

Global Citizenship: Extending Students' Knowledge and Action to the Global Context

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Young adults living outside the U.S. tend to be more globally aware than most young adults living in the U.S. A representative poll of 18-24 year-olds indicated that U.S. residents of this age group have considerably less knowledge about international issues and geography in comparison to their counterparts living in other countries (i.e., Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Mexico, Japan, Italy, and Sweden) (National Geographic, 2002). The poll found that in comparison to their international counterparts, U.S. young adults scored far worse in locating countries on a map. For example, only 42 percent of U.S. 18-24 year-olds was able to locate Japan compared to 69 percent of 18-24 year-olds from other countries. This poll also reported that only 13 percent of U.S. young adults correctly located Iraq on a map while over double the number (34 percent) correctly indicated that the reality television show, "Survivor," was located in the South Pacific. For the most part, young adults in the U.S. may know a good deal about domestic politics, issues, and culture, but know far less about the perspectives of (much less the location of) other countries. This U.S.-centric focus is perhaps well reflected in the same poll that also found nearly one-third of young adults in the U.S. think that the U.S. population is between 1 and 2 billion, mistakenly supposing that the U.S. constitutes nearly one-third of the world's population. Such results are disconcerting and indicate the lack of global perspective among young adults in the U.S.

Future generations require more knowledge about global issues, economies, and politics than was required for past generations. Increased travel, trade, and communication between nations have led to a borderless society, often termed as the "global community" or "global society." In our increasingly global society, we cannot afford to be internationally ignorant or teach our students that the U.S. is the sole nation worth consideration. With the increasing political strength of European Union and the economic force of China and other East Asian countries, the U.S. must acknowledge new leaders in the global society. This article is not about national threats or competition, but about recognizing that it is high time to respect, understand, and appreciate what other cultures outside the U.S. have long had to offer in order to fully participate in this global community. Moreover, students' quest for wholeness and meaning become narrow and U.S.-centric when their understandings are limited to the domestic context.

A quest towards wholeness, meaning, and purpose need not come at the expense of global ignorance. In this article, I will discuss "global citizenship," which I will define as being a civically-minded individual whose concerns for others extends to the global context. Global

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citizenship requires global awareness. Most current discussions of citizenship deal with local issues, such as assisting the disadvantaged in the local areas, cleaning up the local environment, and raising political awareness. While such efforts are important and have effects on the international level, the notion of global citizenship requires conscious goodwill efforts that extend beyond our state and national borders. One need not be at the expense of the other; global citizenship encompasses the world in which we all inhabit.

The college context offers many valuable opportunities for students to become more globally aware. I will generally describe what may be lacking in U.S. colleges and universities as well as suggest how international activities can contribute towards global awareness. These possibilities include studying abroad, taking international studies courses, befriending international students, learning from international faculty, and participating in international events.

Studying Abroad: Perhaps the best way to learn and appreciate international perspectives is by studying outside the U.S. College students studying outside their home countries are exposed to diverse individuals, ways of life, and approaches to education. Those who study abroad will not only gain considerable understanding about other cultures, but having been international students themselves, will also increase their affinity towards international students in their home country. Currently, there are very disproportionate numbers of U.S. students studying abroad in other countries compared to the number of students from other countries studying in the U.S. According to the Institute of International Education (2004), 174,629 U.S. students studied abroad compared to 572,509 international students in the U.S. Besides the unbalanced exchange in the number of students, those who study abroad outside the U.S. often study short-term (i.e., one summer, one semester, or a year) and often travel to Europe. A very small proportion of U.S. students seek degrees outside the U.S., especially degrees from non-European countries. In order for students to become more internationalized, they should be encouraged to seek international education, especially beyond North America and Europe.

Taking International Studies Courses: Learning about international perspectives can also occur within the home campus. Unfortunately, international studies courses are not widely offered across disciplinary fields. In a recent survey of student affairs preparation programs, for example, only a small minority of programs offered international courses related to the field and even fewer offered them as a required component of the program (Lee, Engelsen, Woodard, & McClellan, 2005). When asked why international courses were not integrated into the academic program, most of our respondents indicated a lack of funding and specialized faculty in international issues. One of our respondents stated, "We are too domestically focused. Some programs may claim this niche, but I do not think we will change in the near future." This sentiment is not an isolated one and may lend some evidence as to why international perspectives are often marginalized from most college curricula. Besides lacking resources, there appears to be a passive attitude among many departments that there is no need (and no incentive) to internationalize, which may serve as the greatest barrier to internationalizing the curriculum. Even without considerable financial resources, departments can strategically offer cross-listed courses with internationalized departments, encourage students to enroll in elective courses with international elements, and prioritize hiring faculty with international training or interests.

Befriending International Students: International students are perhaps the most “invisible” members of our campus community. While they have tremendous insight and perspectives to offer, they are often silent and excluded from classroom discussions, social activities, and other campus events. In a recent study of international students (Lee and Rice, 2004), many international respondents reported feeling lonely and left out both in and outside the classroom. They often lack voice because they sense that they are outsiders and not integral to campus life. Language difficulties and cultural adjustments made it especially difficult for them to seek out friends. Many seek friendships within international student circles and remain detached from the social activities of domestic students. In most campuses, international students constitute a very small minority, especially by country of origin. Quite often, international students find social networks within their international student club or friendship circles (i.e., Chinese Student Association, Indian Student Club, etc.). Such international student groups, while valuable, are often detached from other student groups and the rest of campus life.

Of course, not all international students are isolated and many international students befriend domestic students. Befriending international students can reap many benefits, including gaining a greater appreciation for diverse cultures and extending social networks beyond the U.S. International students are not solely interested in mastering academic materials, but also like most U.S. college students, desire to make friends and become part of a college peer group.

Learning from International Faculty: International faculty bring innovative ideas and perspectives from outside the U.S. and represent some of the most renowned scholars in their home country. These faculty are often educated outside the U.S. with fresh insights and life experiences. However, language barriers and foreign accents are sometimes a source of negative teaching evaluations and less than objective comments. In some cases, international faculty are even denied promotion and tenure because of language and cultural barriers. Faculty evaluators should keep in mind that while effective modes of delivery are valuable, teaching styles should not outweigh the significance of the content being taught. International faculty should not be expected to “blend” into Western forms of thought and training, but should be appreciated for the diverse approaches that they offer. Moreover, international faculty provide important networks to other faculty and leaders in their home country. International faculty can serve as critical links between colleges and universities overseas.

Participating in International Events: Almost every campus offers international events, through their international affairs office, multicultural programming center, etc. These may include dance performances, dramatic plays, foreign films, and lectures. While cultural performances are entertaining and highly attended, they should also include educational elements to further promote global awareness. For example, performances may include some additional background information for the audience, such as the historical context, interpretations, and so on. International lectures can also be stimulating and enriching. International lecturers, faculty, and graduate student exhibitions are just some opportunities that are often open to all members of the campus community. Many institutions host an “international week” or “international fair” filled with cultural activities and events as ways for faculty, staff, and students to develop greater global awareness.

As demonstrated, there are many ways that we can promote global knowledge and awareness. Global awareness, however, is not synonymous with global citizenship. Global citizenship requires advocacy and action, not passivity or mere tolerance. Global awareness then precludes global action. As students understand the value of international views and concern themselves with global issues, they can be stirred towards global action and creating social change in the global context. With this in mind, I discuss some ways that students (as well as faculty and administrators) can partake in global action.

Setting up resources for international students: As noted earlier, international students tend to encounter trials and difficulties that extend beyond the difficulties of domestic students. Knowledge and conveniences that most domestic students take for granted, such as how to set up a checking account, where to buy an international calling card, and local transportation can become great hurdles for visitors from outside countries. Besides assisting them on basic tasks such as these, more work needs to be done on orienting the institution and local community towards international students rather than placing the burden on international students to orient themselves.

Quite often, the burden of assisting all the needs of international students tends to fall within the international affairs office, usually staffed by a few overwhelmed individuals. International affairs offices are already quite busy deciphering visa forms, SEVIS procedures, work permits, and the most difficult cases. Greater resources are needed to assist international students as well as international scholars. Other student services offices can also take on an international orientation that orients its services and staff to international students and their concerns.

International student rights: We seek to promote “diversity” but often restrict our advocacy to hyphenated Americans (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, etc.) Many international students feel invisible and unheard in U.S. colleges and universities. Many of these students mistakenly believe that U.S. procedures and rights do not apply to them because they are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. These individuals may encounter tremendous discrimination but neglect reporting such incidents because of misunderstood fears about being deported to their home countries. Not only do international students need to know their rights, but they also should be made fully aware of the steps they can take if they are wronged.

Global activism: There is no shortage of international social justice issues to spur students towards collective action. While activism among college students was especially heightened in the 1960’s, activism among students is still being observed. Collective bargaining among student employees, political campaigning, and rallies about affirmative action are just examples of how college students are participating in social movements. College students should also be encouraged to think of social change in the global context, especially considering international concerns that extend beyond the U.S., such as the AIDS epidemic, worker’s rights (i.e., sweatshop labor, child labor, etc.), fair trade, privatization of public goods, global warming etc.

In sum, college students in the U.S. must become more internationally aware in order to fully appreciate and participate in today’s global society. International issues involve every academic and professional field. International issues should not be isolated to academic concerns as they also permeate our social values. In considering the values and character of students especially,

the universal value of love and respect thy neighbor requires one to first know thy neighbor. Our “neighbors” are not just those who live next door or across the street. In our global society, our neighbors are domestic as well as international. To be true global citizens, we must think not only about the city or nation in which we live, we must extend our knowledge and activities to the global context. Such global understanding and participation can further contribute to the wholeness of an individual. As students learn and work towards improving the global community, they are better able to gain a deeper recognition of their own values, goals, and ideals. A community that is global in scope is, of course, much more diverse than one that is restricted to the domestic arena. Greater exposure to diverse ways of life and learning can promote greater self-awareness and appreciation of the global community in which we all live.

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