Global Learning:
What Is It? Who Is Responsible for It?

▸ **Kevin Hovland,** director of global learning and curricular change, Association of American Colleges and Universities

There are few colleges or universities that do not embrace the goals of increasing global awareness, global citizenship, and global responsibility as part of their educational mission. Yet, across all sectors, institutions continue to struggle to develop the best practices for translating goals into concrete curricular and cocurricular global experiences that are flexible, rigorous, and relevant to *all* students in *all* programs.

Since 2001, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has worked through its Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility initiative to help member colleges and universities envision and enact global learning models that foreground questions of diversity, identity, citizenship, interconnection, and responsible action. Shared Futures supports the efforts of faculty, staff, and administrators as they create curricular, cocurricular, and integrated experiences that enable all students—those who study abroad and the vast majority who do not—to approach the world's challenges and opportunities from multiple perspectives and to wrestle with the ethical implications of differential power and privilege.

Consequently, the nearly one hundred institutions that have participated in Shared Futures projects over the years represent a rich resource of lessons learned. Individuals and teams on those campuses continue to probe what they mean by global learning—in theory and practice—and explore the implications of global learning across institutional structures. The short answer to the first question in the title is that definitions of global learning continue to evolve. As we see the shape that the term is taking, more and more often the short answer to the second question is "everyone." Global learning is not a task to be assigned to an individual, an office, or a department; it is a complex set of goals and outcomes to be coordinated across and throughout the institution. Consequently, study abroad as a vehicle for global learning needs to be carefully situated within a broader institutional and educational context.

WHAT IS GLOBAL LEARNING?

This need is supported by evidence from employers. In 2006, AAC&U commissioned a series of focus groups with business leaders, followed by a national survey to learn their impressions of how well colleges and universities prepare students for work. Business leaders thought that colleges were underemphasizing "global issues," with 72 percent urging greater attention. The following year, AAC&U again asked employers to reflect on how colleges should assess and improve student learning. When asked to evaluate recent college graduates' preparedness in twelve areas, which included such things as critical thinking and communications skills, global knowledge received the lowest scores. Only 18 percent of employers rated graduates as very well prepared in global knowledge; 46 percent felt that graduates were *not* well prepared. Nearly one half of employers responding to the survey did not think their recent college hires had the global knowledge necessary for advancement.

Such data reconfirms our conviction that college and university students will benefit from a careful and intentional alignment of global learning goals with the essential learning outcomes of a liberal education—what it means to be a well-educated citizen for the twenty-first century. By linking global learning and liberal education, institutions can overcome the mistaken view that liberal education is only "learning for learning's sake," disconnected from the practical skills and needs of work. On the contrary, they will demonstrate that liberal education attends to work life, civic life, and personal life in a dynamically shifting, globally integrated environment.

Advancing global learning helps campuses affirm the relevance and urgency of liberal education and gives it shape and coherence. As AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) National Leadership Council argues, "Global integration is now our shared context. The potential benefits of global interdependence are extraordinary, but so too are the challenges. Wealth, income, and social power are dramatically unequal within and across international

boundaries. We are reminded daily of the clash of cultures, histories, and worldviews. The globe itself is fragile and vulnerable as are our shared civic spaces. These global challenges will be with us for the foreseeable future."(AAC&U 2007).

Both AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative and its Shared Futures initiative are organized around a set of essential learning outcomes, which are best developed through a contemporary liberal education. These outcomes provide a new framework to guide students' cumulative progress beginning in school and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies. While the word "global" appears only once in the outcomes, global concerns are infused throughout the entire set of outcomes; global learning is knowledge *focused* by engagement with big questions; skills *practiced* extensively . . . in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance; personal and social responsibility *anchored* through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges; and integrative learning *demonstrated* through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

Nearly a decade ago, when we began to develop the Shared Futures initiative, our queries about global learning were usually forwarded to the campus study abroad office or to the department of international affairs. By focusing attention on student learning outcomes, in the subsequent years, we have seen a marked increase in efforts to design more comprehensive global learning strategies. The following, for example, are working definitions of global learning submitted by a few participants in a March 2009 Global Learning Forum sponsored by AAC&U. At Barry University, global learning "encompasses both everyday intercultural interaction on campus and the formal study of global cultures and issues across the curriculum." Chestnut Hill students focus on the "centrality of relationships in living and working for the common good and . . . understand the diverse world in which they live." At Northern Arizona University, global learning includes issues of environmental sustainability, diversity, and multicultural education. Northern Arizona "students learn about the interaction among diversity, environmental sustainability, and global engagement."

"GLOBAL" AT HOME AND ABROAD

More and more, institutions are defining global learning as a vehicle for integrating multiple disciplinary perspectives and weaving together existing commitments to explore diversity, build capacity for civic engagement, and prepare students to take responsibility for common global problems. At Whittier College, for example, faculty, staff, and administrators "have been exploring how global learning can connect to the college's long-standing commitment to and support of domestic diversity." They are seeking ways to "use the multiethnic, international community settings in Los Angeles to both engage . . . students with cultures different than their own, while giving them a sense of global interconnections." Such language is increasingly evident among the institutions we have followed through Shared Futures activities. The challenge that remains, of course, is establishing an institutional "home" for such coordination. Whittier is using its Liberal Education Program [general education], majors and interdisciplinary programs, study abroad

Essential Learning Outcomes for the Twenty-first Century

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN CULTURES AND THE PHYSICAL AND NATURAL WORLD

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

INTELLECTUAL AND PRACTICAL SKILLS, INCLUDING

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, INCLUDING

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

INTEGRATIVE LEARNING, INCLUDING

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

Source: *College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise.* 2007. AAC&U.

Global Learning: Lessons Learned

- Global learning cannot be achieved at one time or in one place.
- Global learning must take into account the developmental stage of the student.
- Global learning must be built sequentially (in developmentally appropriate ways).
- Colleges and universities need help in developing assessment tools to track the multiple expectations of global learning and to help determine the best teaching strategies for each.
- Global learning should be a rehearsal of real-world problems.
- Global learning should simultaneously address international interconnection and interdependence and inequality, injustice, and American power—at home and abroad.
- Disciplinary frameworks are important—they provide tested tools to students and scholars to bring analytical power to bear on a problem or problems, but for global learning, particularly at the level appropriate to undergraduates, interdisciplinary questions offer great promise.
- General education is a promising area for global learning because it has evolved to address this tension between breadth and depth, between disciplinary tools and perspectives in comparison. General education is also about integration of learning and learning to learn, two elements of global learning that cannot be overemphasized.
- There are local/global intersections in every community. Colleges and universities can identify and utilize them.
- The key questions of Shared Futures—what does it mean to be a responsible citizen in today's global context and how should one act in the face of large unsolved global problems?—are central questions for liberal education and key questions around which to organize curricular and cocurricular engagement.

opportunities, and an emphasis on using Los Angeles as a 'learning laboratory' to achieve the following [student learning] goals:

- an understanding of how other countries and societies interpret U.S. values
- an understanding of how the United States interprets the values of other countries and societies
- an understanding of how individual choices affect or influence other societies and countries
- an understanding of how individual consumption impacts the world's ecological system, cultural values, cultural evolution, and economy.

CREATING COMMON GROUND

Similar thinking across institutional types has led AAC&U to adopt a strategy for Shared Futures that emphasizes both the multiplicity of meaning within the term "global learning" and its potential to create intellectual and institutional common ground. On that common ground, individuals representing different disciplines and divisions can come together to shape a curriculum around real-world, complex global problems and individuals from both student affairs and academic affairs can collaborate around creating integrative curricular and cocurricular opportunities for students to apply their learning. Study abroad and study away infrastructure and personnel have a critical role to play in this common endeavor.

Our interest in common ground has led us to emphasize general education designs, but it is appropriate across all elements of the curriculum and cocurriculum. Through Shared Futures, AAC&U led efforts to build coherent, vertically and horizontally integrated, general education curricula around complex, multidisciplinary global issues such as:

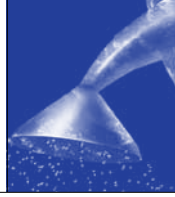
- *Health and social justice,* which explores issues like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, food supplies and security, and pandemic influenza as rich areas of interconnected global learning
- *Sustainability,* which has proved to be a popular topic with which colleges and universities reinforce the importance of scientific literacy, interdependence, social responsibility, and civic engagement in the curriculum
- *Globalization, wealth, and poverty,* which is a useful framework for placing moral and ethical questions within interconnected economic, cultural, political, and social contexts
- *Identity, culture, and border crossings,* which helps students begin to see how their own identities are related to currents of power and privilege, both within a multicultural United States and within an interdependent and unequal world
- *Religion in global contexts,* which raises questions about one source of potential conflict and reconciliation in a shared future

Participating institutions demonstrated convincingly that using global questions to frame general education requirements is an effective educational practice. Evidence from the field suggests that they are also effective in bridging curricular with cocurricular experiences.

Northern Virginia Community College, another institution participating in the Global Learning Forum, divides its global learning outcomes into knowledge/content, attitude/mode of being, and skills. In each category, students will be able to do the following:

Knowledge/Content

- Understand the interconnectedness and interdependence of global systems
- Understand the historical, cultural, economic, and political forces that shape society and explain their own situation in this context
- Develop a nuanced/complex understanding of culture as a concept and the deep/complex/dynamic nature of culture
- Understand various/different cultures and how culture is created



- Understand the relationship of power and language, and how language interacts with culture
- Understand the connections between power, knowledge, privilege, gender, and class (locally and globally)
- Understand conflict and power relationships.
- Understand how language frames thinking and perspective ("the language you speak creates the box in which you think")
- Recognize how stereotypes develop and where they come from

Attitudinal/Mode of Being

- Develop a sense of perspective and social responsibility
- Overcome provincial/parochial thinking
- Reduce their own prejudice
- Appreciate difference; value and acknowledge other cultures as legitimate
- Improve cultural self-awareness and understanding of one's self in the global context (one's own place and connections)
- Demonstrate greater appreciation of or an interest in learning about different cultures
- Develop empathy and perspective consciousness
- Demonstrate open-mindedness and an understanding of complexity

Skills

- Think, work, and move across boundaries—in diverse environments with a range of people
- Develop and use skills in conflict resolution
- Develop and use intercultural communications skills
- Demonstrate language proficiency
- Take informed responsibility for actions in a globally connected world
- Link theory and practice through their own experience both as citizens and in professions
- Internalize and apply cultural understandings and knowledge
- Seek out multiple perspectives—inside perspectives as well as outside ones

In many ways this list recapitulates the LEAP essential learning outcomes. Clearly, it is impossible to make progress across all of these goals without integrating multiple parts of the educational experience. And of course, each of these experiences should be aligned to a developmental arc as well—we can't expect students to achieve the highest degree of success at a single, first exposure. Comprehensive curricular pathways need to be designed. Study abroad or study away is strengthened by opportunities for course-based preparation and reflection. The knowledge, skills, and experiences gained in study abroad or away, in turn, expand and deepen the insights that students bring to what they are learning in the rest of their courses. Equally important to success—especially at a large urban commuter institution—is finding creative ways to bring students into generative contact—to create spaces and opportunities for them to share their diverse experiences and identities in the context of global challenges.

SHARED FUTURES, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In the specific context of study abroad or study away, we must encourage conversation and shared responsibility between faculty and staff who are involved in those programs and those who are not. Such efforts should not be focused only on recruiting additional faculty to lead study abroad, but should endeavor to refine the overall context in which study away occurs so that it is more reflective of a globally interdependent world. Students need opportunities and experiences in which they can explore the relational nature of their identities—identities that are variously shaped by the currents of power and privilege, both within a multicultural United States and within an interconnected and unequal world. Diversity is about everyone; and global is about everywhere. There exists enormous potential on campus for fruitful collaborations within and across these movements.

As the Northern Virginia Community College example shows, when global learning is translated into multiple desired student learning outcomes, the results are ambitious, if not overwhelming. What will a campus look like if this collective responsibility is embraced? What will study abroad or away experiences look like? How will associations such as AAC&U help colleges develop the necessary deep roots for such change?

Such questions have led us to focus more and more on the integrative value of global learning and its role in general education design. Such integration requires cooperation, collaboration, and communication across departments and divisions, between disciplines and, ideally, between academic and student affairs. Global learning must be designed at the institutional level. In recent years, we have seen increased attention to ideas such as global citizenship, global awareness, and global responsibility in institutional mission statements. Such statements of commitment are easy; it is the implementation that is difficult. Global learning takes a curriculum and it requires multiple experiential opportunities for students to practice in the real world what they are learning in the classroom.

The corollary to such an integrative vision of global learning is that it takes a highly developed faculty and staff. Many of the institutions that have participated in Shared Futures projects have had great success developing and sustaining faculty/staff learning communities around the global issues listed above. Through such learning communities, institutions are able to bring existing resources to bear on efforts to build coherent strategies for enabling global learning in students. ■

REFERENCE

Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2007. *College learning for the new global century: A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.