An Innovative Approach to Global Intercultural Learning

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The rapidly changing demographic makeup of America and the advent of technologies that make it possible to communicate information over vast distances compel us to reassess our participation in a global society. During these opening years of the 21st century, mass media and the global span of technology allow us to sit in our homes and voyeuristically observe what is current in distant parts of the world. In a matter of hours, international travel can place us in the far reaches of the planet. As a nation and as a people, we cannot consider ourselves apart from the incredible explosion of diversity, interculturalism, multiculturalism, and the crucial philosophical issues that underlie the current challenges brought about by the transforming measures of globalization.

Gil Merkx, Vice Provost for International Affairs at Duke University, sees this current set of challenges as a new version of globalization that reflects the “second stage” in the development of American universities’ engagement of the world. He says the university is “no longer a decentralized enterprise primarily designed to cure students of narrow provincialism and to comprehend in some measure the complex life into which (they are) soon to be ushered” (Merkx, 6–12).

Over a century ago, University of Michigan President James B. Angell wrote about the role of higher education in the globalization process, suggesting that there is an international cosmopolitanism at the core of higher education and its business. But
mobilizing university resources around globalization misses the critical edge that might be the principal responsibility of the U.S. university’s “sacred space,” especially in an era defined as much by belligerence as by connectivity (Kennedy, 1).

Our current emphasis on globalization is not just economics. Politics, human rights, environmental issues, and even music are subjected to globalization’s transformative power. Dealing with the enormous challenge these new interrelationships bring requires a much-improved knowledge of the many facets of human life both here in America and around the world.

For many college students, study abroad is their first experience outside of the U.S. It is unfortunate that many of these students have not had the diversity, multicultural, or intercultural experiences found in American society. These experiences abound in the U.S., yet we live in a polarized society that serves to rob many of our students of these opportunities. At the University of Michigan nearly 90 percent of White students come from mostly or nearly all White neighborhoods and schools; while over 40 percent of African-American students attended all Black high schools and live in all Black communities. The point here is that we can begin our understanding of the world right in our own communities.

**Ten-year Changes in Racial Composition of Students’ Neighborhoods**

**First Year at Entrance (1990 and 2000)**

**The University of Michigan**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Composition:</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Asian-Pacific Americans</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly/Nearly All People of Color</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half and Half</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly/Nearly All White</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Michigan Student Study.*
From my own scholarly work, some of the most important and life-changing experiences have come from living and working in various global settings. In the early 1990s when I was a faculty member at University of California, Santa Barbara, two students and my son, who was 12 years old at the time, accompanied me on a research trip to The Gambia in West Africa. As part of a team research effort, we collected video data to produce a film documentary on the Mandinka griot tradition.

We lived in the family compound of the internationally renowned musician Alhaji Papa Bunka Susso and shared all aspects of Mandinka musical and cultural life with them over a three-week period. This experience inspired each of us in ways we had never imagined. The cultural sensitivities and social awareness we learned about was a surprise to even me. At the time, I had spent more than 15 years conducting research in other parts of West Africa without understanding some of the nuances of culture. Nevertheless, learning the subtle meaning of African culture and experiencing new social and religious ways of thinking were enriching and intellectually stimulating. The two students went on to complete graduate degrees, one in anthropology and the other in musicology. My son became a middle school history teacher with an enduring interest in Africa. Although each of them experienced The Gambia differently, the stay there had a positive effect on their understanding of another culture and their ability to interact with people different from themselves.

At a time in our history when there are a high number of restrictions on travel to foreign areas, the U.S. is motivated to become a more active player in the global community
Monts

beyond the military and economic power base. Political, economic, and religious challenges brought about by globalization will only continue to compel us to engage the world with newly found ways of thinking and acting.

For nearly two centuries, the University of Michigan has been a leader in providing opportunities for individuals and groups who, for historical or social reasons, did not have immediate access to some of the nation’s prestigious higher education institutions. Again, President Angell spoke of a Michigan education as, “an uncommon education for the common man.” I won’t spend time scolding President Angell for not including women in his often quoted statement, but I do want to expound on the legacy of “an uncommon education.”

Five years ago, it was brought to my attention that underrepresented minority students, in particular, were participating in education abroad programs in very low numbers. The reasons for this occurrence were varied but centered on the cost of spending a full semester away from campus, the transfer of credits from foreign universities, the small selection of sites that did not include those that piqued students’ interest, and the lack of language skills required by some programs. In our efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, benefit from the vast resources of a great university, we created the Global Intercultural Experiences for Undergraduates (GIEU) Program. With support from the International Center, the Office of Financial Aid, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, and Michigan’s 19 schools and colleges, the GIEU has become one of the most intellectually and socially stimulating programs on
the campus. The comprehensive support of the participating campus units has had a tremendous impact on our cross-campus cooperative and collaborative initiatives.

The GIEU Program is unique in many respects; it is not a study abroad program that takes students from classrooms in the U.S. and places them in Western-oriented classrooms in other regions of the world. That is to say, a study abroad experience is not always a global experience. Through an extensive application and interview process conducted by faculty leaders, GIEU places 6 to 10 students and their faculty mentors in global settings to conduct research, to assist with community-based projects, or to work and live side by side with ordinary people whose lives are improved and enhanced by the GIEU team’s presence.

A View of Campus Strategies/Approaches to Pluralism

In addition to the cultural exposure and learning opportunities the program provides, we expect the framework for all approved projects to incorporate aspects of diversity, multiculturalism, and interculturalism (which contain a set of values we strive to infuse into Michigan campus culture) and represent our key strategies and approaches to cultural pluralism. For our purposes here, we must define (or dare I say interpret) what is meant by approaches to diversity, multicultural, and intercultural in order for them to have meaning within this context.

The Diversity View/Approach. In this approach, attention is paid to individual presence and representation. There is a strength which is a solid commitment to structural
outcomes. Yet, there are pitfalls, which manifest themselves in a sense of tokenism, an inattention to process and sustainability.

**The Multicultural View/Approach.** The emphasis here is on the program level, critical mass, and cultural presence. The strengths of multiculturalism are embedded in an institutional presence and a claimed space and ownership. The pitfalls are all too common: They include a sense of balkanization and turf (often called self-segregation) and may not account for the powerful differentials and constant expansion of groupings.

**The Intercultural View/Approach.** Attention is paid to exchange, understanding, and experience. The strengths here are that identities are not reified, openness is cultivated, there is process-based attention to quality, and there are differences in interactions, including power differentials. The pitfalls include a blurred respect for boundaries where process can lose sight of outcomes and possible issues of assimilation.

**Motivating Factors for Development of GIEU**

GIEU contributes several primary factors to the University’s mission toward cultural pluralism at the institutional, faculty, and student levels. For the institution, GIEU blends elements of diversity, multiculturalism, and interculturalism into its programmatic structures. It helps bridge the gulf often found on college and university campuses between student affairs and academic affairs. The level of engagement the GIEU teams have with their global hosts is brought back to campus for futuring greater connections and engagement with global partners. This is experiential learning, involving a wide
range of students in off-campus learning opportunities but with the added feature of
direct faculty contact. Finally, GIEU builds instructional capacity in various fields and
disciplines across Michigan’s highly decentralized campus.

GIEU is a student program. However, there are factors that promote faculty development
of a slightly different sort. Participating faculty develop their own intercultural skills,
opportunities that may have been neglected or non-existent in their own training and
experiences. Through this work, they can expand their curricula and teaching repertoire
while being exposed to the world-as-classroom. Teaching in situ or context/experiential
teaching and learning offers a real departure from their normal classroom venues.
Foremost for many GIEU faculty members is the opportunity to work closely with
undergraduates, to hone their mentoring skills, and to engage in interdisciplinary teaching
and learning. If the beneficial factors for the institution and for faculty are effective, then
they should produce even greater beneficial opportunities for students. Programs on
intergroup relations, undergraduate research, faculty/staff mentoring opportunities, and
multicultural and diversity programming abound at the University of Michigan. Students
participate in many of these programs daily or weekly. In addition to the gravitas gained
from living in a global setting, GIEU offers all of these experiences concentrated in one
program.

There are factors that contribute immensely to the student’s educational experience.
Students attain a commitment to and development of intercultural competencies and
skills. With their peers, faculty mentors, and global hosts, they engage in experiential
learning and reflection. GIEU offers them a gateway to further field involvement and the
application of disciplinary learning to a diverse and real world. Because GIEU is a summer program, it is a better fit with the wide range of student and faculty academic schedules, programs, and budgets. Foremost for students, the program offers greater involvement with a wide range of diverse peers engaged in cultural exchange among themselves.

When considering all of these factors, in a small but growing way, GEIU does for the University of Michigan (a large, highly decentralized, public research university) what many small liberal arts colleges often take for granted. That is, crossing institutional boundaries. GIEU is an effort to combine some or all of the areas of faculty development, community or service-learning programs, multicultural programs, undergraduate research, and experiential learning programs to build multicultural skills in undergraduate education. To fully participate in a global community, we must be willing to make that journey back and forth and forth and back.

Therefore, the GIEU program is an effort to create new opportunities for short-term intercultural study of a global nature. The program enables small groups of diverse undergraduates, led by a faculty member, to learn in rich cultural environments and to gain a greater understanding of global situations and intercultural processes. Students and faculty are able to learn from communities as well as from each other in locations that support cross-cultural education and benefit from partnerships with our institution.

**GIEU Program Components**
• Faculty Proposals and Selection & Student Selection and Team Matching
  o Faculty members post their proposals, and interested students sign up to be interviewed by the faculty member. Student interests and skills sets are then matched to the projects.

• Faculty Seminar
  o Special seminars are provided for faculty members to orient them to issues ranging from experiential learning, course materials, and project funding to coping skills while living in a global setting with 6 to 10 undergraduates.

• Common Orientation & Field Team Orientation
  o Student and faculty participants meet in a common orientation to discuss topics ranging from the substance of the project to overcoming culture shock.

• Field Experiences & Common Debriefing Session
  o This is one of the most exciting aspects of the program, when students return to campus and share their experiences with other GIEU teams.

• Campus Symposium
  o Faculty/student projects are presented to the campus in an annual symposium. This gathering also serves to introduce interested faculty and student participants to the program.
**Evaluation and Assessment**

We are fortunate to have as the director of the GIEU program Dr. A.T. Miller, who also serves as the coordinator of multicultural teaching and learning in our Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. Edith Fernandez, a doctoral student in our Center for the Study of Postsecondary and Higher Education, who recently completed her dissertation on the GIEU program, assists him. I base much of this paper on their presentations at regional and national higher education meetings. With their combined expertise, we have applied a high level of evaluation and assessment to the program. The method of evaluation lies outside my expertise. However, I find their findings striking.

The program evaluation and assessment consists of a Mixed Methods Approach, incorporating longitudinal (both quantitative and qualitative) methods on the 2002 through 2004 cohorts of participants. The quantitative approach occurred over a four-month period, involving a pre-field experience survey administered during program orientation and a post-field experience survey at the debriefing session. Students and faculty are administered the Intercultural Development Inventory and the Intercultural Sensitivity Survey before and after their field experiences.

**Qualitative Approach**

The Qualitative Approach yields data derived from journal entries, faculty interviews, and student interviews. The battery of surveys reveals striking results. The quantitative measure findings revealed that both students and faculty showed a significantly greater interest and willingness to be involved in and face situations of cultural difference and
conflict, and both groups saw a corresponding drop in assertions of confidence in personal ability and knowledge in these areas.

Local Knowledge Gained

1= no knowledge, 5=a great deal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Knowledge</th>
<th>Pre-field Experience</th>
<th>Post-field Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Issues</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Customs</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So what do we learn from the evaluation and assessment process that lends itself to program improvement? From faculty interviews and writing, we learned that they gain a stimulated self-awareness as intercultural learners. There was a consensus among the faculty about the importance of reflection on their engagement in experiential global learning and a high level of enthusiasm for pedagogical framework using the world as classroom. Faculty mentors overwhelmingly believe they are better prepared for the challenges working with students’ varied developmental levels, group dynamics, and the new insights they obtain for enriching their curricula and research agendas. As
ambassadors for GIEU, faculty members enjoy being designated GIEU fellows and look forward to sharing insights and experiences with colleagues.

Equally intriguing are the points gathered from student interviews and writing. Even though students receive important information during orientation sessions and University Courses 275, the global experience teaches them very useful lessons, which allow them to examine their own identity and to stretch themselves beyond their normal personal characteristics and cultural conditioning. Another set of lessons was learned from group interactions and understanding privilege. Students found that understanding issues surrounding identity and privilege take on different character after living and learning in a global setting. They learned to understand that although they are obtaining a quality education at the University of Michigan, there are limits of their own knowledge about the world beyond the campus and this nation. Students found themselves exploring the multiple identities contained within themselves, and many of them begin to look for opportunities to pursue careers that require intercultural competencies.

On the University of Michigan campus, the GIEU program is recognized for its prestige and innovative spirit. Because program participation is competitive for both students and faculty, it draws applications from individuals who seek the most unique and challenging opportunities available on the campus. The combined participation of highly motivated faculty and inquisitive students makes for an outstanding program.

At a university that takes pride in the advancements to extend its global reach in higher education, GIEU provides a unique way to improve and enhance the undergraduate role
in this process. The GIEU maximizes flexibility and adaptability both to the changing world situation, and student and faculty interests in exploring these new areas of inquiry and service.

The program succeeds in bridging programmatic areas that operate on the academic margins, especially the participatory role of faculty who are designated as lecturers. Though complex to manage, the networking freedom, extensive synergy, and funding opportunities meet multiple objectives in creative ways. Given its enormous success, GIEU has made a significant contribution to the University’s global mission.

Conclusion

Our colleges and universities, our faculty, and our students must be among the major players in the globalization process. The closer we become to each other socially, geographically, and technologically, the more we must know about “the other” and what they must know about us. The differences among us will not disappear, so it is incumbent on us all to seek the most productive ways to adapt. There was a time when we could set ourselves apart from the economic crises, environmental concerns, diseases, and disparities in education found in many parts of the planet. Not anymore. The perception that America’s colleges and universities are insular institutions whose concerns do not reach beyond their ivory towers is a relic of the past. As an educator, I believe we actualize our mission through our faculty and our students. While there are a multitude of ways we create the complex connections with worlds beyond our own, I believe the interaction achieved through programs like GIEU contribute in a small way to the goal of
understanding, celebrating, and appreciating differences and our place within the global community.

In these early years of the 21st century, there is an increased need to look upon our colleges and universities as more than degree-granting institutions of higher learning that provide facilities for teaching and research. They must be seen as places where one is exposed to the universe of knowledge. At the University of Michigan and elsewhere, we continue to place high value on the benefits and challenges globalization presents. Increased understanding of truth and cultural values derived from participation in a global community are not luxury items intended for a few; they must be part of the total educational experience. The GIEU remains small, but the contributions it makes to a liberal education and to global learning in particular are enormous. As we continue to explore the life-enhancing, liberal, and liberating educational experiences for our students, we must do so with the notion that a confluence is emerging as globalization is firmly imbedded in the liberal arts. The combined power and enlightenment of these new areas of knowledge and experience provide enormous breadth and contribute to a liberal education. It is from that vantage point that we can begin to understand our place in an ever-changing world.

Appendix I. Selected GIEU Sites

Opportunities and Challenges that Global Firms Face in China
Location: Shanghai, China
Faculty Leader: Jing Yong Ye
College of Engineering

Health & Social Welfare in Hungary: An Examination of Sociopolitical Change, Culture, History and Health

Location: Hungary
Faculty Leaders: Oi-Saeng Hong and Richard Redman
School of Nursing

Creating an Inclusive Community on the Way: Adventure Education for the New Millennium

Location: Spain
Faculty Leaders: Andrew Noverr and Annie Hesp
Romance Languages and Literatures

The Teach-In, Redux: Interpreting Vietnam and the Self through Literature, Memoir, & Travel

Location: Vietnam
Faculty Leader: David R. Smith
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Cultural and Language Exchange in a Dominican Republic Village

Location: Dominican Republic
Faculty Leaders: Deborah Gioia and Luis Sfeir-Younis
School of Social Work/Sociology

Recycling Plastics as an Educational Issue in Ghana

Location: Ghana
Faculty Leaders: Elijah Kannatey-Asibu, Jr.
Mechanical Engineering
East African Communities and the AIDS Crisis

Location: East Africa

Faculty Director: Edith Parker

Health Behavior and Health Education

Globalization and Local Narratives: The Lives of Indian Craftsmen in a Modern, Traditional Society

Location: Varanasi, India

Faculty Director: Nita Kumar

History Department

Pedagogy of Action: Transformation through Community Activism in Jamaica

Location: Jamaica

Faculty Directors: Nesha Haniff and Leseliey Welch

Center for Afro-American Studies and Women’s Studies

Chekhov International Festival Project in Russia

Location: Moscow, Russia

Faculty Directors: Kate Mendeloff and Leonora Ivanitsky

Residential College

Exploring Intercultural Communication and German Language and Culture through Visual and Theater Arts and Intercultural Dialogue

Location: Munich, Germany

Faculty Director: Janet Hegman Shier

Residential College

Culture, Language, and Public Policy—Philippines (CLAPP—Philippines)

Location: Ifugao, Philippines
Faculty Directors: Adelwisa Weller and Martha Adler
Asian Languages and Cultures

Science: Practice and Culture

Location: Geneva, Switzerland
Faculty Directors: Homer Neal and Jean Krisch
Physics

Thailand—Experiencing is True Learning

Location: Thailand
Faculty Director: Montatip Krishnamra
Asian Languages and Cultures

The Making of a Modern African Nation

Location: Senegal
Faculty Director: Augustin Holl
Anthropology and Afro-American and African Studies

Works Cited


The Michigan Student Study. Two four-year longitudinal studies of the freshman classes of 1990 and 2000. Unpublished analyses, Ann Arbor, MI.