

Utility of the Global Engagement Survey (GES) to Quantitatively Evaluate a Unique Undergraduate Community-Based Global Learning Program

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ABSTRACT

In this preliminary study, the Global Engagement Survey (GES) was used to assess developmental outcomes in undergraduate students enrolled in a multi-year community-based global learning program. Statistically significant growth was observed on the Civic Efficacy (CE) scale of the GES ($p = 0.01$). The GES appears to have significant utility in the quantitative assessment of undergraduate community-based global learning programs, even when small sample sizes and pre-test ceiling effects exist.

Keywords: assessment, experiential learning, international, service learning, undergraduate student development

Over the past two decades, diversity/global learning and service learning/community-based learning have become widely recognized as critical pedagogical components of high-impact undergraduate education (Kuh, 2008). When thoughtfully executed, these pedagogies can result in transformational student development outcomes, including a sustained re-orientation of personal and lifestyle choices, habits, and values; a deeper understanding of self and purpose; an expanded sense of solidarity and social responsibility; increased appreciation for complexity and ambiguity; enhanced awareness and questioning of culturally constructed social norms/assumptions/values; and, increased personal actions to promote equity and justice (Kiely, 2004; 2005). Particular attention is currently focused on efforts that combine these practices under the umbrella term of “international service learning,” which strives to engage students with complex issues surrounding the intersections and interdependence of global political, economic, and social systems (Brandauer et al., 2022; Crabtree, 2008; Hartman & Rola, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2022).

However, substantive criticisms exist in connection with both the term “service learning” and how educational activities labeled with this term are conceptualized and executed. Mitchell (2008) has suggested that academic service learning has bifurcated into two distinct subgroups: “traditional” service learning, which emphasizes service experiences that are largely disconnected from their broader economic, political, social, cultural, and historical contexts, and “critical” service learning, which is grounded in multiple contexts and is intentional about seeking to disrupt systems of injustice and inequality. Critical service learning also seeks to engage student participants in a reflective and analytical engagement with the concept of what it means to “serve,” as well as their positionality within broader power structures (Rice & Pollack, 2000). Although the important role of criticality in this work is becoming increasingly appreciated, there continues to be some pushback against this distinction of “traditional” and “critical” service learning (see Jones & Kiser, 2014), and many mainstream academic institutions have only recently begun to re-envision their

service learning programming in response to these significant ethical concerns.

From the standpoint of linguistic framing, the term “service learning” is itself problematic—in many undergraduate settings, students fail to truly “serve” their community partner in a meaningful way. Rather, the “service” of these students is often tied to significant costs to partner organizations, such as the time required to provide ongoing training and supervision, or to document and report service hours back to the students’ institution. Unlike advanced graduate students of professional programs (including medicine, nursing, and law) who serve in volunteer clinics and clearly provide an unambiguous “value added” resource, the vast majority of undergraduate service learning participants are unskilled and can exist as a burden, rather than an asset, to partner organizations and communities (Larkin, 2018).

There are several other fundamental concerns regarding service learning as a pedagogical practice, including inconsistent incorporation of community partners as true equals (Hartman, 2015); limited recognition that service-learning programs must accord equal importance to both student learning and community outcomes (Gendle & Tapler, 2022; Hartman, Morris Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2014); demographic assumptions about student participants (such as age, life status, and relative economic position) that often constrain access and inclusion (Butin, 2006); a failure to develop critical consciousness among student participants, which then functions to perpetuate power differentials and patronizing, colonial, hierarchical, and privileged attitudes regarding those being “served” (Mitchell, 2008; Pompa, 2002; Purpel, 1999); and a lack of adequate preparation to equip students to be effective change agents within their partner communities (Mitchell, 2008).

In his widely cited essay, “Why Service-Learning is Bad,” Eby (1998) has argued that, because of historical orientations toward student learning, traditional service learning pedagogies have often resulted in limited positive community impacts, signifi-

cant community harms, and student outcomes that are shallow and individually centered. Importantly, Eby (1998) notes that academic service-learning programs frequently center on the needs and goals of the sponsoring institution and students, rather than the community that is supposedly being served. Eby (1998) also points out that traditional service-learning programs often inappropriately privilege deficiency models, focus on volunteerism over deep structural and policy change, use community partners as laboratories, and place students into “service” roles without sufficient academic foregrounding, training, or oversight.

In recent years, international service learning has been lauded as a particularly powerful pedagogical practice (Crabtree, 2008). However, significant concerns also exist for academic service-learning activities that take place within international settings. Tiessen et al. (2018) have identified a number of these concerns including a lack of reciprocity between student/faculty visitors and community members/groups; objectification and “othering” of community members, as well as their physical spaces, cultural practices, and shared collective experiences; transactional or consumer-oriented frameworks for student engagement; exclusion of community members from program planning, execution, and evaluation; and, treatment of community members as resource providers, and/or inequitable divisions of realized benefits between program participants and community members. There is an increasing recognition that, all too often, international service-learning programs essentially function as student tourism experiences that include periods of superficial volunteer engagement (Larkin, 2015). Such experiences support power and privilege structures that serve students over international community members, over-simplify, depoliticize, and decontextualize the complex current and historical frameworks surrounding global inequality, and perpetuate paternalistic and neocolonial mindsets (Larkin, 2015; Lewis, 2006; Sharpe & Dear, 2013; Smaller & O’Sullivan, 2018).

The Periclean Scholars program at Elon University (<https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/project-pericles/periclean-scholars-program/>) has been guilty of several of the criticisms raised by Eby (1998) and others. The program was initially conceived, and functioned for many years, as a traditional service-learning initiative (described in detail by Dunn, Arcaro, and Post, 2019), but has since adopted a framework that both aligns with, and in some ways, moves beyond, Mitchell's (2008) conceptualization of critical service learning. In the continued development of this program, it has intentionally incorporated Hartman, Kiely, Boettcher, and Friedrichs' (2018) model of critical global inquiry that both advances collaborative community development and mitigates many of the recognized perils of these efforts. The work of Hartman et al. (2018) extends the concept of critical service learning (Mitchell, 2008) in many important ways, explicitly moving beyond granular service-learning experiences to deeper considerations of student engagement in broad, multi-leveled, and globally interconnected systems. As such, the current program rejects the label of service learning, and instead uses the term "community-based global learning" (or CBGL, coined by Hartman et al., 2018).

The Periclean Scholars program has a competitive application process for first year undergraduates, and accepted Periclean Scholars then spend their sophomore, junior, and senior years working as a cohort (typically < 25 students) with a single faculty mentor to learn about a specific country or region of focus. As a cohort, students selected for this program complete a series of graded academic courses (18 semester hours, across the three years) that are restricted to Periclean Scholars. Additionally, each cohort completes a co-designed project (with their community partner) to promote social change within a local context within the country or region of focus. In order to create collaborative and effective projects, each cohort works with their faculty mentor and community partner to learn about ethical best practices and models of just and

sustainable development. Since its inception, most Periclean Scholars cohorts have worked in international settings, although some have completed projects in domestic locations.

The Periclean Scholars program holds itself to very high external standards—all program activities are guided by the Ethical Reasoning, Global Learning, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence, and Civic Engagement VALUE rubrics produced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (<https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>). These rubrics are open access resources that are widely employed in academia to evaluate student growth and development. The program's work is also guided by the CORE Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (<https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>), which offers nine measurable commitments that organizations can utilize to improve outcomes related to humanitarian action. Additionally, the Periclean Pledge (<https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/project-pericles/periclean-scholars-program/the-periclean-pledge/>) serves as a public commitment to a defined set of organizational values.

Given the explicit and public linkages made between the Periclean Scholars program and these standards of practice, the program has significant interest in identifying evaluation instruments that allow for the assessment of student growth across the three years in the program. Although initiatives with critical service learning or community-based global learning orientations may presume that participation results in significant and positive outcomes in student learning and personal development, meaningfully quantifying such changes often presents a challenge to both researchers and program administrators. Unfortunately, few standardized tools currently exist that allow for the quantitative measurement of student growth resulting from participation in community-based global learning programs. All too frequently, critical service learning and community-based global learning programs over-rely on individual student anecdotes to provide evidence of

positive student growth. In the current fiscal reality of higher education in the United States, programs are increasingly being asked to provide specific quantitative evidence to support claims of positive academic and personal growth among their participants.

One measure that holds promise for this work is the Global Engagement Survey (GES; Hartman et al., 2015), which employs mixed methodology to assess student learning outcomes, particularly in relation to the global learning goals championed by AAC&U. The GES includes 58 closed-ended items, scored on a 5-point scale from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 5 (“strongly disagree”). The instrument also contains 17 prompted, open-ended questions that ask respondents to follow up on their responses to some of the closed-ended items. Both the closed- and open-ended items are categorized as part of eight unique scales [openness to diversity (OD), cultural adaptability (CA), civic efficacy (CE), political voice (PV), conscious consumption (CC), global civic values (GCV), human rights beliefs (HRB), and critical reflection (CR)], as well as two broad measurement themes (cultural humility and global citizenship). The GES has been successfully used by other researchers in the field to assess student perceptions of global learning within a specific study abroad context (Vandermaas-Peeler, Duncan-Bendix, & Biehl, 2018) and to assess components of identity, belonging, and cultural humility (Hartman et al., 2020; McCunney, Reynolds, Sabato, & Young, 2019). However, these past studies have primarily focused on the 17 open-ended questions of the GES, and less research attention has been given to the utility of the quantitative component of this instrument in program assessment.

This manuscript reports on a preliminary investigation that utilized the 58 closed-end items of the GES to quantitatively evaluate student development outcomes within Elon’s Periclean Scholars program. All eight scales of the GES are designed to measure constructs that are central to the learning goals of the Periclean Scholars program, and there was significant interest in how these measures

might change in Periclean Scholars from the beginning to the end of their program experience. Members of the Periclean Scholars Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 completed the GES when beginning the program during the fall semester of sophomore year, and then again at the end of the spring semester senior year. The analysis detailed below utilizes paired comparisons in mean GES scale and theme scores across these two assessment points. This longitudinal study attempts to better characterize community-based global engagement and understand student development throughout the Periclean Scholars program, as well as provide the field with a model for the quantitative assessment of student outcomes in community-based global learning programs.

METHODS

The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Elon University, and all procedures were in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 1983. Sixty-two students who were members of the Periclean Scholars graduating cohorts of 2019, 2020, and 2021 were asked (via email solicitation) to voluntarily complete the GES first during the early fall of their sophomore year, and then again during the late spring of their senior year. A link to a Qualtrics (Provo, Utah, USA) form containing the GES was distributed to the Scholars’ institutional email by the Community-based Global Learning Collaborative (hosted by the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania, USA). Following the initial email solicitation, Scholars were given 14 calendar days to voluntarily complete the GES. At the midpoint of this two-week period, an email reminder to encourage completion was sent, and Faculty Mentors also provided verbal in-person reminders to complete the instrument. Periclean Faculty Mentors did not have access to raw GES data or respondent information until after their class had graduated from the university, and specific individual identifiers were removed from all provided data.

For each of the eight GES scales and two GES themes, mean responses were calculated by summing the total numerical value of responses and dividing that by the number of items included in each scale or theme. GES items are scored on a 5-point scale from 1 (“strongly agree”) to 5 (“strongly disagree”), so lower scores can be interpreted as more advanced individual development/ awareness of the concept being addressed. Similarly, score decreases from pre- to post-assessment can be interpreted as indicating Scholar growth and development over time. However, it is also important to note that score increases may suggest similar growth—as respondents may become more aware of their lack of knowledge or proficiency in a particular area, which itself can serve as a powerful moment of intellectual and personal development. In this particular study, there was a malfunction with the Qualtrics display logic for one item included in the Conscious Consumption Scale and Global Citizenship Theme. As such, means for these outcomes were calculated after omitting this problematic item and adjusting the denominator accordingly.

For each GES scale and theme, pre-test and post-test least squares means (lsmeans) summed across all participants were compared using a repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), constructed with the PROC MIXED feature of SAS 9.4 for Windows (SAS Institute, Cary, North Carolina, USA). Lsmeans were utilized and reported because they are a more appropriate estimate to use in analyses with unbalanced designs. For each scale and theme, ANCOVA models included the following variables: 1) pre- or post-test (PREPOST), 2) Scholar cohort (COHORT), and 3) the interaction of pre- or post-test and cohort (PREPOST*COHORT). The PREPOST*COHORT interaction was included in the models to account for non-random variability that might have existed in the data because of unique changes in individual Scholar cohorts over time. However, this term was not utilized to test any discreet hypotheses, due to the small cell sizes that were present. Participant ID number was also included in the model as

a random factor to account for the repeated measures structure of the data. Model diagnostics were carried out by examining plots of model residuals. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all comparisons.

RESULTS

A combined total of 62 Periclean Scholars from the 2019, 2020, and 2021 cohorts were asked to voluntarily complete both the pre- and post-survey components of the GES. Of those, a total of 16 Scholars completed both pre- and post-test components of the GES (completion rate: 25.8%). These Scholars primarily self-identified as female (15 female, 1 male) and White (68.8%), which mirrors the broader demographics of Periclean Scholars program participants. Although the GES collects categorical data regarding self-reported family income, parent education level, political views, and religious beliefs, these factors were not examined due to small sample sizes for any given category.

Unadjusted means (collapsed across all participants) for each of the GES scales and themes are provided in [Table 1](#). Results from comparisons of pre- and post-test lsmeans (collapsed across all participants) for each of the GES scales and themes are provided in [Table 2](#). No statistically significant differences across these pre- and post-test lsmeans were found for Openness to Diversity (OD), Conscious Consumption (CC), Political Voice (PV), Global Civic Values (GCV), Human Rights Beliefs (HRB), or Critical Reflection (CR; all p 's > 0.30). No statistically significant differences across these pre- and post-test lsmeans were found for either the Cultural Humility ($p = 0.43$) or Global Citizenship Theme ($p = 0.27$).

A statistically significant difference across these pre- and post-test lsmeans was found for the Civic Efficacy (CE) scale ($F(1,32) = 7.08, p = 0.01$), with Scholars across the three cohorts decreasing from a pre-test lsmean of 2.06 to a post-test lsmean of 1.78. A difference across the pre- and post-test lsmeans that approached classical significance was

found for the Cultural Adaptability (CA) Scale ($F(1,32) = 3.14, p = 0.09$), with Scholars across the three cohorts decreasing from a pre-test lsmean of 1.96 to a post-test lsmean of 1.79.

A consistent statistically significant difference between the three Scholar cohorts (collapsed across the pre- and post- assessments) was also observed in many of the GES outcomes. Overall, the lsmeans of the responses gathered from the class of 2021

respondents were consistently lower than those from the class of 2019. Because the analysis collapsed across assessments, this difference has nothing to do with the impact of the Periclean Scholars program on the respondents, and instead reflects individual Scholar aptitudes and/or an enhanced positive bias in the class' self-ratings. As such, it will not be discussed further.

Table 1. *Unadjusted Pre- and Post-test Means (Collapsed Across All Participants) for Each of the GES Scales and Themes*

GES Scale/Theme	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean
Openness to Diversity Scale (OD)	1.63	1.59
Cultural Adaptability Scale (CA)	1.97	1.83
Civic Efficacy Scale (CE)	2.10	1.85
Conscious Consumption Scale (CC)	2.58	2.35
Political Voice Scale (PV)	3.13	3.11
Global Civic Values Scale (GCV)	1.72	1.59
Human Rights Beliefs Scale (HRB)	1.33	1.33
Critical Reflection Scale (CR)	1.58	1.48
Cultural Humility Theme	1.79	1.70
Global Citizenship Theme	2.33	2.19

Table 2. *Comparisons of Pre- and Post-test lsmeans (Collapsed Across All Participants) for Each of the GES Scales and Themes*

GES Scale/Theme	Pre-test lsmean	Post-test lsmean	<i>p</i>
Openness to Diversity Scale (OD)	1.56	1.55	0.91
Cultural Adaptability Scale (CA)	1.96	1.79	0.09
Civic Efficacy Scale (CE)	2.06	1.78	0.01
Conscious Consumption Scale (CC)	2.50	2.30	0.30
Political Voice Scale (PV)	3.04	3.03	0.96
Global Civic Values Scale (GCV)	1.64	1.52	0.53
Human Rights Beliefs Scale (HRB)	1.30	1.31	0.94
Critical Reflection Scale (CR)	1.54	1.46	0.59
Cultural Humility Theme	1.74	1.66	0.43
Global Citizenship Theme	2.27	2.13	0.27

Note: p 's < .05 are in boldface.

DISCUSSION

In this report, we describe a preliminary investigation that utilized the 58 closed-end items of the Global Engagement Survey (GES) to quantitatively assess student development outcomes across three recent student cohorts in Elon's Periclean Scholars program. Although significant changes in the pre- and post-test lsmeans were not observed for most of the GES scales and themes (p 's > 0.27), a statistically significant difference across these pre- and post-test lsmeans was found for the Civic Efficacy (CE) scale ($F(1,32) = 7.08, p = 0.01$), with Scholars across the three cohorts decreasing from a pre-test lsmean of 2.06 to a post-test lsmean of 1.78. This is of particular note, as one of the four formally stated goals of the Periclean Scholars program is "to enhance Scholars' knowledge of the political systems and power structures that frame global problems, as well as the political, economic, and social levers that can be used to affect meaningful change," which is precisely what the GES Civic Efficacy scale purports to measure.

A difference across these pre- and post-test lsmeans that approached classical significance was found for the Cultural Adaptability (CA) Scale ($p = 0.09$), with Scholars across the three cohorts decreasing from a pre-test lsmean of 1.96 to a post-test lsmean of 1.79. Despite not reaching classical significance, this is a potentially important finding, as the CA scale assesses student aptitudes that are closely related to another of the four formally stated goals of the Periclean Scholars program: "To foster a deep understanding of our partners' diverse histories and needs, and engage in culturally-aware dialogues regarding these needs that are based on open-mindedness, empathy, civility, ethical integrity, and mutual respect."

This study offers a model for effectively utilizing the GES for both internal assessment and to demonstrate program impact and value that can be easily replicated and scaled up by other institutions. Historically, community-based learning programs have often relied on case studies and anecdotal

stories of student growth to justify their work. Increasingly, programs are being asked by institutional administrators to move past such individual examples and provide comprehensive quantitative data that can positively support these academic activities. As a whole, the results reported here suggest that the GES has significant utility in the quantitative assessment of community-based learning programs for undergraduates, even in situations with small sample sizes and pre-test ceiling effects. This utility is critical, as instruments that can effectively quantitatively measure student growth and development in such programs are few in number. This lack of appropriate quantitative instruments poses a significant challenge for those who wish to assess programs of this type. In the current fiscal climate of higher education, being able to concretely demonstrate positive student outcomes with quantitative data is becoming ever more central to program funding and survival. In future studies, increased insight regarding student growth and development may be achieved by pairing the GES with a standardized student beliefs/attitudes metric such as the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI; <https://thebevi.com/>). The BEVI's focus on core aspects of student identity and self would likely provide substantial additional context to better understand any changes in cultural humility and global citizenship reflected in student responses to the GES items.

Despite the demonstration of statistically significant student growth and the broad value that this study offers to the field, these results must be considered within the context of a constrained sample and interpreted with caution. Due to a low rate of survey completion (25.8%), the sample size for analysis was limited to an N of 16. Although small, this rate of completion is generally in line with previously documented response rates for undergraduates regarding surveys that utilize email solicitation (Kaplowitz et al., 2004; Porter & Umbach, 2006). The inclusion of additional data from future cohorts will be required to both confirm/replicate the results

reported here and complete a more robust analysis (including an examination of the interaction of pre- or post-test and cohort). This additional data collection should consider ways (such as providing dedicated in-class time to complete the GES) to increase completion rates and further incentivize participation. The results of this examination are also limited in their generalizability to other undergraduate student populations, as the sample was overwhelmingly female and largely White.

In this sample, ceiling effects were present in most of the GES outcomes, with pre-test lsmeans ranging from 1.30 to 3.04, and many of these lsmeans being less than 2.0. The grand average of the pre-test lsmeans for the 10 GES scales and themes was 1.96, suggesting that there was very little available space for upward movement in the post-test scores. It is not clear if this is a consequence of the ways in which Scholars are recruited and selected (meaning, individuals who would already score high on these measures are being attracted to, and accepted by, the Periclean Scholars program), or if the Scholars are generally overconfident in their abilities and aptitudes and consistently over-rate themselves on the GES. Regardless of the cause, these substantial ceiling effects may limit the utility of the GES to detect and describe student growth in this specific university population.

As one of the institutional members of the Community-based Global Learning Collaborative (hosted by the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania, USA), Elon University and the Periclean Scholars program are committed to continuing to engage in scholarship within and across multiple institutions that utilize the GES in program evaluation. It is our hope that through this ongoing work, we can better understand how the GES might function as a valuable assessment tool for community-based global learning initiatives. The identification and/or development of additional assessment tools and strategies will be important for the

continued evaluation of academic programs that are centered on community-based global learning. In order to effectively develop, support, and assess community-based global learning programs, it is critical that program leaders and administrators utilize assessment tools that intentionally move away from traditional service learning models to ones that are more equitable, just, and educationally appropriate.

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