

WANTED

GLOBAL

International education experiences help prepare global-ready graduates for the twenty-first century workforce BY DARLENE BREMER

Globalization has impacted the majority of the world's modern workforce, making competencies once considered essential for productive professionals within a regional or national economy no longer sufficient in a marketplace with crumbling borders. To prepare global-ready graduates for a workforce that requires inter- and multi-cultural competencies that ensure success in dealing with the serious social, political, and environmental threats that have come about from the advance of globalization, institutions of higher education must change their priorities and objectives and include pivotal international educational experiences in their curricula.

Defining Global Workforce Development

Just as the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik in 1957 caused the American federal government and educational systems to redesign themselves, a similar impetus is compelling these institutions to reexamine their presumptions of dominance as the world moves toward increased globalization. "Global workforce development (GWD) is the educational process of fostering and supporting the educational globalization effort," observed William D. Hunter, director of the Lehigh University Office of International Students and Scholars. Most U.S. universities, Hunter asserted, have adopted an international theme by this point, with curricula redesigned to enable students to become globally competent upon graduation.

The term global workforce development has come to the forefront as companies operating in a global economy began to look for people with global competencies to help in their struggle to remain competitive, according to Ron Moffatt, director of the San Diego State University International Student Center. "The term GWD has become more generic and cross-disciplined and has come to mean a global-ready graduate, that is, a person with a grasp of global systems, global issues, the dynamics of how things are interrelated and interconnected in the world, and how

society can best address global issues," he explained. Such issues can include the growing inequalities in economic development around the world, growing environmental hazards, or issues of sustainability, justice, and security.

"GWD is a new imperative that requires universities to prepare students with a much deeper understanding of the global community, including knowledge of other languages and cultures," added Dr. William E. Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, Adelphi. Two important aspects of GWD, according to Kirwan, are preparing U.S.-born students with a more sophisticated knowledge of the larger world in which they will be working, and expanding universities' roles in training foreign-born students in the United States. "Better preparation of U.S.-born students will require more emphasis on acquiring language skills and learning about the histories and cultures of other regions of the world, while the training of foreign-born students in the United States should go beyond helping them master their disciplines. We need to be providing these students with a deeper comprehension of American history and culture so that when they go home, they can promote better international understanding and partnerships," he explained.

More specifically, according to Darla K. Deardorff, director

WORKERS





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of the Association of International Education Administrators, based at Duke University, GWD means preparing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be successful when working with people from different cultures, regardless of location. "One doesn't have to go overseas to work with people from different cultures. Exposure to intercultural communication even at home is becoming more important as our population becomes more diverse," she said.

From the policy point of view of the Southern Global Strategies Council, based in Durham, North Carolina, GWD focuses on internationalizing the U.S. workforce to enable U.S. graduates to acquire global competencies and compete internationally. "Our goal is to create a Southern U.S. workforce that is globally competitive and internationally skilled, while recognizing that the U.S. cannot grow as a country unless the rest of the world grows with us. Therefore, the development of other nations' workforces is equally as important," explained Carol Conway, director of the Council.

Importance of Global Workforce Development

The importance of GWD cannot be overstated. "If you look at GWD in terms of just getting along on a planet and sharing finite resources, the concept means defining what role people are going to take in solving the world's problems," observed Moffatt.

Conway sees of GWD as vital. "Humans are at a turning point. We need to learn how to get along and work together to improve everyone's lives." In addition, the global economy is a reality and, like it or not, we must deal with it with a global perspective. "All students have to have at least two years of postsecondary education that results in a degree or professional certificate that allows them to compete in this global market and global workforce," she stated.

Since the workforce is now being drawn more from the global community rather than from within any single nation, then, according to Kirwan, companies and organizations will be creating teams of workers who live in different parts of the world and who must understand one another and communicate effectively. This requires a deep understanding of languages, cultures, histories, and perspectives, all of which are components of developing global-ready graduates.

The interesting challenge of GWD in terms of intercultural competence is developing an overall blueprint for developing global-ready graduates. "This challenge is being met by ongoing research and curricular and co-curricular experimentation, along with exposing students to global leaders and providing experiential learning opportunities," Hunter said.

When all is said and done, the need for GWD is driven by the growth and increasing complexity of an interrelated global economy. "Even as boundaries between countries and institutions in the global marketplace are crumbling, cultural barriers are going up, making it imperative to develop a global workforce that can function effectively in this environment and that can support the labor needs of businesses with worldwide operations," explained David Rippey, vice president of research and development for Healthy Companies International.

Impact of Educational Experiences

Any cross-cultural learning experience incorporates the kinds of learning processes that engender greater awareness and understanding of different attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives and impact GWD for either U.S. students going abroad or for foreign-born students coming to the U.S. to study. "As society, the economy, and the workforce becomes more cross-cultural, those that are comfortable enough to deal with, understand, and respect cultural difference will be the leaders that can advance their goals," said Moffatt.

As an essential ingredient for GWD, providing international education experiences is now one of the most important priorities for universities. According to Kirwan, education abroad opportunities are the single best way to provide the knowledge and experience needed to succeed in the twenty-first century workforce. And Conway asserts that experiential learning and deep immersion in the global environment is the fastest way to understand a new culture and the best way to create lasting relationships. "The experiential learning experience for either U.S. students going abroad or for foreign-born students coming to the U.S. provides them with a deeper understanding of how the world works and how other people think, as well as providing them with the basics for building the capacity to learn throughout life," she added.

International education experiences not only help to broaden students' cultural sensitivity, but serve to improve global awareness and business acumen, and the development of a network of global connections essential for conducting business internationally, according to Rippey. With international education experiences, students can broaden their skill sets to become more effective leaders in their organizations and those companies and organizations more competitive in the global marketplace.

Too often, however, international students do not have access to enough intentional programs to encourage meaningful intercultural interactions between students of different cultural backgrounds, according to Deardorff. "Even when studying abroad, it's important to

have meaningful, immersed intercultural experiences to develop the deeper cultural understanding necessary to truly impact GWD,” she explained. Depending on how international experiences are structured, then, people will begin to develop degrees of intercultural competence, that is, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Hunter agrees that for students to really succeed globally, a true understanding of one’s own culture and its stereotypes and traditions, as well as participation in cross-cultural experiences, is required to increase awareness of the world’s broader environment. “Cross-cultural experiences don’t necessarily mean physical travel overseas or a study-abroad program. What is necessary is a willingness to step outside of one’s own cultural comfort zone,” Hunter stated.

Skill Sets for Interconnected World

The result of international educational experiences on GWD is a workforce with the skill sets necessary to succeed in an interconnected world. Moffatt’s field of study in this area has been student development theory, which has recently been defined in terms of learning outcomes that are applied to student development throughout the higher education experience.

“The research indicates that there are several intersections between students’ development states and the competencies necessary to function and succeed in a global society,” he explained. Those intersections include being flexible in dealing with inter- or multi-cultural differences, cultural competencies, critical and reflective thinking, intellectual flexibility, emotional cognitive integration, and identity formation. “International experiences only enrich these skills as students develop their short- and long-term goals.”

Deardorff’s research focuses on intercultural competencies, which specifically include the skills to listen, observe and evaluate, analyze, interpret, and relate. “These are skills that are crucial to continued learning throughout life and to processing the cultural knowledge one acquires in becoming prepared for the global workforce,” she explained. She believes that for companies and organizations to be successful, it is imperative that people acquire the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that define global competencies that will allow them to relate to each other and be able to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately with persons from other cultures.

In listing specific skill sets needed to succeed in the global workforce, Conway includes the ability to be fluent in at least one other language, such as Spanish or Mandarin, fluency with e-commerce and the Internet, a well-versed knowledge of geography, and, maybe most important, some knowledge of the political and cultural history of one or two countries or regions outside of Western Europe. “A successful student will not have to know it all, but does have to have a framework of knowledge so that he or she can develop the capabilities to learn faster in the future,” Conway added.

Although Hunter agrees that learning a second language is founda-

tional to developing cross-cultural skills, he adds that the core to developing the necessary skill sets to succeed in a global workforce is open-mindedness. “American colleges and universities have been historically designed to graduate students for the local workforce, which is no longer a valid assumption,” he asserted. A willingness to explore beyond one’s own cultural boundaries is essential to preparing oneself to be a part of a trans-national, trans-cultural team in the global workforce. “It is an inappropriate assumption today that the people who will work with you in the global marketplace will be the same as you,” he warned.

When it comes to languages, Richard Florida, U.S. public policy expert and bestselling author, believes that the U.S. doesn’t focus nearly enough on educating students. He believes students should be learning fluent English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, French, and Japanese. In addition, math, science, computing, and technology, which are integral to a holistic understanding of an interconnected world, should be focused on as well. “Since these latter subjects are already considered the key to economic and personal development, what gets overlooked in the educational system is cultural expression. In short, students need to develop all of these skills sets to succeed in an interconnected world,” Florida stated.



Contribution of Universities

Today, universities are contributing to GWD by providing the fields of knowledge, the research, and the awareness of and the development of the competencies needed for students to enter the global workforce. “The internationalization of the campus is more than student mobility; it is also developing a curriculum that contains the basic elements of a global education,” Moffatt said. That means teaching how the world is interconnected and how the barriers between fields of knowledge, perspectives, and cultures are artificial and somewhat arbitrary. Moffatt believes that universities are moving toward more cross- and multi-disciplinary studies of different fields of knowledge and that there are more collaborations, synergies, and partnerships forming that allow universities to better address issues that challenge the world’s future.

This shift toward globalization on the university campus is certainly making students more aware of the need to prepare for international careers. Although Moffatt does not believe there is enough data to quantify the premise, anecdotally, “international educational experiences are demonstrating an increased desire among people to think and act more globally and to have a more global consciousness.”

Kirwan sees universities contributing to GWD and students’ awareness of international careers in a number of ways, including placing increased emphasis on education abroad programs, making knowledge of other culture and languages a part of the school’s core curriculum, and providing significant international experiences on campus outside of the classroom, such as through art exhibits, cultural activities, and lectures from international experts, all of which

Social Justice and GWD

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION experiences also help improve social justice around the world. By having more educators and students studying and working abroad, increased cultural sensitivity is developed, along with the ability to better understand the attitudes of other peoples and to share their values and goals for social justice. “In particular,” said Douglas Casson Coutts, special advisor to the executive director for Child Hunger World Food Programme. “Recent heightened global tensions have made it more important now to focus on reducing fear and on rededicating efforts to transcend borders and to help those who need it the most.” Moffatt agrees, stating that international education experiences provide an opportunity for the student or global worker to reflect upon the human condition as we are aware of it and allow us to see

the world both as it is, and to envision a brighter future where issues of disparity are being addressed and solved.

Through international education experiences, students learn to develop a better understanding of their own cultural history and an increased appreciation for other cultures. It’s been proven time and again that the more socially aware are more willing to engage problems around the world and in their own backyard. “It takes being out of your own cultural comfort zone to put social problems and social justice issues in perspective and to break down the barriers that stand in the way of solving these issues,” Coutts added.

The multi-national corporations (MNCs) that employ global-ready graduates realized long ago that, regardless of the economic reasons for locating facilities in a certain area, their presence

needs to be appreciated by the people in order to be successful. The real developments that these companies bring to a region, whether they are schools, hospitals, or roads, are no longer token offerings to the local community, but are real efforts to improve life for the workers and general population. “These MNCs are no longer isolated within their zone of operation, but are a part of the local economy and culture,” observed Coutts. The benefits to the community, the country, and its citizens include increased employment and the MNC’s sincere efforts to put forth sustainable, just, solutions for both the region’s development and for their own business presence. [See the Voices interview in this issue of *IE* for a perspective on this topic from former president of Ireland and U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson.]

provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding of the larger world. The proof that awareness of the necessity for preparing for international careers is that inquiries for international opportunities and the volume of students actually studying abroad has significantly increased over the past several years. “Studying abroad is the best way to acquire the global skills so essential for workforce development,” he noted.

Students are also becoming more aware of the need of studying abroad through modern media and computer technology, such as the Internet, according to Conway. “Even parents in middle and upper classes have become more aware that jobs are global today and their children must learn in that context in order to succeed,” she said. Poorer parents, however, may be disproportionately less aware of the need for their children to study abroad and less financially able to provide the opportunities. “The good news is that state and local officials now understand that middle-performing students must be equipped with the necessary skills, including global educations, to become successful workers,” Conway added.

Hunter, however, does not see such high levels of U.S. students’ recognition of where the competition for jobs is coming from. “The number of students who study abroad or learn a second language or have an immersed intercultural experience is still terribly low, which is stalling American participation in the global workforce,” he explained. And Rippey believes that, although students are more aware of the need to prepare for the global workforce, the international climate of rising anti-U.S. sentiment might drive them away from considering careers in the international arena.

What’s Been Accomplished?

According to Moffatt, more people are discovering what GWD really means and that it is no longer just the domain of the business sector. “There is a connection between one’s everyday activities and the global workforce. International educators are better understanding their role in ensuring that students have meaningful, beneficial experiences that will help them shape the global future.” That understanding is being developed from the top universities to the smallest community colleges, according to Hunter. “There is massive grass roots support for the concept that there is no such thing as local anymore and that survival depends on taking a world view,” he said.

The need for intercultural competence development is even beginning to be felt at the secondary education level, with public school teachers beginning to explore intercultural educational opportunities. “Once these teachers acquire some intercultural competence skills, it immediately improves the ways they communicate with students, their parents, and other teachers,” Deardorff said.

Student Perspectives

Nur-E Farzana Rahman graduated from Lehigh University with a B.A. in journalism and economics and is currently working toward her master’s degree in public policy, with a focus on international policy and development, from the Georgetown University School of Diplomacy. Rahman spent the summer of 2005 at Oxford University studying international management. She believes that her international education experience has prepared her for the global workforce by providing her with a global perspective and enabling her to

reflect on and analyze issues from multiple perspectives. “The most important part of international educational experiences, given today’s global workforce and lack of economic borders, is gaining the confidence to travel and work in different countries that I may not have gotten with a more narrow geographically focused education,” she asserted. She adds that her international education experiences have definitely helped her in forming her view of the world and enabled her to understand that geographical borders are non-existent in terms of determining and succeeding in a career path. “Working overseas is a mindset, rather than just a location. Everyone around the world really shares the same economic and political issues,” she added.

Aaron Pratts holds a B.A. in liberal arts and sciences, with a double major in communication and international security and conflict resolution, and a minor in political science from San Diego State University. He is currently on a Fulbright scholarship grant teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia. He has had several international education experiences through San Diego State, including an extended studies and Spanish-language immersion program in Costa Rica and as an international exchange student in Sweden. It has been these international experiences that have fed his desire to learn more about the world, its people, and their cultures.

“Having had all of these different experiences, traveling to all of these locations, and meeting people and exploring unfamiliar places have all prepared me to expect all of the different things that I may encounter in the global workforce,” he explained. One of the reasons he chose to teach ESL in Malaysia is to learn even more about the world, specifically Muslim people and the Islam religion.

“I go into each new experience with an open mind and a willingness to accept anyone and expect anything that may happen,” he added.

In the future, international educators, with the development of the appropriate tools, programs, and services, will have an even deeper impact on the development of the global workforce. Kirwan believes that, with the use of the Internet, the increasing ease of travel, and the significant partnerships being created by universities around the world, the opportunities for ever-expanding international experiences for students will continue to grow. “It is not unrealistic to predict that in 10 to 20 years, virtually all students will be engaged in some sort of meaningful international experience during their college career,” he envisaged.

Global Worker, Global Citizen?

One of the questions surrounding GWD is whether increased awareness of the concept has grown as part of the idea that international education experiences create global citizens. The answer, almost across the board, is yes. “Actually, it’s the key,” said Moffatt. In addition to helping people advance their own goals, as well as their employer’s interests, awareness of GWD helps people develop additional allegiances to the planet itself and the belief that they can effect change through the

work being performed. “It’s an evolutionary trend of moving forward from national and international identities toward an increased sense of global stewardship and citizenship,” he explained.

Although Kirwan also says that awareness of GWD and international education experiences create global citizens, he believes that we are in the fairly early stages of its evolution. “As people develop an ever greater understanding of other cultures, languages, and societies, they also will develop better respect for the differences that exist around the world and will grow into more open-minded and collaborative global citizens,” he explained.

Although the case for global citizenship as an integral part of GWD is growing, it certainly hasn’t been emphasized or popularized in the media as the global economy has been. The U.S. public, for the most part, does not yet really grasp how the country’s attitudes and behavior affects the rest of the world, or why anyone should care. However, there is hope, according to Conway, as a larger proportion of younger U.S. citizens, through media, technology, and intellectual flexibility, are developing the abilities to interact with the new, knowledge-driven global economy.

“Yes, international education experiences do create global citizens,” claimed Rippey. He believes that experiences outside of one’s own cultural environment makes a person more aware of the world’s diversity and that each person (and what he or she represents) is just a single dimension in the global community. “The awareness of GWD and its effect on global citizenship will continue to grow as the international marketplace continues to crumble borders, but only if the global economy grows in a positive way that doesn’t widen the divide between rich and poor,” he asserted.

To reach such a goal of creating global citizens and preparing students for the global workforce, the U.S. educational system must develop integrated, coordinated strategies, and curriculum. For Deardorff, this means that sending students abroad to study is not enough. Students must be prepared for the experience and their progress appraised to maximize the outcome. “There needs to be assessment measures in place to understand what works well and what doesn’t when preparing students for the global workforce.” Deardorff’s research addresses such assessment measures. [See the Groundwork column by Darla Deardorff and William Hunter in this issue.]

The impact and sense of empowerment that profound international education experiences provide students in preparation for the global workforce will not only transform them personally, but will infuse the people that they are involved with in their personal and professional lives with new perspectives and a deeper understanding of the world, how it operates, and their own place in it. **IE**

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