

*Creating globally competent U.S. citizens capable of thriving in the twenty-first century workforce is an undeniable thrust of international education. But what exactly comprises the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent?*

BY WILLIAM D. HUNTER

# Got Global Co

DESPITE PREVAILING VIEWS that U.S. business drives the global economy and that U.S. culture is pervasive worldwide, there is a plethora of domestic commentary—spanning decades of research and writing—arguing that while U.S. ingenuity and capability have led to worldwide economic and military dominance, the nation's college graduates largely remain unprepared to join the global workforce. Not surprisingly, U.S. employers have recognized this shortfall in the U.S. educational system and have spent millions of dollars on intercultural or language training for their employees to help make those employees—and the companies as a whole—globally competitive.



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### **Illusion of U.S. Dominance**

Sure, U.S.-owned businesses such as McDonald's restaurants, Starbucks coffee shops, and GAP clothing stores can be found in most major cities worldwide, dominating the market in their particular product categories. And yes, U.S.-made movies are shown on a far higher percentage of screens around the world than are local film productions, and U.S. songs and television shows are very popular (and often controversial) throughout the world, too. The stirring contradiction is that what began in the mid-twentieth century, with Trans World Airlines (TWA) and International Business Machines' (IBM) global expansion, leading to the "McDonaldization" (Rizvi and Lingard 2000), or Americanization, of much of the world, doesn't mean that U.S. students entering the workforce can be effective if they are only domestically competent. Success stories of big American businesses and pop culture aside, globalization has made the world a tougher place to do business, unless of course, you're globally competent.

The problem sounds easy to solve: just hone up on global competencies and you'll be able to meet the needs of a globalized job market. Not so fast. There is currently no agreed upon definition of what it means to be globally competent or how to obtain such worldwide savvy.

### **Fifty Years Hasn't Been Enough**

The U.S. government's initial recognition of its educational system's failure to educate citizens who were globally competent came immediately following the Soviet Union's October 4, 1957 launch of Sputnik, the world's first satellite. The launch served as the impetus for spontaneous and dramatic changes in the educational focus of the United States, as prescribed by the passage of the National Defense Education Act by the 85th U.S. Congress (U.S. Code Congressional and Administration News 1958). The Act acknowledged the nation's need to confront serious deficiencies in many fields, including the training of scientists, the production of military might, and in particular, U.S. citizens' understanding of international relations as it pertained to geography and foreign language. The Defense Education Act proclaimed that, "It is no exaggeration to say that America's progress in

many fields of endeavor in the years ahead—in fact, the very survival of our free country—may depend in large part upon the education we provide for our young people now."

As evidence of the inability of the United States to communicate with foreign audiences, the Act noted that only 15 percent of all college students were studying a foreign language at the time. To rectify the concern regarding foreign language learning, the Defense Education Act provided for the establishment of foreign language learning centers at universities around the country and the enhancement of the study of geography, history, and economics. These language centers were designed to teach U.S. citizens the languages of their nation's friends and foes. Underpinning this initiative was the presumption that through language acquisition and geographic awareness comes cross-cultural understanding. Fitzgerald (1979) argued that by reviewing U.S. history books at the time the Defense Education Act was passed, "...one would gather that foreign policy—or put it another way—the rest of the world—became important to the United States only in the 1950s."

While the United States momentarily stands alone as the world's only superpower, millions of federal dollars poured into schools by the National Defense Education Act for nearly the past 50 years to enhance students' understanding of foreign languages, geography, and international relations have not led to high levels of student performance in these subjects.

In 1988, the National Geographic Society, which periodically tests the knowledge of school-aged students from a variety of countries on the subject of world geography, ranked U.S. school children in the bottom third. The questions asked in 1988 were identical to those asked in 1957. The study contends the overall results in 1957 were no better in 1988 and could be considered worse given other advancements in education. Following the study, National Geographic Society President Gilbert Grosvenor declared, "Our (American) adult population, especially young adults, doesn't understand the world at a time in our history when we face a critical economic need to understand foreign consumers, markets, customs, foreign strengths and weaknesses" (Grosvenor 1988).

Regrettably, Grosvenor's comments apply today. In concurrence with Grosvenor, Oblinger (2002), in a recent speech, noted that less than 7 percent of U.S. college students meet basic standards for global preparedness, and only 1 percent of U.S. college students study abroad. Oblinger defined "global preparedness" based on an American Council of Education (ACE) report (1988) that noted that to become globally competent, one must have four or more international college courses and have an unspecified ability to speak a foreign language. Some increased efforts have been made to improve international understanding among U.S. citizens following September 11, 2001, but a tremendous learning curve still awaits most future members of the workforce.

### **The Effect of September 11**

Until September 11, 2001, most U.S. citizens considered themselves untouchable, distanced from the evils of war and terrorism. As the only remaining superpower, the United States exerted its dominance almost at will. With English accepted nearly worldwide as the lingua franca, especially for commerce, and CNN and other major U.S. media outlets proclaiming U.S. ideals worldwide, around the clock, the equation of dominance with security seemed justified.

This presumption of invulnerability was destroyed when the first plane, and then the second, slammed into the World Trade Center towers in New York. For months afterward, the nation went into a state of shock, unable to rationalize the reason for it all. The United States had become a target. Fear for personal security was so great that Congress sharply reduced or constrained civil liberties (expanding the extent to which federal authorities could access personal information, for example) when it passed the Patriot Act.

This U.S. population, absorbed by the events on television for days after September 11, is the same population that watches with an outsider's perspective as newscasts regularly depict acts of terrorism in Israel, Northern Ireland, and Spain, never expecting to watch it happen in their own backyards. While U.S. citizens of all ages were emotionally impacted, Cummings (2001) centered specific criticism on U.S. college students, noting that despite access to higher education, their myopic view of the

world left them unprepared to deal intellectually with the horrific events of September 11, 2001.

Several scholars suggested the aggression on September 11 caused a national mindset alteration similar to that intended after the launch of Sputnik in 1957. Cited in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Hebel 2002), J. David Edwards, executive director of the Joint National Committee for Languages suggested that the attack could lead to improved national security through the creation of academic programs designed to increase international understanding, and remarked, "this would be another Sputnik." Richard D. Brecht, director of the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland at College Park also envisioned a paradigm shift, stating, "On September 11, the world didn't change at all. Our understanding of the world did" (Hebel 2002). Bikson, Treverton, Moini, and Lindstrom (2003) envisioned a turning point in the educational system, suggesting that "The events of September 11 underscore the importance of developing a broader and deeper understanding of the differing perspectives of people from other countries and other

cultures, and of learning to work effectively with people who differ in language, customs, and in some cases, political and social values." The study by Bikson et al. contended that the need for a globally competent workforce was not for governments alone, suggesting that corporations, nongovernmental institutions, and intergovernmental organizations have had the need to hire globally competent employees. While unstated in the Bikson et al. study, institutions of higher learning clearly must play an essential role in preparing such agile, cosmopolitan workers.

Employers are not the only group focusing on the need to acquire global education skills. U.S. college students have begun to demand more globally focused courses (Germann and Krupar 2002). Germann and Krupar posited that after September 11, there was an immediate longing for international knowledge among U.S. college

students as interest in courses emphasizing international education increased after September 11.

Despite the optimism of Brecht, Germann, and Edwards, NAFSA reasoned that "International education has been set back considerably as a result of the fallout from 9/11. Before that date, a strong national consensus on the value of international education and exchange for the United States had existed for more than 50 years" (NAFSA 2003). NAFSA's conclusions are likely based on the constriction of the avail-



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ability of student visas, which allow foreign students to study in United States.

#### *Sputnik Revisited*

Just as it took a Russian spacecraft launch to ignite the United States' support for international education in the 1950s, the slaughter of September 11, 2001, could become partially responsible for the resurgence of the concept of educating for global competence as a requirement within the U.S. educational system. Globalization, a multinational workplace, and reliance on worldwide economic partners to ensure future growth are likely to share the responsibility for the declaration of the need for globally competent graduates.

#### **Critical to Transnational Productivity**

Long gone are the days when employee searches were geographically limited. In-

creasing numbers of employers now seek the best qualified candidate by conducting a global search, regardless of distance, and in some cases, language. While Sputnik's launch heightened awareness among the people of the United States of the need to increase military might, and to learn foreign languages, it did not fully accomplish the task of, or in fact design a curriculum for, educating global-ready graduates capable of competing for job opportunities and demands of the global economy. This need for the education of globally compe-

tent graduates is further supported by a survey conducted in 2002 by global relocation management firm Cendant Mobility (2002). Cendant Mobility gauged trends in the worldwide workforce by surveying 180 human resources managers on six continents whose companies employ 200,000 people. The survey revealed that global competency is critical to the success of cross-border workers. Although not providing a definition for the term "globally competent," Cendant Mobility's survey concluded that global competency training is a critical competence of an employee's professional de-

velopment and that the number of global-awareness business and academic programs will likely increase in the near-term.

#### *Government's Role*

Other than serving as a funding source for programs such as Fulbright, the National Security Education Program and related scholarships, the U.S. government has rarely sought to step into the forefront of international educational policy. U.S. President William J. Clinton's April 19, 2000 "Memorandum on International Education Policy" drastically altered that "hands off" approach. The memorandum stated, "To continue to compete successfully in the global economy and to maintain its role as a world leader, the United States needs to ensure that its citizens develop a broad understanding of the world, profi-

ciency in other languages, and knowledge of other cultures.”

Clinton argued that isolationist philosophy, prevalent in the United States in the 1980s, served no purpose in the 1990s and beyond. “Today, the defense of U.S. interests, the effective management of global issues, and even an understanding of our nation’s diversity require ever-greater contact with, and understanding of, people and cultures beyond our borders.” To prepare students for the global workforce, Clinton suggested educators must strengthen foreign language learning at all levels, and increase opportunities for the exchange of faculty, administrators, and students. Clinton saw the production of “international and foreign-language expertise necessary for U.S. global leadership and security.” The president held that learning about other cultures and knowledge of foreign languages was critical to U.S. national security. His pronouncements were general, however, which allowed for quite different interpretation of the operational meaning of his words. Still, the international education community reveled in his willingness to make such a proclamation.

NAFSA, in a position paper coauthored by the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange (2003) agreed with Clinton’s statement, suggesting that U.S. citizens need enhanced international skills and knowledge to guarantee U.S. national security and economic competitiveness.

### **Defining Global Competence**

An international education initiative, known as global competency, was first noted in 1988 in a report published by the Council on International Education Exchange. The publication, known in international education circles as the “Magna Carta” on the concept of global competence, called upon U.S. universities to send students on exchange programs to universities abroad where U.S. citizens are not the majority population and where English is not the dominant language. The report also suggested that students go abroad for three months or more, particularly to countries not normally traveled to by U.S. citizens. Lambert (1996), considered by many as the father of the global competency initiative, identified a globally competent person as one who has knowledge (of current events),

can empathize with others, demonstrates approval (maintains a positive attitude), and has an unspecified level of foreign language competence and task performance (ability to understand the value in something foreign). Despite his joke that a globally competent person must be able to answer all the non-American based questions on “Jeopardy,” Lambert poignantly asked, “Is it the depth of knowledge on a particular corner of the globe producing a more generalized skill (sic) cause someone to be globally competent, or is such a knowledge not generalizable?” (1996).

Including Lambert, a small number of U.S. educators and researchers have taken up the call to combat this lack of U.S. understanding of international relations and global workforce development by calling for the establishment of a higher education curriculum that certifies students as globally competent, globally proficient, or as a global citizen (Brustein 2003; Lambert 1996; Nussbaum 2002). However, no consensus definition of “globally competent,” or the related terms (“transnational competence” or “global citizen”), exists. Despite the lack of a specific definition, global competence has become a buzzword within the executive recruiter industry (Cendant Mobility 2003), and global proficiency and global citizen certificates have become the centerpiece of several recent university curriculum initiatives, including those of Boston College and the University of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh uses a staff-created definition of global competence as the foundation for its Global Studies Program. According to William Brustein, director of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, global competence is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries and to focus on issues that transcend cultures and continents” (2003). The dimensions cited contributing to global competence as: the ability to work effectively in different international settings, an awareness of the major currents of global change and the issues arising from such changes, knowledge of global organizations and business activities, the capacity for effective communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries, and a personal adaptability to diverse cultures (2003).

The University of Pittsburgh’s definition of global competency, according to Brustein (2003), is “self devised.” Nussbaum, assistant dean for International Student Services at Boston College, and creator of its “Global Proficiency” program, noted that her program was based on perceived trends and student interest and not grounded in educational research (2002).

While practitioners have derived global competence/proficiency programs without a foundation of sound research, several U.S. scholars and one European firm have published works on the topic. A transnational management consulting firm, the Swiss Consulting Group, in its Global Competency Report 2002, defined the skills one must possess to be globally competent are: intercultural facility, effective two-way communication, diverse leadership, systematic best practice sharing, and a truly global strategy design process. The Swiss Consulting Group also viewed global competency as a business tactic, creating an opportunity for globally competent managers to “parachute into any country and get the job done while respecting cultural pathways” (2002).

Olson and Kroeger (2001) surveyed staff and faculty at New Jersey City University to assess the relationship between international experience, global competencies, and intercultural sensitivity. The results drew the researchers to define a globally competent person as “one who has enough substantial knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication skills to interact effectively in our globally interdependent world” (2001).

Curran (2003) considered global competence to mean a developed appreciation of other cultures and the ability to interact with people from foreign lands. Curran suggested that global competence is the ability to become familiar with an environment, not causing a rift while experiencing something new, and reflection upon the experience at its completion. Still other researchers and practitioners have suggested that skills such as cultural awareness, willingness to communicate, ability to develop social relationships, and ability to resolve conflicts are the core of global competence. The term “process competence” is occasionally used as a synonym for global competency (Engle et al. 2001). In a business

context, managers often cite skills such as empathy, adaptability, diplomacy, language ability, positive attitude, emotional stability, and maturity as key components necessary to become “process competent.”

#### *Close But Not Quite*

The Stanley Foundation (2003), which supports research pertaining to global education, considers global competency to include “an appreciation of complexity, conflict management, the inevitability of change, and the interconnectedness between and among humans and their environment. Globally competent citizens know they have an impact on the world and that the world influences them. They recognize their ability and responsibility to make choices that affect the future.”

In a related study, 23 community college officials and representatives of government agencies met at a conference convened in 1996 by the Stanley Foundation and the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) (1996). The conference, titled “Educating for the Global Community: A Framework for Community Colleges,” sought to define the term “globally competent learner.” Following several days of debate using a process similar to a Delphi Technique, the participants determined that a globally competent learner is one who is “able to understand the interconnectedness of peoples and systems, to have a general knowledge of history and world events, to accept and cope with the existence of different cultural values and attitudes, and indeed, to celebrate the richness and benefits of this diversity” (1996). Their recommendations regarding institutional requirements included references to global education in the mission statement, revising accreditation criteria to acknowledge the importance of global competency, development of a comprehensive global competency education program on campus, and providing support for such educational initiatives.

While this panel comprised numerous perspectives from community colleges across the United States, it is questionable whether the group could possibly have brought a wide enough perspective as to define the term “global competency.” All points of view sought were from U.S. sources, significantly limiting the generalizability of the definition. Further, the 1996 study misrepresents the balance among participating sectors. First, the study’s summary noted that those taking part represented community colleges and United

recognized as a dominant component of meaningful, futuristic, and applicable education. We can provide our learners with nothing more valuable than quality, comprehensive global education.” A related entity, ACE, called for the establishment of a partnership between those in higher education, business, and government to ensure that U.S. graduates are a “globally aware and competent citizenry,” suggesting that global competence “will enhance America’s leadership role” (1997). The ACE paper also contended that U.S. citizens do not appreciate

the nation’s dependency upon the global market and the willingness of other countries to underwrite the United States’ massive and growing national debt, furthering the necessity of a comprehensive international education curriculum model nationwide. NAFSA concurred with ACE, stating, “It is through international education that the United States will prepare the next generation to lead the world, and its citizens to function effectively in a global environment” (2003).

Ultimately, the responsibility falls on higher education institutions to do more than offer a series of internationally focused courses or

send students abroad to have them become globally competent. Students must be globally literate and possess a high degree of international understanding and intercultural competence before becoming the more noted, globally competent (Green 2000).

#### **Looking for an Answer**

Recognition of a problem or gap in knowledge should naturally lead to a solution or further education. Cendant Mobility’s enormous, multinational study clearly posited that future cross-border workers must be globally competent (2002). As geography and technology are no longer hindrances, all employees should consider themselves, at least potentially, cross-border workers. The education necessary to prepare college graduates to be globally competent lacks clarity, uniformity, and



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States government employees; however, in fact, only two of the 23 participants were government affiliates (The Stanley Foundation and ACIIE 1996). Second, the study noted that the reason for gathering the group was to build on the foundation established by a 23-member committee that published the 1994 report, “Building the Global Community: The Next Step.” The 1996 study referred to the 1994 study group as “24 community college educators and representatives of government, industry, and nongovernmental organizations.” However, the 1994 study described only international educators and federal government officials as participants.

#### **Meeting the Needs of a Global Workforce**

The proceedings from the ACIIE conference suggested that, “Global education is now

direction. Current initiatives were based on employee brainstorming sessions instead of grounded research. While there are multiple published definitions of the term "global competence" and a compendium of postulates regarding the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent, there is no consensus. Further, little research exists with the purpose of defining the term "global competence" or of identifying the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent. Cummings, referring to the dearth of research on the topic, suggested that because international education is not the primary focus for most scholars, research on global competence is "somewhat sporadic, non-cumulative, and tends to be carried out by national organizations as part of advocacy projects" (2001). Hayward, in the ACE report "Internationalization of the U.S. Higher Education," concurred, suggesting that "International education at U.S. colleges and universities is a poorly documented phenomena (sic)" (Hayward 2000). Additionally, current global competence certificate programs offered by several U.S. universities were created as the product of staff consensus as opposed to an evolutionary process based on grounded research.

To help find an answer to the elusive "what is global competence?" question, a study is now underway with two main goals: define "global competence" and, once a consensus on the definition of that term is derived, determine via a survey the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent. The definition of "global competence" will be drawn from a group of 17 panelists, including senior NAFSAs, human resource directors at transnational corporations, United Nations officials, State Department officials, and others. Once a definition is agreed upon, this researcher will conduct a survey seeking to understand the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent. The survey will be sent to human resource professionals from transnational corporations who hold membership with the National Foreign Trade Commission and those international educators at universities that self-nominated for inclusion

in NAFSA's *Profiles of Success at Colleges and Universities—Internationalizing the Campus 2003*. In doing so, this study will seek the participation of many non-U.S. sources, in contrast to the bulk of the current research on the topic.

It is this researcher's hope that the definition and necessary qualifications derived from the study will provide vital clarity to this expansive collection of stakeholders seeking to either educate or employ globally competent individuals. Moreover, it is intended that this study, by drawing upon the insights of both business and educational leaders, will produce a hypothesis worth testing and refining.

As many researchers and associations noted, for the United States to continue as a superpower, its citizens must truly be educated with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and international knowledge. Unless immediate action is taken, this prognostication could quickly become reality.

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