

By Elaina Loveland

## Preparing Globally Focused Graduates

**R**ONALD A. CRUTCHER IS PRESIDENT OF WHEATON COLLEGE in Norton, Massachusetts. An active musician and scholar, President Crutcher holds a faculty appointment at the college, and he also is a member of the Klemperer Trio, which performs regularly in this country and in Europe. Crutcher is co-chair of LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise), the Association of American Colleges and Universities' national campaign to demonstrate the value of liberal education. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Crutcher pursued graduate studies at Yale University as a Woodrow Wilson and Ford Foundation Fellow. In 1979, he was the first cellist to receive the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Yale. The recipient of a Fulbright Award, he is fluent in German and studied music in that country. Before becoming president of Wheaton College, Crutcher was executive vice president for academic affairs and professor of music at Miami University, his alma mater. His earlier posts include serving as director of the School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin (1994–99), vice president of academic affairs at the Cleveland Institute of Music (1990–94), and associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (1987–90).

**IE:** What are the realities of the twenty-first century that the higher education community must recognize today and how is it different than in previous decades?

**CRUTCHER:** To begin with, we live in a country where more than ever before, we are becoming increasingly cognizant of the fact that we live in a global world. In the past, the United States—even in universities and colleges—at best, took a national perspective and in some cases, a local perspective. In a sense, the events of September 11, 2001, perhaps more than anything else, gave us a wake-up call: we need to perceive and look at all problems from a global perspective. Something else that is pushing us in that direction is the reality that Thomas Friedman talks about in his book, *The World is Flat*. Today when you call Delta Airlines while being in the United States, you are talking to someone in India—this is evidence that a global society is here.

Colleges and universities in the twenty-first century have a responsibility to be vigilant about having our students view problems from a global perspective. Quite frankly, I'm not convinced that all of our high schools necessarily prepare students or introduce them to the global perspective. Colleges and university must do it.

**IE:** You are co-chair of LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise), the Association of American Colleges and Universities' national campaign to demonstrate the value of liberal education. Earlier this year, LEAP released a report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*. What recommended learning outcomes did the LEAP National Leadership Council find necessary for reforming liberal higher education today?

**CRUTCHER:** The Association of American Colleges and Universities (ACC&U) developed a set of essential learning outcomes that were then incorporated



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into the LEAP agenda. However, these are not simply outcomes for college studies. In the best of all possible worlds we would begin focusing on these four outcomes in schools and then continue on at successively higher levels in college.

The first outcome is the attainment of knowledge of human cultures in the physical and natural world, which means that every college graduate should have some basic competency in science and technology. Here, the focus is on engaging the big questions, such as global warming, making an intelligent decision about whether information one reads in a newspaper is accurate. Graduates need at least a basic knowledge of science. Topics like human genome technology or stem cell research are topics that graduates need to understand and be able to separate reactions to the notion of this kind of research from the possible visceral and emotional reactions. It's important to have basic knowledge of science to make the kinds of ethical decisions that today's graduates will need to make.

The second outcome represents intellectual and practical skills, such as critical thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative skill, literacy, and also teamwork and problem solving. These skills should be practiced across the curriculum.

Third, we need to emphasize personal and social responsibility. Here the focus is on specific knowledge and engagement—both local and global. Intercultural knowledge and competency is crucial for students graduating from college in the twenty-first century. In other words, to be able to work effectively in teams of individuals, some of whom will have very different cultural beliefs and backgrounds. Ethical reasoning and action is also part of this.

Finally, we focus on integrative learning, which includes a synthesis of knowledge across the general curriculum [general education requirements] as well as in specialized studies [a major]. This can be demonstrated through the application of students' skills and information as in senior projects that are sometimes focused on solving more practical problems.

**IE: How do these learning outcomes align with the needs of employers that hire graduates?**

**CRUTCHER:** To put it succinctly, the learning outcomes are similar to the skills that employers are looking for in graduates these days—at least the employers surveyed in the LEAP study, which includes a representative sampling of employers. Employers expect college graduates to think critically and solve problems. Teamwork is highly valued by the employers that AAC&U has talked to. The expectation is that, in problem solving and in gathering information to solve problems, college graduates will be able to put all the pieces together and come up with a solution that will work for a team or a company.

**IE: How must higher education adapt, particularly in the United States, to meet the changes that students will face in the world beyond campus walls when they complete their postsecondary education?**

**CRUTCHER:** No matter how well a college or university has done to meet this challenge, they must never take it for granted. The biggest issue is how we, as colleges and university faculty and staff, foster an environment to encourage students to learn how to connect everything that they do. For example, this is teaching students how to connect their classroom experiences to their out-of-classroom experiences and to connect their personal, cultural experience to that experience of others. Today, higher education institutions need the ability to teach the skill of being able to connect across differences and to do that in a way that appears to be natural, consistent, and ongoing so that students can do this by the end of their four years of college.

As I like to say about Wheaton graduates, I would like to be able to drop them anywhere in the world and know that they wouldn't just survive but that they would thrive. There is solace in knowing that they wouldn't recoil because they heard languages that are foreign or were given food that was different. It's a real challenge in any college or university; I think it is more easily achieved in a smaller setting. Also, the institution has to start this learning process at the very beginning of the students' collegiate career. When students enter college as freshman, the faculty and staff have to be very intentional about helping them to make these connections across



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all kinds of boundaries. I think that is the most important thing. If they are successful at doing that, then when they leave they will be comfortable no matter where they end up. But they have to have practiced this both on the campus as well as off the campus before being launched into the larger world.

**IE:** In the context of a global economy that demands innovation and technological savvy, what kinds of educational practices will prepare graduates to enter the workforce?

**CRUTCHER:** It is critical for colleges and universities to look at the essential learning outcomes and put together a curriculum that will ensure students achieve those outcomes and supplement it with opportunities to connect those learning experiences in the classroom with some real-life practical experience (such as what you would get with internships but it's not just simply participating in an internship). It is finding a way to evaluate, to do a personal evaluation of a student's whole experience while they are participating in that experience. That takes an ability to be reflective. Sometimes it can be as simple as having a series of questions that you think about every day and then writing a journal entry based on those questions. Or, it could be students asking themselves questions like, "Am I getting a charge out of what I'm doing? Is it what I thought it was going to be?" It's self-examination, which can be helpful no matter the answer. Even if the students find out something wasn't what they thought it was going to be because, it might send them in a different direction that they hadn't thought of before.

**IE:** Today college graduates enter an economy that is inextricably linked with those of other nations to a degree never seen before, which requires a deeper understanding of other cultures. How can colleges and universities encourage intercultural learning?

**CRUTCHER:** One of the things that we are trying to do at Wheaton is have an increasing number of students who come from outside the continental United States. These students, in particular those from the United World Colleges, come here and hit the ground running in terms of being able to interact with anyone no matter where they come from. Our goal is to have our international students have impact on our native students and vice versa. If the students come here, go through the college, are self-segregated, and don't spend the time to reach out to other students, then they won't play much of a role in transforming the culture of the campus. But if we can find ways to do this, there is more interaction. Students have done this through celebrations. For instance, we had the first Holi celebration (a Hindu religious festival) in April; we had a celebration for Ramadan. These

events are coordinated through our office of Office of Spirituality, Service and Social Responsibility. These programs serve as an entree for U.S. students to cultures that are different from theirs. I'm not saying that 100 percent of students get to that level, but a large percentage of students do because it is an ongoing process.

Of course, another thing that can contribute to this intercultural awareness is study abroad, where I am going to another country, and engaging in academic studies with people from that country. In other words, I am not talking about boutique programs where students are in a hotel, where professors come to them, but students do not interact with people from that country. And to the extent possible, in addition to studying, students should do an internship while abroad—actually work in a nongovernmental organization or a company. While that's not possible for all students, it is one way to add to the overall intercultural competence. Additionally, I believe that you don't need to leave the country to break outside of your own cultural box. You can go to a Native American reservation in Arizona, which some of our students do, or to a place unlike your hometowns. For a student from Maine, living, working and studying in one of the inner cities like Chicago, or New York can be an intercultural experience.

It can be difficult to figure out how to provide and encourage intercultural experiences, but it is essential. Also, there must be a mechanism for students to continually ask themselves questions about these experiences, to assess what they have learned from stepping beyond their comfort zone—it is crucial for nurturing deeper intercultural understanding among college graduates.

**IE:** How can faculty members become engaged in a process of curricular innovation?

**CRUTCHER:** For faculty to be engaged in innovation, they need to have a mechanism to constantly ask, "Is the curriculum as effective as we think it is?" "Where is the evidence to show that?" And "Are we really providing students a transformative educational experience?"

The Wheaton faculty just completed an assessment of how this curriculum is working, and its results will fuel future changes. The educational policy committee at Wheaton doesn't just approve courses—they also examine aspects of the curriculum that can be improved upon. Wheaton's faculty are constantly pushing themselves to evaluate whether they are as good as they think they are.

**IE:** When higher education institutions change their educational methods, what is the best way to measure success?

**CRUTCHER:** To do this, I think colleges need to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools, but personally, I am more

interested in the qualitative. For example, institutions can assess if students' writing has improved over the course of four years by using a writing portfolio. If every year, a student puts a piece of writing into a folder, then at the conclusion of the senior year, it can be determined whether or not there has been improvement in that skill for that particular student.

Colleges and universities can also ask the students themselves about the quality of their education through surveys. Even though this is subjective data, it is valuable. If a student feels that they have learned the skills to prepare them for life after college, the education has been successful. And that's useful information in determining whether the learning that is occurring on campus is what it should be.

**IE: What has Wheaton College done to help reform curriculum and provide students with the best possible learning experience to help them succeed in their life after graduation?**

**CRUTCHER:** Wheaton has made some efforts in curriculum reform in light of today's increasingly global marketplace. In 2004, we implemented our strategic plan, *Wheaton 2014: Transforming Lives to Change the World*. The new curriculum is based on two pillars.

The first pillar is "connection," which means connecting courses from different fields with a common theme. This interdisciplinary approach combines disparate courses that are focused on a shared topic. One example of this at Wheaton is a pair of courses that connects cell biology to medieval architecture.

The second pillar is infusing concepts of race and ethnicity and its intersection with gender, class, and globalism into our courses and having these concepts interwoven throughout the curriculum.

Additionally, what we are trying to do at Wheaton is connect student's classroom experiences with their out-of-class experi-

ences so they fully understand the concept of making connections in their studies, in their work, and in their lives. Nearly 70 percent of Wheaton students study abroad whether that is for a full year, semester, in the summer or during winter break. With the emphasis of our curriculum and support of intercultural learning, we want to make sure our gradu-

ates will be prepared to make the transition from student to working citizen when they graduate—wherever they choose to live. Ultimately, we strive to prepare students to lead a purposeful life. **IE**

**ELAINA LOVELAND** is managing editor of *IE*.



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