



# CASE STUDY

## FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY Assessing Global Learning: Lessons from the Field

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## CASE STUDY

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# FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY Assessing Global Learning: Lessons from the Field

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## Introduction

Promotion of greater international understanding is one of Florida International University's (FIU) founding purposes. FIU students live and learn in the global city of Miami, Florida; yet prior to 2010, it was possible for them to have graduated from the university without having been subject to a formal global educational requirement. To address this contradiction, FIU spent three years developing "Global Learning for Global Citizenship," a ten-year, 4.11 million dollar initiative that provides every undergraduate with multiple educational opportunities to achieve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of global citizenship through global learning. The heart of the initiative is a requirement that all FIU students take at least two global learning courses prior to graduation: one interdisciplinary foundations course as part of their university core curriculum (UCC) sequence, and a second discipline-specific global learning course in the context of their major program of study. All FIU global learning courses address three learning outcomes—global awareness, global perspective, and global engagement—through diverse international and intercultural content, active learning strategies, and authentic assessments. Students also participate in integrated co-curricular global learning opportunities, ranging from intercultural discussion series to international service trips, designed to extend and enrich classroom global learning.

## Developing FIU's Global Learning Initiative

"Global Learning for Global Citizenship" was shaped by a university-wide exploration of three essential questions.

1. **As global citizens, what should FIU graduates know and be able to do?** Miami is home to FIU, the city's only public research university. It is also home to the highest concentration (58.1 percent) of foreign-born residents in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau 2012) and more than 1,100 multinational corporations (The Beacon Council 2012). FIU's location at a global crossroads imbues it with a special responsibility to prepare all undergraduates to live and work successfully in highly diverse and fluid settings. To address all students' needs, FIU's global learning outcomes define specific competencies of global citizenship, are relevant to all disciplines, and are flexibly applicable to emergent conditions of life in the twenty-first century.
2. **How will FIU know if students are achieving the global learning outcomes?** Comprehensive global learning assessment is vital to the fulfillment of FIU's obligation to its students. Valid and reliable assessment data is also necessary for accountability to external stakeholders such as taxpayers and accrediting agencies. FIU balances its need for assessment data that broadly portrays graduates' achievement of global

learning outcomes with its need for information that enables faculty and students to make meaningful, incremental adjustments for continuous improvement.

3. **What kinds of global learning experiences should FIU provide for its students?** The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines global learning as the process by which students are prepared to fulfill their civic responsibilities in a diverse and interconnected world (Hovland 2006). Given FIU's global learning outcomes and its unique geographic and socioeconomic context, FIU has defined the kinds of content, pedagogical strategies, and activities that should comprise the process of global learning at FIU.

Hundreds of students, faculty, staff, administrators, community members, and alumni considered these questions in discussions led by FIU's Office of Global Learning Initiatives (OGLI). These discussions were essential in building institutional support for "Global Learning for Global Citizenship" and resulted in the development and design of the initiative's major components: an integrated global learning curriculum and co-curriculum, faculty and staff development, and a comprehensive assessment plan. FIU achieved overlapping consensus concerning its global learning outcomes through an 18 month-long process of participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation (Landorf and Doscher 2012).

### **FIU's Global Learning Outcomes**

The OGLI engaged diverse stakeholders in an exploration of potential learning outcomes through focus groups, open forum discussions, open-ended interviews, meetings, and surveys. After an initial brainstorming period at each face-to-face encounter, the OGLI shared responses from other stakeholders in order to facilitate conversation across groups. In this way, agreement developed around three outcomes determined central to the practice of global citizenship:

- **Global Awareness:** Knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems.
- **Global Perspective:** The ability to conduct a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems.

- **Global Engagement:** Willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

A multiplicity of stakeholders voiced the need for FIU graduates to be aware of prevailing world conditions, and echoed Nussbaum's (2004) contention that citizens cannot function on the basis of factual knowledge alone. Twenty-first century citizens must also possess global awareness, an understanding of the world's complexity that enables people to connect the dots between and among seemingly isolated events (Adams and Carfagna 2006). Additionally, FIU stakeholders consistently expressed the need for students to acquire a global perspective, a cognitive agility that allows them to view issues through multiple social, political, cultural, and disciplinary lenses. Beyond this, the FIU community voiced a shared commitment to educate students for active citizenship. While clearly stipulating that the university should dictate neither what students should think nor how they should behave, participants drew a sharp distinction between knowing how to navigate the world's conditions and global engagement, the inclination to assist in solving local, global, international, and intercultural problems.

### **FIU's Global Learning Courses and Activities**

As of fall 2012, 121 global learning foundations and discipline-specific courses have been approved through the Faculty Senate curriculum review process. All global learning courses are either newly developed or existing courses that have been revised to include required components: global learning course outcomes; diverse global, international, and intercultural content; active learning strategies; and authentic assessments. In addition to these components, foundations courses include an integrated co-curricular activity and deal with complex themes best understood through multiple disciplinary lenses. Courses such as "Artistic Expression in a Global Society," "International Nutrition, Public Health, and Economic Development," and "The Global Scientific Revolution and its Impact on Quality of Life" set the stage for students to make interdisciplinary connections throughout their university career. In turn, discipline-specific courses provide students with a global view of their field of study. These courses are available in nearly every academic department, and

range from “Technology in the Global Arena” and “Geography of Global Change” to “Social Responsibility in the Hospitality Industry.” Each semester additional courses are developed and/or revised, and approved for global learning designation in response to increased student and faculty calls for a thoroughly globalized learning experience.

The Division of Student Affairs sponsors numerous global learning activities throughout the year. International and cultural clubs and organizations, international volunteering and internship opportunities, lectures, panel discussions, and annual Diversity and International Education weeks engage students from different majors and backgrounds in challenging, eye-opening social and scholarly experiences. The Tuesday Times Roundtable series is FIU’s signature co-curricular global learning activity. Scores of participants gather each week over lunch for thought-provoking discussion of *New York Times* articles on global issues. A wide range of faculty, staff, and community leaders moderate these discussions, which take place on FIU’s main campuses.

Since fall 2009, the OGLI has facilitated monthly workshops for faculty and staff redesigning or developing new global learning courses and activities. These interdisciplinary, interdepartmental workshops engage participants in active, problem-based learning strategies that can also be implemented with students, moving them towards new perspectives on effective content and pedagogy. A significant part of the workshops is devoted to drafting course and activity outcomes and assessments. These address content that is specific to the discipline, but are aligned with FIU’s global learning outcomes. Each global learning opportunity is viewed as an important contribution to the development of students’ global outlook.

### **Assessing Global Learning at FIU**

FIU has developed multiple methods for estimating the impact of the global learning initiative on students’ learning over the short and long term. To gauge the influence of individual courses, faculty and staff conduct assessments of global learning course outcomes every semester. FIU also conducts an annual pretest/posttest study to determine the initiative’s overall influence. Over the ten years of the initiative (2010-2020), FIU will analyze assessment results in the context of new data and the expansion and

improvement of courses, constructing an increasingly comprehensive and nuanced understanding of students’ responses to global learning and their achievement of the global learning outcomes.

**Pretest/Posttest Assessment of FIU’s Global Learning Outcomes.** FIU’s pretest/posttest study enables the university to estimate the value-added impact of the global learning initiative on undergraduate education. The study involves two assessment activities delivered annually as pretests to 10 percent samples of incoming freshmen and transfer students and as posttests to a 10 percent sample of graduating seniors. One of the activities, the institutionally-developed Case Response Assessment (CRA) directly measures students’ global awareness and global perspective. The CRA prompts students to read a complex, interdisciplinary case study and respond to two essay prompts corresponding to global awareness and global perspective. A panel of trained faculty raters evaluates students’ essays on a scale from zero to four using two FIU-developed rubrics, one for each outcome. The holistic rubrics’ five levels align with Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy of Cognitive Development. FIU defines the minimum criterion for success on activity as a rubric score of three, which represents the cognitive level of analysis. Results of a quasi-experimental study comparing average learning gains of students enrolled in global learning and non-global learning courses demonstrated that the rubrics yield valid and highly reliable measures of students’ global awareness and perspective (Doscher 2012).

FIU uses the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) (Braskamp, Braskamp, and Merrill 2009) to indirectly assess all three outcomes: global awareness, global perspective, and global engagement. This survey instrument requires respondents to rank 48 statements on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree). The GPI assesses students’ development and acquisition of three interconnected domains—cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—each of which is divided into two scales. In order to determine the instrument’s construct validity as an assessment of FIU’s global learning outcomes, the OGLI developed a table of specifications survey wherein internal and external experts were asked to rate GPI items for correspondence with each outcome. Results indicated that the GPI’s cognitive scales aligned closely with the global awareness outcome, its intrapersonal

scales with the global perspective outcome, and its interpersonal scales with the global engagement outcome.

FIU will only be able to gauge the full value-added impact of the global learning initiative when the first student cohort subject to the requirement begins to graduate in spring 2014. However, general response trend analyses of pretest and baseline results collected since 2010 have yielded some important findings. CRA results indicate that students, regardless of their class level, have more difficulty achieving high levels of global perspective than global awareness. Additionally, pretest GPI results for freshmen and transfers and posttest baseline results for seniors indicate that all class level groups scored higher than the 2011-12 established national norm (Braskamp 2012) on all scales except that of “Knowing” in the Cognitive domain. Braskamp defines “Knowing” as the “complexity of one’s view of the importance of cultural contexts when judging what is important to know and value” (Braskamp 2012, 2). Although items in this scale have been determined to align with the global awareness outcome, students’ comparatively low scores on this particular cognitive attribute may indicate the source of their difficulty with analyzing issues from perspectives other than their own. In a small-scale study comparing pretest/posttest GPI scores of freshmen students who took at least one global learning course during AY 2011-12 with those who didn’t, FIU found that the global learning course had a statistically significant positive impact on students’ Cognitive-Knowing scale scores. In response to these results, the OGLI is working closely with faculty to infuse courses with targeted activities requiring students to evaluate issues based on complex cultural contexts, and has increased partnerships with Student Affairs departments and community organizations to offer co-curricular cultural programming.

**Assessment of FIU’s Global Learning Course Outcomes.** Along with a syllabus, Faculty Senate curriculum committees review a comprehensive assessment plan prepared by the faculty member when considering the course for global learning designation. This document includes the global learning course outcomes, planned assessment activities or artifacts, evaluation methods, minimum criteria for success, and the student sample size. Faculty members use this document to report assessment results and make suggestions for continuous improvement

at the end of every semester the course is taught. The OGLI collects and analyzes course syllabi and assessment reports and a Faculty Senate committee uses them to assess the courses’ ongoing fidelity of implementation, i.e. adherence to global learning course outcomes, assessments, content, and active learning strategies.

Confirming findings from the pretest/posttest study, faculty report that students have more difficulty developing a global perspective than they do global awareness. Some faculty have observed that these outcomes may be developmentally related, finding that students must achieve some measure of global awareness before they see the need and value to approaching issues from other points of view. They also note challenges in terms of the discomfort students often feel with cognitive dissonance and cultural contrast associated with achieving a global perspective. With these results in mind, some faculty members have begun sequencing content and activities with a developmental approach to global learning outcomes. Courses begin with students building global awareness through the exploration of interrelated dynamics influencing the topic of study. With this background knowledge, students are prepared to build a global perspective by investigating these complex issues from multiple cultural or analytical viewpoints. These outcomes are then strengthened by engaging students in group problem-solving related to the topic. Faculty report that instructional strategies such as field research, volunteering and service learning, team-based learning (Michaelsen, Knight, and Fink 2004), and the case method of instruction have led to increased development of global perspective and engagement. Faculty observe that these pedagogies, successful as they may be, are also time- and resource-intensive, and demand additional resources and support from academic programs, Student Affairs departments, and the OGLI. This is one of several continuing challenges with which FIU is contending as it seeks to continuously improve students’ global learning.

## Challenges

Having overcome the initial obstacle of instituting undergraduate curriculum reform, FIU’s foremost challenge now concerns the long-term fidelity of its growing suite of global learning-designated courses. Fidelity of implementation has a direct impact

on student learning. Global learning courses were specifically engineered to develop students' global awareness, perspective, and engagement. Faculty members who designed the courses engaged in extensive professional development and coaching through the OGLI, and, as originally conceived, these courses were approved through a comprehensive Faculty Senate vetting process. How can the university now ensure that students continue to benefit over the long term from the substantial global learning components built into course syllabi? Fidelity is particularly endangered when original faculty members move on to other teaching assignments. To address this challenge, the OGLI has expanded its professional development offerings to include workshops targeting instructors inheriting courses from first-generation global learning faculty. It is essential that differentiated professional development continue for the duration of the initiative to allow for reflection and continuous improvement. Faculty members also need to be rewarded for the substantive improvements they implement as a result of professional development, i.e. the additional time, effort, and creativity exerted to engage all students in multi-perspective problem solving in a global context. FIU has developed specific procedures to assess and improve the long-term fidelity of global learning courses. The university must allocate sufficient human and financial resources to carry out this responsibility even when its primary focus turns to other initiatives.

As for assessing the global learning outcomes, the university faces two interrelated challenges. One concerns incentivizing graduating seniors to put forth their best effort when they take the assessments. Although FIU will not be able to begin analyzing students' value-added learning gains until spring 2013—when the first students subject to the global learning requirement graduate—the university collects baseline data on seniors who currently complete the global learning assessments as part of their graduation packet. Two years of baseline data reveal a trend that seniors score lower on the assessments than do incoming freshmen or transfer students. Out of concern that seniors' low motivation may threaten the validity of their scores, the university is exploring alternative contexts in which to gauge students' development of global citizenship. These may include course-embedded capstone assessments that offer more

authentic, high-stakes opportunities for students to demonstrate their global awareness, perspective, and engagement.

Connected to the question of optimal assessment conditions is how best to balance the allocation of resources needed to implement broad program-level assessment with meaningful analysis of course-level assessment results. Global learning course assessment provides essential feedback concerning the relative contribution that specific teaching and assessment strategies make toward students' achievement of the global learning outcomes. FIU considers each global learning experience an incremental step in student development; the story behind students' global awareness, perspective, and engagement posttest scores at graduation may ultimately lie within both the cumulative effect of multiple global learning opportunities and the power of individual, highly effective educational practices. Yet at the course level, motivating and supporting reluctant faculty members who consider assessment a distractor rather than a contributor to student learning is a resource-intensive process. As noted in *Measuring and Assessing Internationalization* (Green 2012), "many faculty members do not see assessment as adding value to their work, and indeed see it as busywork imposed by administrators." The OGLI has found that consistent dialogue with global learning faculty, staff, and students concerning what works and what doesn't is key to finding meaning in assessment results, improving the quality of assessments, and using results to improve content and pedagogy. To that end, the OGLI offers discussion sessions at the beginning and end of each semester to guide faculty through the global learning course assessment process and facilitate reflection on successes and challenges. Participants commend the sessions' usefulness, citing opportunities to meet with and learn from faculty members across disciplines struggling with similar issues. Despite these successful results, the OGLI remains constrained in its ability to provide enough support to faculty through coaching and dialogue, as well as in the timely collection, analysis, and dissemination of course assessment results. The office's limited human resources are prioritized to carry out FIU's global learning pretest/posttest assessment study, the results of which must be reported to the university's accrediting body in 2015.

## Conclusion

In the implementation of its 10-year global learning initiative, FIU recommitted itself to living up to its middle name and founding purposes. To make good on this commitment, it is essential that the university keep its finger on the pulse of what students are learning, the circumstances that facilitate learning, and the incremental and cumulative impacts of the initiative on students' global capacities. Continual multi-method assessment of FIU's global learning efforts is not only necessary to justify the expenditure of scarce public resources, but it is also the most effective means of keeping the university on a steady path toward achieving its most important goal, the sound education of its students.

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