

## An Internalization Project to Develop Global Competency Across the Disciplines

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The purpose of this article is to describe an internationalization project that was developed at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, Florida to provide faculty across the disciplines with assignments they can use to foster the development of their students' global competency. After describing the project and the series of assignments they developed, the authors focus on one of the assignments, a cultural interview, and describe how it was adapted in two disciplines: hospitality management and political science. Overall, the students found the experience to be a positive one. They gained confidence as a result of conducting the interview and developed a broader perspective on their chosen profession. Finally, many students reflected on the fact that before completing the interview they thought their level of cultural competence was much greater than it actually was. The interview assignment is a valuable tool for faculty who wish to help their students develop their global competency whether the primary motivation is to help students become more competitive in the job market or to foster students' development as engaged global citizens. As shown by the findings of this study, the assignment has the potential to do both simultaneously.

The purpose of this article is to describe an internationalization project that was developed at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, Florida to provide faculty across the disciplines with assignments they can use to foster the development of their students' global competency. Faculty in many disciplines have recognized the need to develop students' global competency and to internationalize the curriculum (Brustein, 2017; Hanson, 2010; Rajala, 2012; Soria & Troisi, 2014). In fact, there is widespread recognition in higher education of the need to prepare students to function as global citizens both in their professions and in their personal lives. When discussing the need for an internationalized curriculum, scholars typically mention the fact that "the world has become highly interconnected and interdependent" (Rajala, 2012, p. 1377), and the problems we face have become much more complex (Keohane & Nye, 1987). In some cases the emphasis is on the need to help students develop their global competency so that they can compete successfully in the workplace. In other instances, the emphasis is on preparing students to become globally responsible citizens (Hanson, 2010). But whether there is an emphasis on market-driven or social concerns, educators agree that if we do not develop a comprehensive internationalized curriculum that is available to all students, we will "fail to prepare our graduates for the enormous global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Brustein, 2017, p. 390).

### Defining Global Competency

An examination of many definitions of global competency reveals that they all agree on certain key aspects of what it means to be a globally competent individual (Appiah-Padi, 2001; Brustein, 2017; Hanson, 2010; Rajala, 2012; Soria & Troisi, 2014). The skills and abilities associated with global competency include

awareness of, and sensitivity to, other cultures; an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the peoples of the world; the ability to think critically about global and local issues; and the ability to communicate and collaborate with diverse others. Globally competent individuals view themselves as citizens of the world rather than of a particular nation or culture.

Those scholars who have a market-driven perspective would also emphasize the fact that developing global competency will allow professionals to understand consumer tastes and therefore succeed economically (Friedman, 2005), while scholars who approach global competency from the perspective of social responsibility would emphasize the ability of global citizens to take action and play a role in transforming their world (Freire, 1970). These two perspectives are not necessarily always incompatible as some definitions emphasize the ability of global citizens "to act to advance both their own enlightened self-interest and the interest of people elsewhere in the world by understanding the interconnection of all living things" (Appiah-Padi, 2001).

### Study Abroad and On-Campus Alternatives

While educators may differ on some aspects of the definition of global competency or on whether the primary emphasis should be on social or economic concerns, they do agree that institutions of higher education must find effective ways to prepare students to be globally competent. Together with an increased emphasis on the important goal of internationalizing the curriculum has come the acknowledgement that traditional study abroad programs are not an effective means for achieving that goal. Only a small percentage of U.S. students study abroad; for example, the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) reports that for the 2014-2015 academic year just over

1.5 percent of all U.S. students enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States participated in study abroad programs. In some disciplines that number is even smaller; for example, engineering students are often unable to find time to study abroad because of “curricular rigidity” (Rajala, 2012, p. 1381). Typically, engineering students must complete a large number of required courses in order to earn their degrees and have little time to pursue electives. Further, students in many disciplines are prohibited from studying abroad because of the cost of such programs.

Given the small number of students who are able to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad, faculty have recognized the need to create on-campus programs and courses to help students develop a global perspective. To this end, many universities have added diversity and international studies courses and programs to their curriculum. In many instances, students may only take one or two courses with a global focus. They may complete their studies without developing global competency, proficiency in a foreign language, or an in-depth knowledge of any culture outside the United States (Brustein, 2007). Further, many stand-alone international studies programs have been criticized for not aligning these studies with expertise in a particular discipline (Brustein, 2007). At the same time, faculty across the disciplines have recognized the need to prepare students to develop global competency in order to succeed in their professions and to become globally minded citizens who have the ability to contribute to society both at home and abroad (Flammia, 2012; Hanson, 2010; Rajala, 2012; Reimers, 2009).

### **Discipline-Specific Assignments to Foster Global Competency**

Faculty members in many disciplines have developed assignments designed to foster students’ global competency. Most of these assignments emphasize the importance of giving students the opportunity to interact with diverse others. Some rely on virtual collaboration while others draw on the international population on campus to facilitate intercultural encounters (Mitchell & Benyon, 2018; Siczek, 2015); they all give students opportunities to engage in activities that enhance their intercultural communication skills and their understanding of the relationship between the global and the local (Flammia, Cleary, & Slattery 2010; Patterson, Carrillo, & Salinas, 2012; Sklad, Friedman, Park, & Oomen, 2016). For example, May, Wold, and Moore (2015) initiated a collaboration between engineering students at the University of Virginia in the U.S. and at the TU Dortmund University in Germany. As part of the collaboration the students engaged in interactive online role-playing simulations. At the end of the semester,

students reported that they had developed the ability to see “the relationship between cultural practices and engineering solutions more so than they could before the simulations” (p. 538). They gained confidence in their ability to demonstrate respect for other cultures and to listen to other points of view.

Mitchell and Benyon (2018) used a virtual collaboration between U.S. and South African students to enhance the Information Systems (IS) curriculum. Students engaged in one-on-one intercultural communication using email, Skype, Facebook, and other social media to get to know one another; the success of the project was assessed based on a reflection paper in which the students were required to discuss what they learned about their partner and about the IS curriculum. The students reported that they were surprised by how much they learned from their partners. Opportunities to interact with diverse others are vital to the development of students’ intercultural competency. Siczek (2015) suggests that international students on campus can make valuable contributions to globalizing the curriculum by acting as “‘bridges’ between their home communities abroad and their local communities in the US” (p. 7).

Beyond merely getting to know diverse others, having students interact with them to address discipline-specific issues provides valuable preparation for the global workplace. Jesick, Zhu, Woo, Thompson, and Mazzurco (2014) describe the use of scenario-based and situational approaches to preparing global engineers. Based on an extensive literature review and on their interviews with practicing engineers, they developed a situational judgment test (SJT) to evaluate global engineering competency. The situational prompts developed for the test were also used in their courses to facilitate case-based conversations about typical situations in global engineering work.

Case studies are also a common teaching tool in the international business curriculum. However, as Briguglio (2007) has pointed out, many existing case studies have been written from a Western perspective. Based on her experience using case studies in a business class, she argues that other approaches are needed to help students develop the intercultural communication skills they will need for international business contexts. She recommends using existing case studies as a starting point and then having students adapt the cases from their own cultural perspective. She also suggests challenging students to work collaboratively to produce original case studies based on cultural dilemmas that they have encountered themselves and then to adapt their cases to a business context.

In an international management course, Feng (2016) used a reflective development model to increase students’ cultural awareness and sensitivity. After the initial reflection stage, students were required to seek out

ways to interact with diverse others within their home environment (e.g., getting to know international students, attending local cultural events). Then students were required to write reflections describing what they did, how they felt about the experience, what they learned from it, and what they plan to do to continue improving their cultural awareness. Based on both quantitative assessment (pre- and post-surveys) and qualitative assessment (students' reflections), Feng found that the students improved their intercultural competency while remaining in their home environment.

Similar studies have been conducted in teacher education, language, and first-year writing courses (Dobrauc, 2016; Frigo, 2017; Lopes-Murphy, 2013). Sandell and Tupy (2015) used Hammer and Bennett's Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure the cultural competency of students in a teacher education program; the results of the IDI describe how individuals or groups are oriented toward other cultures. To facilitate the students' development of cultural competency, Sandell and Tupy used guest speakers, films, panel presentations, self-assessment writing activities, and interaction with partners from other cultures. As a result of these high-impact activities, the students showed "statistically significant positive gains in their orientations to cultures different from their own" (p. 378).

Although writing courses do not focus on discipline-specific skills and knowledge in the same way that upper-division courses within the disciplines do, they have the potential to play a vital role in the development of students' global awareness and sensitivity. Taking a local-then-global approach in a first-year composition course, Dobrauc (2016) sought to help her students develop global awareness while also gaining confidence in their writing skills. She used journal prompts to get students to identify ways in which global issues are part of their everyday lives. Dobrauc also used video and audio clips to help students visualize global issues in action; she even integrated global perspectives into instruction in grammar and vocabulary. As a result, her students showed strong improvements in their cultural awareness and in their development as global citizens.

Frigo (2017) has also addressed the need to help students in the writing classroom move outside their cultural comfort zones. She offers ten strategies to develop students' global competency. One example is a writing assignment that prompted students to think about where in the world they would like to travel if they had five thousand dollars to spend and to write a research essay on the destination explaining why it is a desirable place to visit. The students found this activity "both engaging and illuminating" (1. Start with a Geography Lesson section, para.3). Frigo also suggests having students read non-U.S. news sources to gain a broader

perspective on world issues and challenging them to develop positions on UN missions or interventions.

All of these approaches from diverse disciplines emphasize the importance of providing students with international experience in some form or another whether by interacting with international students, collaborating with diverse others, or examining how global issues impact their everyday lives. While some of the examples focus primarily on developing global citizenship and others place a greater emphasis on preparing students for the global workplace, nearly all of them also focus on the importance of teaching global competency in the context of disciplinary topics. Such an approach has been shown to be extremely beneficial to students (Dobrauc, 2016).

### **Fostering Global Competency Across the Disciplines**

While courses and assignments within the disciplines have proved to be effective in helping students develop the skills and abilities associated with global competency, the internationalization project described in this article took a different approach: rather than focusing on strategies for fostering global competency within a particular discipline or on creating a generic global studies course for all students, the authors have created a sequence of assignments that can be adapted by faculty members across the disciplines to add international elements to their courses. This simple and flexible approach was created to address the needs of a large number of new faculty members (over 400 in a two-year period) at the University of Central Florida. The authors believed that it was likely that a significant portion of these new colleagues might not have experience internationalizing their courses. As our project at a summer faculty development conference sponsored by UCF's Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL), we sought to address one of the President's Five Key Goals for the University: "Provide international focus to our curricula and research programs."

The sequence of assignments was originally developed by two of the authors (Flammia and Sadri) for an interdisciplinary Honors course they taught titled: "Global Perspectives." The students enrolled in this Honors course were from a diverse range of majors (e.g., English, International Relations, Mathematics, Business Administration). The primary focus of the course was to develop students' global competency skills, particularly their understanding of the connections between the global and the local. To this end, we began the course by having a series of speakers from local branches of international organizations that address global issues (e.g., Amnesty International, the United Nations Organization). Each speaker talked

about his/her organization's mission and gave examples of local actions being taken to address global concerns. The students were then divided into small groups (3-4 students). The groups were told to select one of the organizations and to develop a local project to address that organization's global mission.

Throughout the semester, the students completed several assignments that all contributed to the completion of the major project for the course which was a local project for a global organization of their choice. In addition to the major project, the assignments included a project proposal, an interview with a subject matter expert in another culture, a peer review, and a public presentation of their final project on campus or in the community. The projects developed by the students included the creation of curriculum to teach fifth grade students about the United Nations Organization and a website for the University of Central Florida's Office of Diversity Initiatives. The course was very successful in many ways. The students produced projects that were highly valued by their clients at the various organizations. The students also shared their projects through public presentations that further disseminated their work on campus and in the community. The students reported an increased understanding of global issues and greater confidence in their own global competency. Perhaps most significantly, they left the course with a framework for global civic engagement that they will be able to apply in the future both in their careers and in their personal lives.

### **An Internationalization Project**

Based on the success of this course, Flammia and Sadri sought to develop a series of assignments that could be used either singly or in sequence in various courses across the disciplines. The assignments were designed to help students develop the skills and knowledge associated with global competency. The specific competencies we sought to foster included these skills and abilities:

- An understanding of cultural differences
- Sensitivity to other cultures
- The ability to think critically about global issues
- Knowledge of world events and the ability to view them from an interdisciplinary perspective
- Mastery of communication technologies for collaboration
- The ability to collaborate with diverse others to manage knowledge and create shared understandings
- An understanding of how to take action locally to address a global issue
- A framework for global civic engagement

We revised the assignments used in our course and sought to make them more easily adaptable to other disciplines. First, we wrote a brief description of each assignment and created a list of learning objectives for it. Then, we offered suggestions for how the assignment might be implemented in specific disciplines. We created a total of five assignments:

- Interview with a Subject Matter Expert in Another Culture
- Internet Research Assignment
- Country Research Report
- Local Project to Address a Global Issue (Group or Individual Project)
- Public Presentation

For the purposes of this article, we are going to focus on one of the five assignments: the Interview with a Subject Matter Expert in Another Culture (Cultural Interview). We decided to focus on this assignment because it is the one that most of our colleagues chose to adapt for their courses.

### **The Interview Assignment**

The interview assignment required students to conduct a technology-supported interview with at least one subject matter expert in another culture. In the context of this study, students were instructed to interview a person from "another culture," or in other words, from a culture they self-identified as different from their own. Individuals learn behavioral patterns and communication styles based on the unwritten norms, rules, and values of their home culture through a process of socialization (Gudykunst et al., 1996). These styles of communication can vary both across and within cultures, based on how individuals are raised and the context of their socialization (Hall, 1976). In addition to observing different cultural behaviors and communication styles, students self-selected interviewees who they identified as being from "another culture" based on additional cues such as food preparation, dress, and environmental aesthetics, for example.

The students were allowed to conduct the interviews via email, using Skype, via videoconference, or through some other computer-mediated medium. In some instances, the students conducted an interview with a subject matter expert from another culture who was currently on campus or in the community.

The assignment was designed to meet these objectives:

- To develop students' interview skills
- To develop students' technology skills
- To enhance students' awareness of cultural differences

- To develop students' understanding of the practice of their discipline in other cultures
- To enable students to view their field from a broader perspective

The assignment lends itself to a variety of disciplines as students can be required to interview subject matter experts in any area. They may be required to conduct a general interview to gain a basic understanding of how a particular discipline (nursing) is practiced in another culture, or they may be required to investigate a specific aspect of a discipline, for example, elder care or neonatal nursing.

In this article, we describe how the assignment was adapted in two distinct disciplines: hospitality management and international relations. The faculty members in these two disciplines shaped the assignment to meet the goals and learning objectives for their courses; the way they did so may serve to spark ideas for other faculty of ways that they could use the assignment within their own disciplines to foster the development of students' global competency while also meeting discipline-specific learning objectives.

#### **Cultural Interview Executive Summary for Hospitality Management**

Students enrolled in a Supply and Procurement Management course in the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at UCF were assigned a cultural interview with a purchasing professional from one of the services industries (e.g., food and beverage, hotel operations, retail, etc.). While students were allowed to select any purchasing professional from the hospitality/services industries, two criteria guided their selection: (1) the professional had to be responsible for some aspect of the purchasing function (e.g., Executive Chef, Director of Food and Beverage, hotel or event procurement specialist, owner of an ethnic restaurant or grocery store); and (2) the professional had to either be from another culture or be a U.S. citizen who had worked as a purchasing agent in another country.

This assignment was designed to meet these objectives:

- Expose hospitality management students to service professionals from a culture other than their own
- Encourage intercultural communication beyond the students' comfort zone
- Build intercultural communication skills
- Promote awareness of cultural differences with regard to the hospitality industry

Given that the majority of students enrolled in the course were employed in the hospitality industry, they had access to purchasing professionals within their respective organizations.

However, in different circumstances where students are not employed in the course-related industry, the instructor may need to coordinate with professionals and organize potential interviews before disseminating the assignment. Instructors should only use this approach to help students with no connections in the industry to find suitable interviewees and not as a response to students with connections who feel uncomfortable approaching these professionals.

One of the objectives of the assignment is to create a space for guided discomfort, allowing students to confront their fears and apprehensions in approaching (1) an industry professional whom they have not yet met, and (2) a professional from a culture different from their own. It should be expected that a certain amount of hesitation might occur among students, and they should be encouraged to meet with the instructor for scaffolding techniques designed to guide them through the assignment with the ultimate goal of facing and overcoming perceived obstacles.

Prior to conducting the interviews, students were required to obtain the instructor's approval of the professional they chose to interview so that the instructor was able to confirm if the assignment criteria had been met. As students were allowed to select their own interviewee, there was some variation among the professionals chosen.

To steer the interview process in the right direction and help precipitate a conversation, students were given these potential questions for the cultural purchasing interview:

1. How long have you worked in/owned this establishment?
2. Where are you from, or in which county have you worked as a purchasing agent?
3. What are the differences in sourcing food and non-food items both here and in your home country?
4. What are the challenges in sourcing products and services in this country?
5. What are some differences in the purveyor relationships between this country and your home country?
6. Is there anything you think buyers and/or purveyors from this country should know about procuring products and services from other countries?
7. Do you have any purchasing advice for me?
8. Can you offer any advice as to how I might become more knowledgeable about your culture?

Upon completion of the interviews, students were instructed to write a two-page executive summary based on the interview; they were also required to write a reflection on the experience of conducting the

interview. In order to gain a maximum benefit for the class as a whole from this individual assignment, small group discussions were organized during face-to-face class time, followed by a short classroom discussion designed to summarize both the contextual learning objectives and the self-reflection exercise, allowing students to share their experiences with the entire class.

## Results

The qualitative data were collected from the cultural interview assignments in Supply and Procurement Management courses from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, with a total of 55 students participating, resulting in 34 females (62%) and 21 males (38%), consistent with the college enrollment skewed toward females at 75.3% and males at 24.7%, as reported in 2016. As no quantitative data were collected, the demographics of the students cannot be reported; however, relative to the 2016 report referenced above, it can be inferred that the data collected were similarly representative of the college demographics: 64.9% White; 19% Hispanic/Latino; 6.9% Black/African American; 3.2% Multi-Racial; 3% Asian; .2% American Indian/Alaskan Native; .1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (UCF Demographics, 2016).

While the contextual basis of the course each semester was supply and procurement management, for the purpose of this study, only the reflection component as it related to intercultural communication and global competencies was included in the reporting of the results. Students disclosed a wide range of thoughts and feelings about the cultural interview assignment, including the more challenging aspects, such as, “This assignment was hard,” “I was uncomfortable,” “I didn’t like it,” “This was a very different assignment than what I am used to,” and, “[The assignment] challenged me.” Numerous students reported a sense of initial discomfort with the assignment, which resulted in a stimulus either to face their reluctance and overcome it (and learn) or to conduct the interview anyway with less commitment and potentially to learn less. A consistent finding revealed that although the assignment was “different,” regardless of their levels of commitment, students shared that the cultural interview “challenged me,” and, “It made me think.” One student summed up her experience by saying, “I had to step out of my comfort zone,” and, “I learned so much more than I thought I would.”

Finally, one of the more introspective students stated, “I didn’t know as much as I thought I did about other cultures,” presenting perhaps the most significant finding of the study and highlighting the paradoxical challenges associated with it. More specifically, for those students who were reluctant to complete the assignment either because they thought they were

already familiar with other cultures or because they believed they would not gain from completing it, this finding revealed that perhaps the students did not know what they did not know. As is often common with students well-acquainted with their industry of study, they arrive in class with a sense of competence beyond what they might actually possess.

Instructions in the assignment included questions about the interviewees’ home country and cultural procurement practices, thereby referencing cultures and business practices outside the United States, from the Caribbean Nations, South America, Europe, and Africa, for example. While these cultures are represented in the United States to a certain degree, as it relates to their procurement and intercultural communication practices in business, there were vast differences for students to explore. The benefit of the cultural interview assignment in this instance was that it allowed students to complete the interview based on their current level of cultural understanding while also challenging them to move beyond their existing level of cultural competency and to develop an understanding of culture in the course context. For example, those students very new to intercultural conversations could focus on the purchasing information attained while still gaining initial intercultural conversational experience. In comparison, those students who had achieved a certain degree of intercultural competence (or thought they had) could explore their level of competencies in both acquiring purchasing information and navigating through an intercultural conversation.

In addition to analyzing students’ general thoughts on the cultural interview assignment, a more detailed word frequency analysis was conducted on the transcripts of the reflection component (see Table 1). From Table 1, it can be inferred that the assignment was immersive, experiential, different from typical assignments within the college, interpersonal, cultural, enjoyable, interesting, and finally, one that offered an innovative path toward intercultural understanding. A word cloud representation of the totality of the frequencies of word data collected, inclusive of the purchasing course context, revealed an overall positive assessment by the students based on their perceptions of the assignment (see Figure 1). Word clouds are useful for educational research in two ways: (1) as a highlighting tool for a quick preliminary analysis of the word data, and/or (2) to confirm and validate the interpretation of findings (McNaught & Lam, 2010). In this study the word cloud depiction of the cultural interview reflection (Figure 1) was valuable to reveal high-frequency word data after the top 20 listed in Table 1, thus providing a more holistic view of students’ responses. Additional words in the word cloud not revealed in the top 20-word list—such as “Halal,” “travel,” “personal,” “meet,” “foreign,”



“future,” and “open”—convey a candid and more forthcoming impression of students’ feelings about the assignment and its benefits. In totality, the overall impression of the word cloud depicts a positive experience based on purposeful market-driven learning in the hospitality management context. Interweaving these contextual findings with the purchasing aspects of the interview, the data revealed that the students collectively reflected on a rich learning experience, combining cultural competencies with a market-driven teaching perspective.

The final step in the cultural interview assignment for the hospitality supply and procurement management course was a larger in-class discussion. Although data were not collected during this stage of the assignment, instructor observations detected more in-depth conversations around intercultural communication than previous in-class lessons. Examples illustrating student engagement in the conversation included demonstrating a richer vocabulary and increased comfort in describing a dialogue with someone from another culture, explaining the process for entering a conversation with an unknown person in an unfamiliar culture, satisfaction in having attempted and successfully engaged with a person from a foreign culture, and a willingness to make more attempts either by reaching out to persons from other cultures within the local area or by traveling to foreign countries for the purpose of exploring other cultures.

### **Cultural Interview Assignment for International Relations Majors**

Students in an International Organization (IO) class in the Political Science Department at UCF were assigned a cultural interview with a foreign diplomat from one of the international organizations where the U.S. is a member-state. The students were instructed to focus on a public (e.g., the International Monetary Fund), not private (e.g., the Red Cross), organization in which the U.S. is a member. The students were also free to choose either a regional (e.g., the Organization of American States or OAS) or global (e.g., the United Nations) international organization. Last but not least, they were free to focus on a security, political, economic, social, or humanitarian topic under discussion in the organization.

The instructor allowed the students to choose any diplomat from these organizations. However, four criteria narrowed their choice of an interviewee:

- (1) The diplomat must have at least 5 years of experience in the field;

- (2) The diplomat must represent other countries (not the U.S.);
- (3) The diplomat must have been raised outside the U.S.; and
- (4) The diplomat should not have had an American K-12 education.

This assignment was designed to meet these academic objectives:

- Connect international relations majors to diplomats from other countries and cultures
- Promote intercultural communication beyond the students’ U.S.-centered environment
- Present an opportunity to be mindful of cultural differences
- Foster the development of students’ oral and written intercultural communication skills

The instructor allowed students to find these foreign diplomats on their own. However, he provided guidance for students who did not know how to locate someone to interview by giving examples. Moreover, the instructor was available to any student who experienced general or specific difficulty in completing the assignment. Before conducting the interviews, the students consulted the instructor about their choices to make sure that the selection criteria were met.

Finally, the instructor provided students with a list of possible and appropriate questions for this intercultural interview assignment:

1. Where were you born and raised?
2. What are the ethnic backgrounds of your parents?
3. Where did you complete your K-12 education?
4. What foreign languages do you speak?
5. How did you learn English?
6. Where did you complete your college education?
7. How many years of experience do you have in diplomacy?
8. How do you compare the American and your own approach to international crises?
9. What are the methodological differences between the U.S. and your diplomats for handling crises?
10. What are the typical obstacles for coming to an international agreement?
11. Do you have any advice for me in preparing for a career in diplomacy?
12. What should I read or experience to become more knowledgeable about your culture?



Beyond these basic questions, students were free to ask any questions after consulting with the instructor in order to make sure that their questions were not politically or culturally insulting to the interviewee.

As these questions indicate, the assignment instructions required students to learn about the interviewee's country of origin and cultural background. The assignment addressed the cultural dimension in addition to examining political and diplomatic practices outside the United States. While some of the cultures the students learned about are also represented in the U.S. to a certain degree, as it relates to their handling of diplomatic communication and intercultural practices in diplomatic and professional environments, there were a variety of differences for students to explore.

After completing the interview process, students were instructed to write a one-page evaluation summary based on the answers to their questions. They were also asked to include a reflection section about their experience.

Following the completion of the assignment, the instructor organized a series of classroom group discussions to summarize the learning objectives, as well as the self-reflection exercise, to provide students the opportunity to share their experiences with the rest of the class.

### Results

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the IO class was taught twice to a total of 99 students, of which 66 were female (about 67%) and 34 were male (about 33%). No real quantitative data was collected regarding the students. The only quantitative data from the class records related to the gender division. This type of gender division is typical of a UCF political science course. Moreover, the majority of political science courses show an ethnic diversity rate close to the figures that UCF statistics indicate (UCF Demographics, 2016). Qualitative data were collected after the interview assignment. The results described are from the reflection component of students' evaluation reports that were directly related to their intercultural communications and global competencies. To start with, about 10% of the students were not able to complete the assignment for a variety of reasons, including a lack of response from the interviewee and the student's failure to complete the assignment on time.

In general, the rest of the students' responses covered a wide range of experiences from those who found the interview assignment to be almost too difficult to complete to those who found it to be very manageable. Those students who complained about the assignment (about 22%) used statements such as, "The cultural interview is simply too hard," "I am not comfortable with it," or "I do not like it."

A number of students (about 39%) reported that they faced challenges as they conducted the interview; however, they were ultimately able to complete the assignment and to learn from their experience. These students used phrases such as the following:

- "The assignment made me think."
- "It challenged me."
- "The interview assignment was different from what I am good at or used to, but I learned how to complete it."

The rest of the students (about 29%) were comfortable in choosing foreign diplomats to interview, adding to the list of basic interview questions provided by the instructor, and conducting the interview itself. In fact, a couple of students made such meaningful connections with the diplomats they interviewed that they were strongly encouraged to apply for internship positions in the diplomats' offices before or after graduation.

Yet another result of this initial study relates to a group of very thoughtful students who used some of the following expressions, phrases, and/or statements:

- "I didn't know much about other cultures, but I learned a lot."
- "I was wrong about what I thought that I knew about that culture.";
- "It is certainly enlightening to listen to someone else's perspective about what we think that we know."
- "We take some ideas and beliefs for granted as [if] they are facts, not thinking that not everybody thinks that way."

From an academic perspective, one significant finding relates to the last group of students. Not only did they accomplish the task despite challenges, but they also learned a valuable lesson by becoming "mindful" (or more mindful) of other perspectives, views, and interpretations of the same facts, figures, and opinions.

Another observation indicates that some students resisted completing the assignment based on the belief that they were already familiar with, or knew enough about, other cultures to get by. Based on their own cost/benefit approach, others supposed that they would not benefit much after completing the interview. This pattern of behavior uncovered a more significant result that perhaps some of the students were unaware of their own lack of intercultural competence and failed to see a need to develop intercultural communication skills.

Thus, one could make the argument that the main advantage of the cultural interview assignment was that it

challenged students to move beyond their current level of understanding and to interact with diverse others. That is certainly a significant finding, not only from an academic perspective, but also from a practical point of view, as such individuals will learn to function better in a professional environment based on the experience.

### Conclusion

Although the interview assignment was adapted for use in two different disciplines, its basic components remained the same. Students were required to conduct interviews with subject matter experts who were members of other cultures. In both adaptations, the students were required to step outside their comfort zones and were given an opportunity to develop a broader understanding of their field of study. They were also required to communicate with someone outside their own culture. Unlike many other approaches to developing students' global competency, this assignment is grounded in a particular discipline and is integrated into an existing course. The simplicity of the assignment makes it easily adaptable across the disciplines.

The findings from the two adaptations of the assignment have several key similarities. In both instances, the students displayed an initial reluctance to the assignment, particularly to the challenge of identifying a foreign-born professional to interview. However, despite initial resistance to the assignment, the majority of the students went on to complete the assignment successfully. As a result of completing the assignment, the students reported learning outcomes related to their cultural competence and to their discipline-specific knowledge. Overall, the students found the experience to be a positive one. They gained confidence as a result of conducting the interview and also developed a broader perspective on their chosen profession. Finally, many students reflected on the fact that until they were challenged by the assignment, they thought their level of cultural competence was much greater than it actually was.

Gaining cultural awareness is an important first step in becoming a culturally competent individual. Helping students develop a sense of their own lack of intercultural knowledge is a valuable part of helping them become globally competent individuals. Denial of cultural differences or the minimization of them are earlier stages in Bennett's Model of Cultural Competence (Bennett, 2013). Assignments like the one described in this article can help move students along a continuum from minimization or mere acceptance of cultural differences to adaptation to them and finally to integration of the differences and the development of a multicultural view of one's self.

The findings presented in this article are limited in that they are based on pilot testing in only two

disciplines. However, the positive nature of the findings do indicate that it would be worthwhile to pilot test this assignment and the other assignments in the internationalization sequence in other disciplines. The authors plan to conduct additional pilot tests and to encourage colleagues across the disciplines to do so as well. We also recommend that future studies should incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data so that the results can be disaggregated according to student outcomes by cultural composition. Utilizing this approach longitudinally, trends can be detected to ensure students are indeed interacting with someone from a dissimilar culture, and outcomes can be better monitored to increase reliability.

The interview assignment is a valuable tool for faculty who wish to help their students develop their global competency whether their primary motivation is to help students become more competitive in the job market or to foster students' development as engaged global citizens. As shown by the findings of this study, the assignment has the potential to do both simultaneously. Undeniably, students in fields like hospitality management and international relations will be more likely to succeed in their careers if they are culturally competent. However, the development of an integrated level of cultural competency will also influence the students' worldviews and their sense of their own place in our global society.

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## Appendix

**Cultural Interview Executive Summary****PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this assignment is to improve the student's understanding and awareness of cultural differences with regard to the hospitality field, and particularly to purchasing/procurement.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

The student will organize a 10-15-minute interview with a hospitality professional from another country whose job function it is to purchase goods and/or services for his/her respective establishment. The hospitality professional may come from ANY segment of the hospitality/services industries, but MUST be responsible for some aspect of the purchasing function (i.e. Executive Chef, Director of F&B, hotel or event procurement, ethnic restaurant, ethnic grocery store, etc.). Also, this person MUST originate from a country other than the USA.

Possible questions for the interview might include:

1. How long have you worked in/owned this establishment?
2. Where are you from, or in which county have you worked as a purchasing agent?
3. What are the differences in sourcing food and non-food items both here and in your home country?
4. What are the challenges in sourcing products and services in this country?
5. What are some differences in the purveyor relationships between this country and your home country?
6. Is there anything you think buyers and/or purveyors from this country should know about procuring products and services from other countries?
7. Do you have any purchasing advice for me?
8. Can you offer any advice as to how I might become more knowledgeable about your culture?

**DELIVERABLE:**

The student will write a 2-page executive summary based on the outcome of the above questions. In addition, the student will include a reflection component describing what he/she learned about him/herself during the interview. Please include the interviewee's name and contact information in the summary.

### **International Organization Class Cultural Interview**

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

The objective of this assignment is to advance students' understanding and mindfulness of cultural differences for political communication, diplomacy, discussions, and negotiation.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

Each student is required to conduct a 15-minute interview with an international (not American) diplomat or government official from another country whose career is involved with diplomacy, especially at one of the public international organizations. Please notice that the staff of the private international organizations do not qualify for this assignment. The diplomat interviewee may come from any level of public diplomacy. However, the four following criteria narrow the choice of an interviewee:

- (1) The diplomat must have at least 5 years of experience in the field;
- (2) The diplomat must represent other countries (not the U.S.);
- (3) The diplomat must have been raised outside the U.S.; and
- (4) The diplomat should not have had an American K-12 education.

Possible questions for the interview might include:

1. Where were you born and raised?
2. What are the ethnic backgrounds of your parents?
3. Where did you complete your K-12 education?
4. What foreign languages do you speak?
5. How did you learn English?
6. Where did you complete your college education?
7. How many years of experience do you have in diplomacy?
8. How do you compare the American and your own approach to international crises?
9. What are the methodological differences between the U.S. and your diplomats for handling crises?
10. What are the typical obstacles for coming to an international agreement?
11. Do you have any advice for me in preparing for a career in diplomacy?
12. What should I read or experience to become more knowledgeable about your culture?

Beyond these questions, students were free to ask other questions after consulting with the instructor to make sure that their questions were not politically or culturally insulting to the interviewee.

The students are free to find foreign diplomats on their own. However, the instructor provides guidance for students who did not know how to locate someone to interview by giving examples. Moreover, the instructor is available to any student who experienced general or specific difficulty in completing the assignment. Before conducting the interviews, the students should consult with the instructor about their choices to make sure that the selection criteria were met.

#### **DELIVERABLE:**

Following the interview, students are to write a one-page evaluation summary based on the answers to their questions. They were also expected to include a reflection section about their experience.

Moreover, the instructor organizes a series of classroom group discussions to summarize the learning objectives as well as the self-reflection exercise to provide students the opportunity to share their experiences with the rest of the class.