more universities in different countries are a very effective way to broaden students’ perspectives on world issues. Programs like Adobe Acrobat Connect, Skype, and OneHub make it possible for students to communicate and collaborate with their counterparts at universities abroad.

For example, one very successful project was a teaming of students at the University of Limerick in Limerick, Ireland with students at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, Florida. The students in the two classes were divided into teams of three or four students with Irish and U.S. students on each team. The student teams were charged with researching information on intercultural communication that they thought would be helpful to college students communicating with students in other cultures; they were then responsible for

designing a web site to present their findings to fellow college students. In a Middle East Politics class, UCF students recently collaborated with their counterparts at the Ghent University (Belgium) via teleconference, Adobe Connect, Skype, and e-mails to discuss diverse perspectives and policy options about conflicts in the Middle East.

Technology can be used in many ways to enhance students’ understanding of their role as global citizens and to make it possible for them to disseminate their understanding to others. Another successful project using technology was the creation of a web site by a team of UCF students. These students created a web site for the Offices of International Studies and Diversity Initiatives on the UCF campus. Although the web site was developed for a primary audience on one campus, it had much farther reaching implications. The content of the web site was information on the various holidays celebrated by the diverse population on the UCF campus. The students in the class researched and wrote about over thirty-five holidays being careful to choose holidays that represented a wide diversity of cultural, religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Because the UCF campus has such a diverse population, it was not possible initially to represent every group on campus, but the web site will continue to grow and serve as an interactive site where individuals both at UCF and outside UCF can contribute information on the holidays they celebrate and the way they celebrate them. The web site is a tool for creating an understanding and respect for cultures different from one’s own. It will serve to represent UCF to the larger community and also to connect UCF to the larger global community.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY**

Faculty members wishing to incorporate assignments and class activities that will help students develop as mindful global citizens have many avenues open to them. Of course, there may be limitations because of the particular class or topic being taught. However, some key principles can be applied successfully in nearly all situations. We present a list of guidelines here and then discuss each one in more detail. These guidelines are:

1. Begin where students are currently in their thinking about global issues.
2. Use new technologies to stimulate students’ interest in projects and to enhance their ability to disseminate the fruits of their research and writing.
3. Use public figures and current events to demonstrate the power of individuals to effect significant changes and to address large global issues.
4. Give students the relevant discipline-specific background information (politics,

economics, intercultural communication, and global health) before beginning an assignment where they will address global issues.

5. Give students clear cut parameters for the assignment and, when possible, give them examples of successful projects from the past.
6. Consider letting students work in small groups to enhance their creative process and stimulate their interest in the assignment.
7. Take advantage of opportunities to have students communicate with members of other cultures either via electronic means or by meeting visitors on campus.

### **Begin Where Students Are**

It is helpful to students if we begin our discussion of global citizenship by explaining what we mean by the term and making clear that it is possible to be a global citizen even without leaving one's own campus. We begin by giving students six steps to becoming a global citizen as presented by Taking It Global. According to Taking it Global, there are six simple steps to effectively make change and become global citizen in your own right. The first step is to reflect—what changes would you like to see happen in your local community or in the world? The second step is to identify—what interests or skills do you have? The third step is to get informed and inspired—gather as much information and sources as you can about your interests. The fourth step is to plan—create your own plan of action to address the changes you would like to make. The fifth step is to implement—get started, stay focused and positive. You may hit obstacles in the road, but if you pursue enough you will eventually reach your goals. The sixth and final step is to evaluate—review the progress you made, reflect on the goals you were able to accomplish, and address what changes you would make if you did it again. By following these six simple steps, anyone can become a global citizen and change their own local community or the world.<sup>6</sup>

### **Use New Technologies**

When we use new technology like OneHub or Adobe Connect, we are giving students an understanding of the tremendous power such technology has for enhancing global understanding and cooperation. It may be helpful to give students examples of situations where technology played a powerful role in effecting social change. For example, mobile communication use and collective action was seen in the Philippines when political activists engaged in an attempt to overthrow a repressive regime by using text messages via mobile phones to take part in collective action. Their plan succeeded on January 20, 2001 when the “smart mob” made President Joseph Estrada of the Philippines the first leader to ever lose power to collective wireless communication action. Over

one million Manila citizens mobilized and communicated via text messaging to assemble together to bring down the regime. On Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, also known as “EDSA,” tens of thousands of Filipinos came together after all receiving a text message reading, “Go 2EDSA, Wear blk.” More than a million people gathered over a period of four days and, for the most part, were wearing black. Another example is the use of Twitter in the aftermath of the 2009 Iranian election.

### **Use Public Figures and Current Events**

As we mentioned earlier in this paper, examples of action taken by individuals, particularly popular cultural icons, can serve as an inspiration to students who may wish to emulate these individuals. At the same time, it may also be a good idea to give students examples that do not seem as removed from their own lives as few students have the financial resources of Bill Gates or the media stardom of Bono. Therefore, we also give students examples closer to home like Alternative Spring Break at UCF, which is similar to other alternative spring break programs around the world. This program gives students the opportunity to benefit society by taking part in experiential learning and community service. Some of the trips and destinations that are available for UCF students to take part in include: Hands on Orlando (Orlando, FL), United Cerebral Palsy (Nashville, TN), Habitat for Humanity (Albany, GA and Florence, SC), Jekyll Island Sea Turtle Center (Jekyll Island, GA), Eastbank Storm Center (New Orleans, LA), and Hands on Atlanta (Atlanta, GA). Although these programs are not international, they are very much in the spirit of global citizenship.

### **Give Students Relevant Background Information**

When teaching global citizenship, it makes sense to place the discussion within the context of the discipline and specific course. For instance, teaching an International Relations (IR) course is often challenging because students tend to see IR as an abstract field that does not involve them. A major teaching strategy is to show how IR influences our everyday life. We teach about the IR impact in our pocketbook (via trade, employment, and income), environment (since locally-produced pollution spreads globally), and war and peace issues (in most classes there are students who know someone sent to a war zone). While all efforts toward global awareness are positive, it is most likely that the students will be engaged when they see the relevance to their own lives and areas of study.

### **Give Students Clear Cut Parameters**

Building on the previous point, we note that because global issues can seem overwhelming, the best way to introduce them is within the context of one particular discipline or topic. For example, students of International Relations may wish to learn more about intercultural communication and that study can lead into the development of a project requiring them to communicate

with their counterparts at a university in another country. Students also find it helpful to see the types of projects that were done by other students in the past. If the faculty member has not done this type of project before, it would be worthwhile to seek out projects from colleagues.

### **Have Students Work in Small Groups**

In many professional settings, employees work as part of teams or at least work in collaboration with co-workers and share information, often via technology. For this reason, it is good preparation for the workplace to have students work in small teams to complete their projects. Beyond just having them work in teams, having them work as part of virtual teams will greatly enhance their mastery of communication technology. It will also make possible collaboration with teammates in other cultures.

### **Have Students Collaborate with Members of Other Cultures**

Using technology to have students collaborate with members of other cultures is an ideal way to structure a global citizenship project. However, when logistics prohibit this type of project, it is still a good idea to use technology or other resources to have students at least communicate briefly with members of other cultures. Even one videoconference with students or global activists in another culture may make a lasting impression on students and inspire their work on global projects. Another option is to have students meet face-to-face with visiting scholars or members of the larger community who represent other cultures and who have experience as global citizens.

## **CONCLUSION**

Structuring assignments to help students become mindful global citizens can be challenging for faculty members and can take more time than merely teaching courses without such assignments. However, the benefits for both students and faculty far outweigh the challenges presented by the endeavor. Certainly, seeing a project like the ECHO manual put into use by an agency working to end world hunger makes all the challenges worthwhile.

---

<sup>1</sup> This research was mainly conducted with the support that Drs. Houman Sadri and Madelyn Flammia have received from the UCF Office of International Studies, UCF Faculty Center of Teaching & Learning, UCF Information Fluency Project, and International Studies Association. Nevertheless, none of these organizations are responsible for the ideas presented in this work by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave-MacMillian Publishing, 2005), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Tyrangiel, December 2006, 5.

<sup>4</sup> "Microfinance: A Key Tool in the Fight against Poverty and the Empowerment of the World's Poor—Especially Women," DATA, (Washington, D.C.: October, 2005), <http://www.data.org/policy/aids/>.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Microcredit Summit Campaign, "About Microcredit," (Washington, D.C.), <http://www.microcreditsummit.org/Aboutmicrocredit.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Taking it Global. [http://www.takingitglobal.org/action/guide/Guide\\_to\\_Action.pdf](http://www.takingitglobal.org/action/guide/Guide_to_Action.pdf)