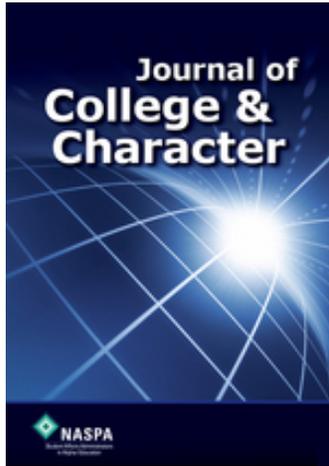


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Fostering Global Perspective Taking at American Colleges and Universities

Larry A. Braskamp, Central College¹

Abstract

Students at American colleges and universities do become more advanced in their global perspective taking along all three dimensions—cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Their degree of involvement in a number of cocurricular activities and their perceptions of the campus community are correlated with their level of perspective taking on the three dimensions. Student affairs professionals can make a difference when they provide focused and intentional activities, ones that foster specific goals in global perspective taking.

Student affairs professionals have always stressed the “whole student” perspective in their work. When I was in college, this phrase summarized the mission and culture, and I have never really let go of this goal for an undergraduate. At the time I did not view myself as on a journey in life, but I have come to use the image of us being on a journey, a journey of life in which we grow, change, and develop along several dimensions—intellectual, social, civic, physical, moral, spiritual, and religious. And we do so holistically; that is, we simultaneously develop our mind, sense of self, and relationships with others or, some would say, our mind, body, and spirit, or we grow up using our head, heart, and hands. A holistic and integrated approach to development, as Robert Kegan emphasizes in *In Over Our Heads* (1994), stresses the mutually reinforcing nature of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development. Students not only develop cognitively but also integrate their knowledge in a way that reflects learning, and they need to grow interpersonally by considering themselves as part of a larger whole and intrapersonally by establishing a belief system about what is good and true in this world that influences and guides their choices and experiences.

In our pluralistic and global society today, this journey has become so much more complex for most of us, especially those who are just beginning to enter adulthood. We now live in a global world in which multiple worldviews and salient cultural traditions influence how we think, develop our sense of identity, and form relationships with others. In our 2009 article, “Developing a Global Perspective for Personal and Social Responsibility,” Arthur Chickering and I underscored the role of developing global citizens as part of the larger goals for liberal learning. We need to understand and empathize with persons who differ dramatically in national origin, ethnicity, and religious and spiritual orientations as well as in race and gender. We need to learn to talk and work with a wide range of persons across these potential divides (Braskamp, 2008).

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Thus, each of us needs to develop a global perspective in our journey in life.

Global perspective taking involves three critical questions related to each of the developmental domains: “How do I know?” “Who am I?” and “How do I relate?” (Braskamp, Braskamp, Merrill, & Engberg, 2010). As one develops an enlarged global perspective, she incorporates more complex ways of making meaning that are grounded in intercultural knowledge, cultivates greater acceptance of cultural differences and solidifies her sense of self, and develops more mature interpersonal relationships and a stronger commitment to social responsibility.

Advocates of college student development have always recognized the importance of the college environment. Recently King and Baxter Magolda (2005) highlighted the need for colleges and universities to create learning opportunities that foster intercultural maturity. In our book *Putting Students First* (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006), my colleagues and I argued that an effective learning environment puts students first and builds on close relationships among students, those in student affairs and campus ministry, and faculty to create a variety of programs in and out of the traditional classroom (e.g., service learning in urban areas and third-world countries, volunteer programs, and chapel) and a community that supports holistic student development. The collegiate environment is a place that provides a set of expectations and opportunities for students. We used a “4 Cs” framework—culture, curriculum, cocurriculum, and communities within and beyond the campus—to describe the salient features (Braskamp et al., 2006).

So the question for us in this issue is this: What do we know about the ways that colleges and universities can effectively foster global perspective taking? That is, what environmental conditions, particularly those involving cocurricular activities and the community, are associated with students engaged in enhanced global perspective taking? In this issue I can focus on only American colleges and universities because we have data from only American colleges and universities. Institutions in other nations are beginning to collect data, and once we have data from a number of institutions outside the United States, I will share the results in a future column.

The Measurement Tool: Global Perspective Inventory

I begin by briefly describing the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), a tool we have used to collect the data I am summarizing in this column. The GPI reflects a global and holistic view of student learning and development and the importance of the campus environment in fostering student development. The GPI, consisting of 58 items plus several demographic items, measures how a student thinks, views herself as a person, and relates to others from other cultures, backgrounds, and values. (It reflects how students are responding to these three major questions: How do I know? Who am I? and How do I relate to others? as noted above.) Forty items measure the three major dimensions of a global perspective of development, with two scales measuring each of three dimensions—Cognitive, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal. Three clusters totaling 18 items reflect the campus environment, measuring important dimensions of a campus—Community, Curriculum, and Cocurriculum. The GPI was designed so users can focus on potential connections between holistic student learning and development (the “desired ends”) and campus environment (the “appropriate means”). With student responses to three dimensions of their development and their involvement in campus programs that stress a global perspective, campus leaders can use the GPI results in their discussions about what interventions—activities, programs, courses, events—may be influencing students as they progress in becoming global citizens or developing a more global perspective in how they think, view themselves, and relate to others unlike them. The GPI is a self-report survey that can be taken online by students, faculty, and staff. Approximately 34,000 respondents have completed the GPI since 2008, mostly undergraduates, almost all within the age range of 18 to 24. (A description of the scales, the list of institutions administering

the GPI since 2008, and the psychometric characteristics can be found in Braskamp et al., 2010).

Results

What can we report about students developing a global perspective?

First, traditionally aged students with a higher class status—freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior—have higher average scores on all six scales. Freshmen and seniors had the largest difference on the Knowing (complexity of thinking and taking into account cultural differences on what is important and valid) and Social Interaction (relationships with others unlike them in background) scales and the least differences on Identity (a sense of having a purpose in life) and Social Responsibility (desire to be interdependent and work toward a common good). Moreover, the differences between the cohorts by class status are more apparent between the freshmen and sophomore years, with relatively less pronounced changes from the sophomore to the senior year of college. Thus, the developmental gains in all three dimensions generally occurred early in the collegiate careers of the traditional-aged students. However this portrayal masks some of the differences among groups of students in college today. Students enrolled at selective college and universities are more apt early in their college days to express a great global perspective, especially in Knowing and Social Interaction. On the other hand, students at colleges whose mission is religious and evangelical in focus have higher scores on Identity and Social Responsibility and lower scores on complexity of thinking. International students score higher on all six of the GPI personal scales than do the noninternational students. Students who are 25 years and older also have higher scores on the scales, but most notably on the Social Responsibility, Identity, and Affect scales (self-confidence about oneself as a unique person and acceptance of others with different views and values; Sinclair & Glass, 2010).

Second, student perceptions of their campus community are related to their levels of global perspective taking. Students who have more positive perceptions of their campus as a community are more apt to have a more global perspective, especially in their intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. Students who consider themselves to be “challenged and supported” by their college, have “been encouraged to develop their strengths and talents,” and “feel a part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends” are more apt to have a greater sense of who they are, feel more comfortable and self-confident about their own identities, and be more involved in interacting with others who are unlike them. Students who do not feel “insulted or threatened based on their cultural/ethnic background” at their college show a higher lever of complex thinking than students less secure at their institution.

Third, students more highly involved in a variety of cocurricular activities also have a higher level of global perspective taking. Students who are more engaged in cocurricular activities are more apt to express a greater global perspective in all three dimensions—head, heart, and hands—than students not as engaged. Students’ views of their social responsibility are positively related to their level of involvement in activities and programs such as “community service activities,” “campus organized discussions on diversity issues,” and “religious or spiritual activities.” Students’ levels of attendance at “events or activities by groups reflecting a cultural heritage different from their own” and in “campus organized discussion on diversity issues” are related to their levels of social interaction, supporting the argument that students who are engaged in meeting others unlike themselves become more comfortable with persons unlike them. The level of student involvement in “religious or spiritual activities” and “leadership programs” is related to students’ sense of their own unique identity and to their level of social concern for others. Thus, in general social

interactions in activities that purposefully foster pluralism and multiple cultural values outside the classroom are related to all three dimensions of holistic student development, but especially to social interaction.

Implications

Student affairs professionals do and can play an important role in fostering global perspective taking in all three dimensions of the head, heart, and hands of traditional-aged students, according to our findings. All cocurricular activities are not uniformly correlated with all dimensions of global development, but selected ones are associated with selected learning and development in predictable ways. The influence of curricular strategies like study away (study abroad and service learning as pedagogical strategies) are not reported in this column, but their potential impact follows a general theme that I have noticed in all of our studies: Effective interventions are possible when the programs and activities are focused and intentional.

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