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Developing Global Competency in US Higher Education: Contributions of International Students

International students are key players in realizing the goal of internationalizing US colleges and universities, particularly when it comes to engagement on issues of global significance. This article contextualizes the phenomenon of the internationalization of higher education and recent patterns of transnational mobility for international students, and then it examines internationalization on an institutional level, both the practices associated with this recognition of global interconnectivity and the discourses that accompany it. Though institutions have missed some opportunities to integrate international students into their teaching and learning communities, I argue that these diverse students are in fact rich natural resources for developing global competency in US higher education. This article concludes by highlighting some promising practices for integrating international students into teaching and learning environments on US campuses and emphasizing the importance of reorienting status quo approaches.

Introduction

There is little doubt that "internationalization" has become a buzzword on US college campuses, and literature highlights an overall acceleration of internationalization activities (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Brustein, 2007; Hayward, 2000; Qiang, 2003). The broader impetus for internationalizing US higher education is linked to participation in a diverse and interconnected global community (American Council on Education, 2012; Brustein, 2007; Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006). Such participation is driven by overlapping—and sometimes seemingly contradictory—purposes: the need to address global challenges; the need to compete in the global econo-

my; the need to protect our nation from threats and risks; the humanitarian need to support the world community as global citizens. Scholars have noted that the four key rationales for the internationalization of higher education are (a) political; (b) economic; (c) academic; (d) cultural and social (Childress, 2009; de Wit, 2002; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Knight, 1997, 2004, 2006; Qiang; 2003). The political rationale aligns with the nation's diplomatic or strategic interests, while the economic motivation relates to the preparedness of US graduates to compete in—and benefit from—the global marketplace. In academic terms, internationalization is thought to contribute to the overall quality of education, and socioculturally, cross-cultural learning and engagement is thought to equip individuals to interact thoughtfully and respectfully with those from diverse backgrounds.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), during the academic year 2013-2014, a record 886,052 international students engaged in study at US institutions, 8% higher than the previous year; California is the leading state for international student enrollment (IIE, 2014b), largely based on substantial international student populations at the University of Southern California (USC), the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley). China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia now comprise the top-sending countries of international students to the US, and the most popular fields of study among international students are Business and Management, Engineering, and Computer Science (IIE, 2013). Chow (2011) found that the US was the destination of choice for international students for three main reasons: the quality of its higher education systems, its diversity of schools and programs, and its welcoming environment for students. Though these students have their own motivations for matriculating at US colleges and universities, they in turn come to serve as a visible representation of institutions' internationalization agendas. For the purposes of this article, the internationalization of higher education is defined as a set of activities that integrate an "international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, p. 11). By Knight's reckoning, internationalization is a thoughtful, ongoing, and generative process by which institutions engage globally.

Evidence suggests, however, that this engagement is rarely fully integrated or sustained in the teaching and learning environments at US institutions (Green 2003; Qiang, 2003). American colleges and universities tend to be monolingual and monocultural, operating on a set of assumptions and practices that represent a "single dominant

culture" (Caruana, 2010, p. 34). This hegemony, combined with structural constraints of the curriculum, limits US domestic students' development of global skills and perspectives (Brustein, 2007). At the same time, though many colleges and universities cite international student data as evidence of their global interconnectedness, research shows that second-language (L2) international students are often marginalized on US college campuses, where language and cultural diversity is treated as deficit or difference rather than as an opportunity to promote global perspectives. This article explores the context for internationalization in higher education, with a particular focus on the potential contributions of international students, arguing the importance of recognizing both the cultural and linguistic value of these students and of cultivating the benefits they can bring to our campuses and classrooms. If we are indeed to move US colleges and universities toward our professed goal of graduating globally competent and globally minded students, we should look to international students as key resources in promoting learning for the global realities of the 21st century.

Broad Economic, Cultural, and Strategic Benefits

According to NAFSA's *International Education Data & Statistics* (2014), international students and their dependents brought a net impact of nearly $27 billion to the US economy in 2013-2014. In California alone, more than 120,000 international students and their dependents contributed more than $4 billion to the state economy (IIE, 2014a). Such benefits are not limited to large public institutions that enroll thousands of international students; in fact, in a survey of more than 400 schools it was found that institutions with increased matriculation of international students were "more likely to meet enrollment and net-tuition revenue goals," even in tough economic times (Thomason, 2013). This both reflects and perpetuates the active recruitment of international students at US colleges and universities, with many keen to capitalize actively on the international market for US higher education (Brennan & Dellow, 2013; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Stromquist, 2007; Taylor, 2004).

In terms of cultural benefits, international students are thought to make valuable contributions as "bridges" between their home communities abroad and their local communities in the US. The US assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, Evan M. Ryan, noted that both international and global relationships are strengthened as a result of interactions that derive from international educational exchange: "It is through these relationships that together

we can solve global challenges like climate change, the spread of pandemic disease, and combatting violent extremism" (McDaniel, 2014). Positive engagement with diverse members of the global community serves as a form of "soft diplomacy" (Altbach & Peterson, 2008; Nye, 2004) that advances US strategic and diplomatic goals, which is especially important in this time of geopolitical instability. From a national perspective, Ryan also emphasized that "only by engaging multiple perspectives within our societies can we all reap the numerous benefits of international education—increased global competence, self-awareness and resiliency, and the ability to compete in the 21st century economy" (McDaniel, 2014, para. 5). There is little doubt that an engaged community of international students and scholars can promote both the economic and strategic interests of the nation.

Institutional Missions and Strategies

It is thought that similar benefits accrue at an institutional level, and the perceived benefit of enrolling international students is often conceptually—and rhetorically—aligned with broader internationalization agendas at a university level. Institutional rationales are often articulated in mission statements and other strategic documents. In fact, half of all colleges and universities have mission statements that emphasize the value of internationalization (American Council on Education, 2012), employing phrases such as "global perspectives," "global competence," "cross cultural understanding," and "engaging the world."

The top-enrolling California schools for international students all highlight a global ethos in statements of their institutional mission and values: USC's mission statement notes that "[we are] pluralistic, welcoming outstanding men and women of every race, creed and background. … We are a global institution in a global center, attracting more international students over the years than any other American university" (1993); UCLA professes that it "advances knowledge, addresses pressing societal needs and creates a university enriched by diverse perspectives where all individuals can flourish. … Located on the Pacific Rim in one of the world's most diverse and vibrant cities, UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships locally and globally" (n.d.); UC Berkeley has also established a set of guiding principles that "reflect [its] passion for critical inquiry, debate, discovery and innovation, and our deep commitment to contributing to a better world" (n.d.). Such aspirational statements reflect the ethos that motivates global engagement on campus.

The key practices associated with internationalization in US in-

stitutions are branch campuses in other countries, joint degree programs with institutions abroad, study-abroad and exchange-student programs, study of foreign language and cultures, globalized curricular content, and the enrollment of international students on US campuses. Some of these opportunities are clearly directed externally—and often for entrepreneurial purposes—and others target what has been called "internationalization at home" (Knight, 2004), notably the study of foreign languages and cultures, globally purposed curricular content and co-curricular activities, and enrolling students from the global community. These collective activities are thought to contribute to students' development of global competency, which Olson and Kroeger (2001) defined as "substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication skills [necessary] to effectively interact in our globally interdependent world" (p. 117). Global competence outcomes include skill sets and mind-sets, and it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to equip students for the global 21st century (Bourn, 2011). In reality, however, internationalization is often a series of activities that may or may not be unified in any integrated way, and international students tend to be overlooked as rich and generative resources for cultivating global competence in US colleges and universities.

Missed Opportunities

Despite institutions' idealized goal of global learning, it is generally acknowledged that most internationalized activities take place in a piecemeal manner, rather than as part of a thoughtful, strategic, and integrative process (de Wit, 1999; Knight, 2004; Qiang, 2003). In fact, Green (2003) noted that "institutional policies and practices reveal that most institutions are only minimally internationalized" (p. 1). Part of this is the result of the complexity of the higher educational enterprise; universities are complex entities with multiple stakeholders and multiple goals, and change is not easily brought about (Bartell, 2003; Childress, 2009; Van der Wende; 1999, 2001). They also operate on a set of principles and practices that are deeply entrenched and—particularly relevant to the development of global competency—they tend to represent the linguistic, cultural, and epistemologic preferences of the dominant community (Caruana, 2010) and take an "uncritical stance toward both their own internal practices and the structures in which they operate" (Davies, 2006, p. 688). The consequence of this status quo relationship with knowledge is that it creates a gap when it comes to globally engaged teaching and learning (Bourn, 2011; Kreber, 2009; Leask, 2001). US students have little sustained access to global themes and perspectives in their classes and thus have lim-

ited opportunities to develop global and cross-cultural competency themselves (Brustein, 2007; Hayward, 2000). In short, though mission statements and institutional rhetoric highlight the goal of transformational global learning, such a goal is often thwarted by existing attitudes and practices in the US higher educational system.

At the same time, the global diversity of the student body is often touted as evidence of how "global" US colleges and universities are. Yet, as Leask and Carroll (2011) argue, we cannot assume that there will be "automatic benefits" just because a campus is "diverse" (p. 650). The question that arises, then, is to what extent are international students thoughtfully and strategically cultivated as resources to promote global competency? The reality for many international students is markedly different from the marketing materials they accessed when applying to the university. For example, the literature on the experience of international students in US higher education is dominated by research on the acculturation process of international students—in other words, how well they adapt or assimilate to the existing environment (Andrade, 2006; de Araujo, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The emphasis on the extent to which international students "fit" into existing institutional frameworks reflects an underlying—and potentially harmful—assumption: Even though colleges and universities are actively recruiting more and more international students, a one-way assimilation for international students seems to be preferable.

Along the same lines, institutional policies often label and segregate international students into language-support or remediation course work with the eventual goal of mainstreaming them into the existing curricular framework and producing graduates who meet the same standards as English-speaking domestic students (Chiang & Schmida, 2006; Costino & Hyon, 2007; Harklau, 2000; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). International students also tend to be stereotyped based on superficial assumptions about their linguistic or cultural backgrounds or are otherwise identified by their differences (Benesch, 1993; Kubota, 2001; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Morita, 2004), as if language diversity were a problem to be "solved" (Hall, 2009, p. 37). Research on faculty perceptions tends to support this deficit mentality (Leki, 2006; Zamel & Spack, 2004) or highlight concerns about how to respond to the influx of culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013). When we combine the growing linguistic and cultural diversity of US university student populations with the impetus for internationalization, it is clear that it is time to put aside the tendency to marginalize international students on campus and to start tapping their potential to promote global learning.

International Students as a Natural Resource for Global Engagement

A key reason that international students are uniquely positioned to be resources for global engagement is that they themselves are products of global flows and have crossed cultural borders. Research on transnational mobility indicates that push-pull motivation still characterizes the decision to study abroad (Altbach, 2004; Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but it also indicates that we are seeing a new profile of a transnationally mobile student. Today's international students are more likely to be young—undergraduates rather than graduates—and from socioeconomically privileged families in countries with a burgeoning middle class. Though there is not a huge amount of diversity among sending countries, there tends to be significant heterogeneity *among* the students who are coming from the same country (Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012; Fischer, 2011). In addition, empirical research on the transnational migration experience of international students at a US university found that the students were themselves testament to global interconnectivity; the motivation to study abroad was characterized by family experiences abroad, a strong awareness of both the pragmatic and self-actualizing benefits of study abroad, and an awareness of the limitations of the higher educational systems in their home countries (Siczek, 2014).

International students' very experience of transnational migration challenges our static view of "nationality," "ethnicity," and even "culture." In fact, scholars have recently argued that it is time to consider these students in more dynamic terms, noting that they are part of a "global cultural flow" (Singh & Doherty, 2004, p. 15), shaped by both global economic conditions and their own cultural and linguistic experiences as they cross borders. If we look to international students with this recognition, we can see that their transnational mobility does not diminish their experiences in their home communities, but instead it motivates a new, more fluid "cosmopolitan" understanding of cultural identity, one that "emerges out of the conditions of global interculturality; and of critical engagement with ideas and images that circulate around the world" (Rizvi, 2005, p. 334; see also Bourn, 2011; Dervin, 2011; Kell & Vogl, 2008; Van Gyn, Schuerholz-Lehr, Caws, & Preece, 2009).

While some would argue that international students are products of a neoliberal system—a commodified higher educational marketplace—they carry with them different sources of knowledge, ways of communicating, values, approaches, and experiences. Through transnational migration, international students have been forced to experi-

ence differing pedagogies and, presumably, to examine themselves in the context of their sociocultural pasts and their new global futures. Rather than pushing these potentially transformative resources to the margins of our educational communities, we should recognize that our classrooms are what Singh and Doherty (2004) might call "global contact zones," spaces where—in line with sociocultural theory—"mutual entanglement" (p. 12) is favored over a one-way assimilation to the norms and expectations of the US education system. If US colleges and universities are indeed to realize their goal of engaging all students in global learning, negotiating different ways of knowing and thinking is a pedagogic imperative. To engage all students in global learning, we need to innovate our teaching and learning environments—including curricular approaches—to provide "space where learners cannot only explore complex and differing approaches and values but also reflect upon their own identity" (Bourn, 2011, p. 562).

These pedagogical gaps also connect to scholars' claims that US domestic college students are graduating with low levels of global and intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2004; Robson, 2011). Hunter, White, and Godbey (2006) and Brustein (2007) cited numerous studies on gaps in US students' geographic knowledge and foreign language proficiency; Brustein invoked crisis language to emphasize the dangers of graduating students who are ill prepared to meet "rapidly shifting economic, political, and national security realities and challenges" (p. 382) and critiqued the "cafeteria style" course-selection process for students and the siloed nature of departments on campus. In addition, because the American higher education curriculum is not ideologically neutral (Benesch, 1993; Berlin, 1988; Canagarajah, 2002), international students' linguistic backgrounds and global experiences could serve as catalysts for promoting critical reflection and global learning for domestic students in US college classrooms.

Promising Practices

It is easy to make a conceptual argument as to why international students enhance global engagement in US universities, but to realize this goal there must be both a shift in thinking *and* a move toward the implementation of strategic interventions and activities that are academically oriented. The section that follows highlights some promising practices to engage international—and indeed all—students in global learning.

Facilitate Faculty Professional Development. One of the reasons global learning has not been incorporated more deeply into the curriculum is that educators "lack the pedagogical knowledge or skills

to make sophisticated changes that reflect comprehensive implementation of [internationalization]" (Van Gyn et al., 2009, p. 27). Neither do faculty have expertise or time to respond to the needs of multilingual international students in their classes. These gaps necessitate a thoughtful approach to professional development, including buy-in for the overall proposition of internationalization and the tools and mind-sets that enable them to innovate their teaching to promote global learning. Caruana (2010), Dewey and Duff (2009), and Mak (2010) have all written about faculty and staff trainings and initiatives in their institutions, and Van Gyn and her colleagues (2009) put forward a model to redesign curricula to promote world-mindedness through pedagogical means. Through workshops, participants are asked to critically reflect on their assumptions, their course content, and their teaching practices, and then to collaborate with facilitators and peers to reconceptualize their courses and assess the extent to which they enact global-minded learning.

Expand Topics for Class Reading, Discussion, Writing, and Research; Embrace Diverse Perspectives Through Assignment Design. In line with the faculty-driven curricular redesigns outlined above, faculty should question the course materials used in their classes and the type of activities and assignments students are asked to complete. As Bourn (2011) stated, "The world is changing and previous world views are no longer appropriate;" thus, class assignments and activities should draw on a range of perspectives and move away from what he called "fixed content and skills that conform to a predetermined idea of society" (p. 565). Expanding course topics to be inclusive of more diverse experiences gives international students an opportunity to share their existing knowledge and, ideally, change the thinking of other students who may not have been exposed to these perspectives before.

Use the Writing Classroom as a Site for Global Engagement. Many departments on campus continue to be siloed by discipline, each with its unique—and often fixed—sources of knowledge and pedagogical practices. In general, however, writing programs have more context flexibility than traditional disciplines and thus have remarkable potential to draw on interdisciplinary and global themes. Shapiro and Siczek (in press) used the term "strategic content" to characterize writing-intensive classes, with titles such as English in a Global Context and Language and Social Justice, that are organized around multidisciplinary topics of global significance. Such courses support institutional goals to internationalize and develop global competency, appeal to student needs and interests, and promote institutional integration, as international students have much to contrib-

ute to the class based on their own experiences. Ibrahim and Penfield (2005) and Matsuda and Silva (1999) have also been strong advocates for cross-cultural writing courses; such courses, they argue, "mediate" the integration of domestic and international students and, as such, promote global engagement.

Arrange or Promote Mixed Writing Groups and/or Research Teams for Class Activities and Assignments. Because developing global competency is motivated by the ability to interact cross-culturally and approach one's own beliefs and experiences critically and self-reflexively, opportunities for domestic students to engage in academic tasks with international students must be cultivated. International students can be critical sources of knowledge, representing diverse as well as more complex—and contested—ways of knowing. According to Leask (2001), class projects that require students to work across cultures facilitate the development of intercultural communication skills and, at the same time, "value the contribution of international students to the process of internationalizing the curriculum" (p. 114).

Promote Co-Curricular Activities That Encourage Domestic and International Students to Interact on Issues of Global Significance. Opportunities for global engagement that are *outside* of the formal curriculum allow students to connect based on their own personal interests and aspirations. Leask (2009) argues that institutions need to strategically facilitate such interactions, which requires a "campus environment that motivates and rewards interaction among international and home students" (p. 205). Suggestions for co-curricular activities include participation in universitywide symposia and events, service-learning initiatives, research teams, intercultural student organizations, student government and leadership, globally themed living and learning communities in residence halls, and tutoring and mentoring programs (in which international students tutor or mentor, rather than *being* tutored or mentored, or at least engage reciprocally in the relationship).

Through such opportunities for global engagement, all students—domestic and international—have the potential to question their assumptions, beliefs, and sources of knowledge; such insights engender a change in perspective as they come to understand themselves and one another, thereby connecting themselves to the broader global community. It is important, however—though one-off initiatives can generate clear benefits—that international students are incorporated into a consistent, holistic, and engaged framework for "comprehensive internationalization" (Brennan & Dellow, 2013; Hudzik, 2011).

Concluding Thoughts

This article shines a light on the gap between the rhetoric of internationalization in US higher education and the reality of international students' experiences on campus. The international students that US institutions recruit and enroll are an incredibly rich resource toward promoting global engagement. To capitalize on their potential contributions, however, colleges and universities must be *responsive*—not just to economic opportunities that derive from tapping the global higher education market, but more important, to enriching opportunities for global engagement in their teaching and learning environments. Our classrooms and campuses are becoming increasingly diverse, creating new spaces for cultural and global interaction. Yet many institutional practices have not kept pace with the global realities of the 21st century. As a result, we are missing opportunities to innovate curricula and pedagogies, to tap into the many contributions culturally and linguistically diverse students bring to our institutions, and to cultivate global and intercultural competency on the part of domestic students and faculty.

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