

Universal Global Learning, Inclusive Excellence, and Higher Education's Greater Purposes

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During the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) 2017 Global Engagement and Social Responsibility conference, AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella and Don W. Harward, founding director of Bringing Theory to Practice, posed an essential question for attendees to consider in that geopolitical moment: “Are higher education’s efforts to advance global engagement, and global citizenship, un-American?” Their joint response was unequivocal: “No.”

Citizens can possess both local and global identities that motivate them to advance the interconnected common good of their own communities and other communities worldwide. Harward (2017) asserted that higher education plays a critical role in nurturing these intersecting identities and responsibilities in all students and preparing them to act. “The challenging work for each campus to be a global community is in it becoming a context and a learning culture where the emancipation of a student as a global citizen is anticipated—even expected—that ‘global citizenry’ is realized as a dimension of each student’s identity,” Harward said.

In theory, preparing students for global civic engagement is compatible with higher education’s longtime mission to foster local and national engagement, but what does this mean in practice? Harward wondered if campuses can prepare students for global citizenship in “authentic and clearly confirmable ways.” How can students without a passport “gain empathetic understanding” and experience “authentic encountering” of diverse others while remaining embedded within their home classroom and community? More broadly, how does an institution’s “commitment to being global” relate to the greater purposes of higher education—the promotion of well-being, learning and discovery, civic purpose, and meaningful

life choices? The process of *global learning*, which involves diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders (Landorf and Doscher 2015), can provide answers to Harward’s questions—but only if it involves all students. Global learning enables participants to discern the interconnectedness of local and global well-being. Universal global learning propels inclusive excellence. It makes diversity essential to the achievement of higher greater purposes—all students’ growth and engagement as people, learners, community members, and citizens of the world.

GLOBAL LEARNING

The term *global learning* originated with the founding of the Global Learning Division of the United Nations University (UNU) in 1982. The division’s mission was to develop educational practices that would enable people to understand and address persistent transnational challenges such as hunger, poverty, conflict, energy insecurity, and ethical dilemmas arising from advances in science and technology. Its name was a deliberate double entendre “meant to convey both the sense of learning as a global process that must include all levels of society, and the sense of learning to think globally, in the recognition that the world is a finite, closely interconnected, global system” (Soedjatmoko and Newland 1987).

Fast-forward twenty-four years to the publication of *Shared Futures: Global Learning and Liberal Education*, in which Kevin Hovland (2006) described global learning as the means by which students are prepared for citizenship in a diverse and interconnected world. *Shared Futures* echoed global learning’s original purpose, but it didn’t define its nature as an educational process. Global learning was explicitly differentiated from curriculum internationalization,



which is traditionally achieved by increasing the availability of language, area studies, and study abroad programs or the amount of international student recruitment and exchange. Institutions internationalize for many reasons—to connect with the world’s knowledge production and learning network, improve career preparation, heighten profile and rankings, or augment tuition revenue. Institutions may derive similar benefits from engaging students in global learning, but the process itself is focused on interactions among participants and the benefits these interactions yield to individuals and the collective.

The process of global learning involves problem *framing*—purposeful examination of the ways in which different people define and experience local, intercultural, international, and global challenges to human and environmental well-being—and problem solving. It’s appropriate for tackling complex problems, the causes and effects of which transcend *borders* of difference, “socio-spatial distinctions between places, individuals, and groups” (Kolossoff and Scott 2013, 3). These multifaceted, often multiscale problems manifest differently across social, geographic, and political borders, leading those diversely affected to interpret them disparately. This means that complex, transborder problems can neither be fully construed nor resolved by any single person, group, discipline, or perspective alone. Global learning aims to develop students’ global awareness—knowledge of the world’s complexity and interrelatedness within the context of diversity and disparity. Global awareness can only be built through collaboration across borders of difference: common inquiry, social negotiation and consensus building, and group interconnectedness and accountability.

Global learning is grounded in the development of *perspective consciousness*, insight into one’s own beliefs, values, and assumptions and the ways in which these are similar to and distinct from those held by others at

home and abroad (Hanvey 1975). Global learning catalyzes perspective consciousness by helping diverse groups determine how their viewpoints relate to one another and the common challenges they face. This is the definition of a global perspective, the ability to construct an analysis of a complex transborder problem that takes into account multiple interpretations of its causes, consequences, and proposed solutions. Global learning also helps groups capitalize on their diversity to formulate more innovative, equitable, and sustainable solutions for the world’s interconnected human and natural communities. In this way, global learning advances personal well-being and a sense of civic purpose by providing circumstances that push individuals to engage with diverse others in order to develop a unique sense of self and perceive the value of participating in collective decision making at local, national, intercultural, international, and global scales.

Global learning, global awareness, and a global perspective can be facilitated even when students remain immersed in their home country or typical cultural milieu. This is accomplished through strategies such as democratic deliberation, intergroup dialogue, “pedagogies of difference,” and the use of long-distance communication technologies. Gordon Allport’s (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory provides direction, supported by robust research, to educators seeking to configure global learning in ways that reduce prejudicial, stereotypical, and discriminatory responses to the cultural contrast that accompanies meaningful encounters with difference. Global learning courses and cocurricular activities present students with authentic, unscripted problems of local and global import to explore with peers and/or community members located near or afar. The diverse expertise, experiences, and perspectives of all participants must be brought to bear on the process of analysis and solution making. Faculty need to facilitate equal status among global learners

through learning and discovery activities that turn the tables on privileged knowledge and entrenched power dynamics and that stimulate the empathic understanding of others. Examples include values clarification exercises, roleplay, qualitative research methods, and design thinking. Finally, institutions need to explicitly endorse and support global learning for all students, faculty, and staff to normalize substantive engagement with difference as part of the campus culture. Professional development for faculty and staff is particularly vital to making global learning happen. Students and communities can only reap the benefits of global learning if they are helped to reconcile and reflect upon the differences in language, customs, behaviors, perspectives, and thinking patterns they encounter during their collaborations.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is a fundamental ingredient of global learning. It’s also foundational to AAC&U’s notion of inclusive excellence, achieved when institutions “integrate diversity, equity, and educational quality efforts into their missions and institutional operations” (n.d.). We (the authors) contend that inclusive excellence involves

- bringing diverse students to campus through equitable admissions practices;
- ensuring that all students are equally unhindered in their path toward quality educational opportunities and graduation;
- making diversity indispensable to the institution’s mission to transmit and produce new knowledge.

There’s no shortage of evidence that in the coming years our campuses will become increasingly diverse and that diversity interactions correlate with a range of civic and critical-thinking outcomes. We also know that the mere presence of a diverse student body neither leads necessarily to interaction nor to these outcomes (Gurin and Maxwell 2017). The way we conceptualize diversity



influences how we cultivate and respond to it and, consequently, its impact on campus climate and student learning. These conceptualizations also influence our ability to make global learning universal and advance inclusive excellence and higher education's greater purposes.

Structural Diversity

When we talk about diversity in US higher education, we're usually referring to student demographics, the institution's *structural diversity* (Gurin et al. 2002). Since the 1960s, diversity has primarily signified race and gender. More recently, other demographic factors compose the notion of diversity, traits such as age, disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual preference, gender identity, and first-generation college student status. When diversity is defined as demography, inclusive excellence tends to be measured in terms of representational parity in admission and graduation rates. This requires compartmentalizing students and their identities into neat categories of difference. While this categorization enables research that may reveal institutionalized inequities and biases, it also obscures meaningful characteristics such as purposefulness, mindfulness, and grit that cut across demographic categories and influence how students respond to their educational experiences. Practices that ignore these characteristics or the fact that students define themselves in terms of multiple identities obstruct perspective consciousness, psychosocial well-being, and ultimately academic success. Inclusive excellence involves more than increased variety in the types of students on campus, in certain programs, and walking across the graduation stage. Inclusion also means the extent to which all students feel they belong on all parts of campus, in all aspects of college life, and can act purposefully and engage meaningfully with others across domains of difference.

Classroom Diversity

Structural diversity is the impetus behind *classroom diversity*, which involves content learning about cultural practices and minority issues (Gurin et al. 2002). A demographically diverse student body needs a more expansive curriculum in terms of the histories, norms, values, and practices it covers. When classroom diversity is coupled with structural diversity, we can begin to gauge inclusive excellence in terms of student learning. But what kinds of content and teaching strategies lead to desired outcomes? Diversity courses have been found to have less of an impact on perspective-taking outcomes than either meaningful interactions with diverse peers or reflective learning (O'Neill 2012). This may be because classroom diversity is often a passive learning experience. An overemphasis on learning *about* others rather than *in collaboration with* others can also fuel a climate that inhibits inclusion. Students' sense of belonging is shaped in part by the interplay between how they define themselves and how others define them. Students can be helped to move away from automatic, reductive thinking about themselves and others by reflecting on experiences that require them to "confront the relativity or limitations of their points of view" (Gurin 1999). Sustained, prolonged dialogue and deliberation with people who think and behave differently helps students experience the construction of knowledge over time. It also helps them learn how different values and schemas influence scholarship and discovery, including beliefs about what's important to know and question, the nature of claims made about the world, and the manner with which claims are received. For global learning to benefit inclusive excellence and education's greater purposes, institutions must be just as committed to advancing the transfer and production of new knowledge as they are to diversifying student demographics and the established

content to which students are exposed. This requires thinking about diversity in yet another way: in terms of students' cognitive tool sets.

Cognitive Diversity

Scott Page, professor of complex systems, political science, and economics at the University of Michigan, studies the impact of diversity on teams engaging in complex problem solving and prediction tasks. Page (2007) found that under certain conditions, diverse groups generate more ideas and more accurate, efficient, resilient, robust, and innovative conclusions than do homogeneous groups of even the best problem solvers. He determined that these benefits derive from interactions among the varied cognitive tools that individuals bring to their common pursuit. Page identified four interconnected tools people use to understand and shape the world around them:

- perspectives: ways of representing situations and problems
- heuristics: ways of generating solutions to problems
- interpretations: ways of categorizing or partitioning perspectives
- predictive models: ways of inferring cause and effect

Education and experience lead directly to the formation of different cognitive tools. Law students, for example, will form different heuristics and predictive models than will biology students, and people raised in rural settings often form different social perspectives and interpretive constructs than people who grew up in cities. Identity plays an indirect role in tool development. People who affiliate with the same category may think in very different ways; therefore, "we cannot equate individual tools or collections of tools with specific identities. We can expect, however, that identity differences lead to experiential differences that in turn create tool differences" (Page 2007). Identity influences



the kinds of education and life experiences people seek, and societal norms, policies, stereotypes, and biases influence the opportunities open to them. Page provides a succinct metaphor for society's role in tool formation: "Just because someone slips and falls does not mean that she is clumsy. It could mean that her front porch is icy" (2007, 307).

When diversity is also thought of in terms of cognition, then inclusive excellence involves not only admitting demographically diverse students, providing them with diverse content, and removing barriers to their sense of belonging, but also *creating more diversity to produce better responses to complex tasks*. This is achieved through the *superadditivity of diverse tools*, a condition under which one plus one literally equals three. When cognitively diverse groups of people collaborate to understand and solve a complex problem, they employ their tools sequentially. Someone presents an interpretation, for example, and then other people try to improve upon it by adding details previously unnoticed or unknown. Take any two different interpretations and parts of each can even be combined to create a whole new interpretation. Interestingly, interpretations don't even have to be right, in the sense that they lead directly to the correct answer, in order to contribute to the best solution—they just have to be offered in order to prompt the group to improve. Superadditivity explains why a diverse group's ability to tackle a complex problem is often greater than the sum of its imperfect parts. Thus, institutions that seek demographically diverse students and engage all of them in global learning with peers and community partners not only maximize the availability of diverse tools, but they actually create more diversity on campus and in our world, leading to new knowledge, new solutions, and the achievement of inclusive excellence and higher education's greater purposes.

MAKING GLOBAL LEARNING UNIVERSAL

When global learning involves only some students, it limits global awareness, perspective, and problem solving for all. The process of global learning prepares and motivates students to choose from a wide range of actions to meaningfully contribute to positive change, everything from activism and volunteering to service learning and social entrepreneurship. These efforts build students' self-confidence and self-efficacy as solution makers for the local and global public good. Through universal global learning, colleges and universities commit to enabling all students to "see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group, but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (Nussbaum 2006).

In Harvard's words, the challenging work for each campus is to develop organizational practices that make good on their commitment to advance students' global engagement. Institutions must develop a comprehensive approach to making global learning universal. This begins with determining a lean set of intended measurable learning outcomes, essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes of global citizenship. Program goals for universal global learning must focus specifically on intended learning outcomes, not institutional outputs. Leaders need a theory of organizational change that involves all stakeholders in the achievement of these goals and outcomes, and they need to provide comprehensive faculty and staff development for educators facilitating integrative global learning in the curriculum and cocurriculum. Finally, in addition to conducting ongoing student learning assessment and program evaluation, leaders must foster continuous communication across institutional reporting lines in order to facilitate the improvement necessary to sustain and expand global learning for all students, faculty, and staff over the long term.

When the value of a college education is a question for debate in some circles, there is no better time for institutions to answer the call for universal global learning in order to fulfill the values underpinning liberal learning, inclusive excellence, and the greater purposes of higher education. ■

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