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How Colleges Can Influence the Development of a Global Perspective

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Higher education has always stressed the development of the “whole student” along several dimensions—intellectual, social, civic, physical, moral, and spiritual. Students develop their minds, bodies, and spirits simultaneously, and they grow up using their heads, hearts, and hands. As students develop cognitively, integrating knowledge in ways that reflect their learning, they also need to grow both interpersonally, by considering themselves as part of a larger whole, and intrapersonally, by establishing a belief system that can influence and guide their choices and experiences. In today’s pluralistic and global society, where multiple worldviews and salient cultural traditions have a lasting influence on how we think, feel, and relate to others, this developmental journey is increasingly complex. We need to understand and empathize with persons who differ dramatically in terms of national origin, ethnicity, and religious or spiritual orientation as well as in terms of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Thus, each of us needs to develop a global perspective.

Global perspective-taking involves three critical, developmentally based questions: How do I know? Who am I? How do I relate? As students grapple with these questions, their answers mutually reinforce the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of human development, highlighting its holistic and integrated nature. Thus, as students develop and enlarge their global perspective, they incorporate intercultural knowledge into their epistemological beliefs and sense of self, which simultaneously influences their compassion for difference and their motivation both to engage in intercultural relationships and to behave in socially responsible ways.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) has highlighted the important role of colleges and universities in fostering global learning, particularly during the undergraduate years. Questions remain, however, about which campus strategies are most effective in fostering intercultural development. What environmental conditions—curricular and cocurricular activities as well as the ethos of a campus community—are catalysts for spurring students' global learning and development? In what ways can educators intentionally structure campus environments and learning opportunities to help students integrate multiple dimensions of self?

Our approach to these questions is based on two prominent themes that inform our views of student learning and development. First, we stress the important role of meaning-making, of how students make sense of their journey in life. Making sense of the world is not an intellectual pursuit only; our thinking, feeling, and behaving all become more complex and integrated as we develop. Meaning-making is a motivating experience in which students actively question how they approach and grapple with knowledge, how understanding redefines or reinforces their goals and values, and how they learn from their various encounters with the world around them.

The second theme that informs our views of student learning and development builds on the symbiotic relationship between the person and environment. Theorists of college student development have always recognized the importance of the college environment (Parks 2000; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005)—especially its potent influence on students' development of a sense of self, which is often couched in terms of identity formation (Chickering and Reisser 1993). Today, the college environment, which extends beyond the campus itself, is more diverse than ever before. Students have unprecedented access to others at the local, national, and global levels. Within this vast landscape, students need to learn to talk and work with individuals who represent a wide and varied range of social, ethnic, and religious identities (Chickering and Braskamp 2009).

As a guide for connecting the dimensions of desired student learning to student development and to campus environmental influences, we have used these two themes to construct a multilevel framework that intersects the campus dimensions of community, curriculum, and cocurriculum with three dimensions of student development: cognitive development, intrapersonal development, and interpersonal development.

Cognitive development is centered on one's knowledge and understanding of what is true and important to know. It includes viewing knowledge and knowing with greater complexity and taking into account multiple cultural perspectives. Reliance on external authorities who have absolute truth gives way to relativism when making commitments within the context of uncertainty. The key question is, how do I know?

Intrapersonal development is focused on increasing awareness of one's own values and self-identity and integrating these into one's sense of personhood. The end of the journey on this dimension is a sense of self-direction and purpose in life; greater awareness of one's strengths, values, personal characteristics, and sense of self; and a view of one's own development in terms of self-identity. The ability to incorporate different and often conflicting ideas about who one is from an increasingly multicultural world is now an important aspect of developing a confident self-identity. The key question is, who am I?

Interpersonal development is centered on one's willingness to interact with persons with different social norms and cultural backgrounds, acceptance of others, and comfort when relating to others. It includes being able to view others differently, seeing one's own uniqueness, and relating to others as they move from dependency to independence to interdependence. The key question is, how do I relate to others?

Research summary

The following research summary is drawn from data gathered using the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI; see <https://gpi.central.edu>). Developed by Larry Braskamp, David Braskamp, Kelly Carter Merrill, and Mark Engberg, the GPI includes sixty-four-items that measure students' development along each of the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains as well as their engagement with the social and academic environment of their colleges. The developmental questions of the GPI translate into six empirically validated scales (two scales per dimension) that reflect each of the critical development questions addressed above.

The cognitive scales reflect *knowing* (degree of complexity of one's view of the importance of cultural context in judging what is important) and *knowledge* (degree of understanding and awareness of various cultures). Thus, the first scale focuses on how one approaches thinking and learning, whereas the second scale reflects what one knows and understands about our global world. The

intrapersonal scales measure aspects of *identity* (level of awareness of one's unique identity and sense of purpose) and *affect* (level of respect for and acceptance of cultural perspectives different from one's own and degree of emotional confidence when living in complex situations). The interpersonal scales capture elements of *social responsibility* (level of interdependence and social concern for others) and *social interaction* (degree of engagement with others who are different from oneself and degree of cultural sensitivity in living in pluralistic settings).

Below, we present findings from the GPI based on 5,352 students who attended one of forty-six different private and public colleges during the 2009–10 academic year. Results are first reported in relation to student and institutional characteristics, followed by an examination of community, curricular, and cocurricular effects across the six development dimensions of the GPI.

Student and institutional characteristics

Students differ on their global perspective-taking depending on their gender, ethnicity, and age. As shown in [table 1](#), female students had higher average scores (a higher score indicates a more advanced level of development on the measured dimension) on four of the six scales—with the largest differences found in *social responsibility*, followed by *knowing*, *social interaction*, and *affect*. Female students scored slightly lower than males on knowledge and scored similarly to male students on *identity*. The findings across race were less consistent, although black and Hispanic students generally had higher developmental scores across the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions than did white students. Students who are twenty-five years and older also have higher scores on the scales, but most notably on *social responsibility*, *identity*, and *affect*.

Students differ on their global perspective-taking depending on their class status. Traditionally aged students had higher average scores on all six scales as their class status increased (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior). Freshmen and seniors had the largest difference on the *knowing* and *social interaction* scales and the least difference on *identity* and *social responsibility*, as shown in [table 1](#). Moreover, the differences between the cohorts by class status were more apparent between the freshman and sophomore years, with relatively less-pronounced changes from the sophomore to the senior year of college. Thus, the developmental gains in all three dimensions generally occurred early in the collegiate careers of the traditional-aged students. Some caution is

needed in interpreting these changes, however, as the findings are based on differences among cohorts of students and not longitudinal changes of the same students over time.

Students differ on their global perspective-taking depending on the type of college in which they are enrolled. Students enrolled at selective college and universities are more apt early in their college days to express a more developed global perspective, especially in *knowing* and *social interaction*. On the other hand, students at colleges whose mission is religious and evangelical in focus have higher scores on *identity* and *social responsibility* and lower scores on *knowing* (e.g., complexity of thinking).

Table 1. Mean differences for background items across GPI domains

	Knowing	Knowledge	Identity	Affect	Interaction	Responsibility
Female	3.32	3.50	4.08	3.73	3.55	3.74
Male	3.19	3.63	4.10	3.64	3.46	3.52
White	3.27	3.53	4.07	3.66	3.45	3.64
Black	3.17	3.49	4.21	3.79	3.64	3.76
Hispanic	3.26	3.67	4.19	3.83	3.76	3.72
Native American	3.16	3.57	4.19	3.72	3.56	3.82
Asian	3.33	3.76	4.04	3.73	3.80	3.65
Multi-race	3.40	3.69	4.17	3.84	3.84	3.76
Freshmen	3.13	3.48	4.05	3.60	3.41	3.61
Sophomore	3.39	3.59	4.11	3.74	3.60	3.69
Junior	3.44	3.63	4.13	3.80	3.61	3.73
Senior	3.49	3.70	4.17	3.87	3.74	3.73

Community, co-curriculum, and curriculum

Student views of their college as a community. Students who had more positive perceptions of their campus community were associated with higher levels of global perspective-taking, especially in the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, as shown in figures 1, 2, and 3. Students who consider themselves to be “challenged and supported” by their college, have “been encouraged to develop their strengths and talents,” and feel “part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends” were more comfortable and self confident about their own identity, and were more likely to think of their lives in terms of giving back to society. Additionally, smaller effects were noted in relationship to students’ proclivities for social interaction, intercultural knowledge, and tolerance for difference.

Student involvement in cocurricular activities. As students became more engaged in cocurricular activities, they expressed higher

scores across all three dimensions of the GPI (see figures [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#)). Students' involvement in community service exerted the strongest effect on the *social responsibility* scale, which resonates with much of the literature on experiential education. Students' level of attendance at "events or activities sponsored by groups reflecting a cultural heritage different from their own" was positively associated with their level of *social interaction*, supporting the argument that engagement with difference can lead to greater openness toward and comfort in interacting across cultures. Attending cultural events was also related to students' *knowing* and *knowledge*, as well as their *affect*, which measures self confidence and acceptance of others with different views and values. Student involvement in "leadership programs" demonstrated the strongest relationship with their level of social concern for others, with more modest effects found in the other five dimensions of global perspective-taking. Thus, engagement in activities that purposefully foster pluralism and multiple cultural values outside the classroom are related to all three dimensions of holistic student development, especially in fostering socially responsible dispositions.

Student enrollment in diversity courses. Pedagogical strategies that intentionally incorporate diversity content and opportunities for dialogue were significantly related to all three dimensions of the GPI. Students who more frequently enroll and participate in courses that include "materials/readings on race and ethnicity issues" and "opportunities for intensive dialogue among students with different backgrounds and beliefs" showed preferences for higher levels of complexity in their understanding of the world around them and their acceptance of multiple perspectives in their thinking and knowing. They also appeared more knowledgeable in their understanding of differing cultural backgrounds and values, and demonstrated a stronger preferences toward cross-cultural interaction and making a difference in society.

Service learning as a curricular/pedagogical strategy. As students engaged more frequently in for-credit service-learning courses, they demonstrated significant increases across all three dimensions of the GPI with the exception of the cognitive *knowing* scale. The strongest effects, however, were found in relation to *social responsibility*, which resonates with a long line of research connecting service learning to students' desire to make a difference and give back to society. A recent study by Engberg and Fox (2011) found conditional effects related to both gender and ethnicity, with males associated with a significantly stronger effect compared to females, and non-significant effects uncovered for

both black and Hispanic students. Significant effects were also noted in relation to class status, with effect sizes incrementally increasing as students moved from freshman to senior status.

Influence of a semester abroad experience on global perspective-taking. A number of studies have been conducted using a pretest-posttest research design in which students completed the GPI at the beginning and end of their education abroad (Chickering and Braskamp 2010). The influence of education abroad on the three dimensions of global learning and development varies, as shown in [figure 4](#). After a semester abroad, students significantly increase their knowledge about different cultures. These changes in the cognitive domain are most apparent in *knowledge* (what students know and understand about cultural differences), rather than in *knowing* (how students come to learn and understand what is true and important to discern and how they become more adept at multiple perspective-taking).

Students also gain a more positive sense of themselves based on their study-abroad experience, express greater self-confidence in their ability to confront novel situations and communicate with others not like them, have a reduced need to be continuously supported by others, and demonstrate greater emotional confidence when living in complex situations. However, after a semester abroad, students demonstrated considerably smaller increases in their social concern for others.

Figure 1. Effect sizes for curriculum, cocurriculum, and community items across cognitive knowing/knowledge domains (■ Knowing ■ Knowledge)

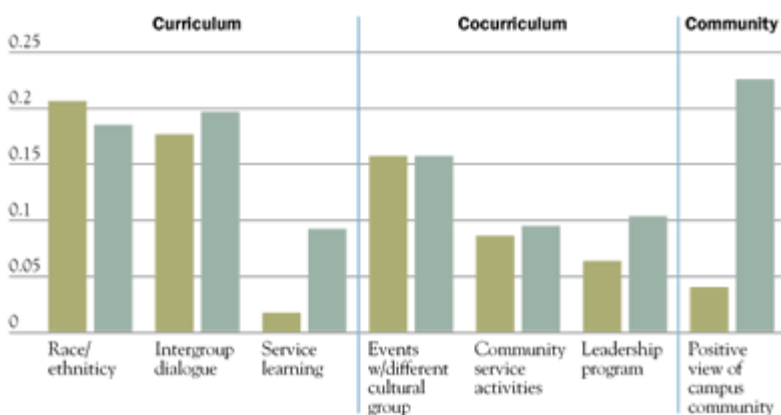


Figure 2. Effect sizes for curriculum, cocurriculum, and community items across intrapersonal identity/affect domains (■ Identity ■ Affect)

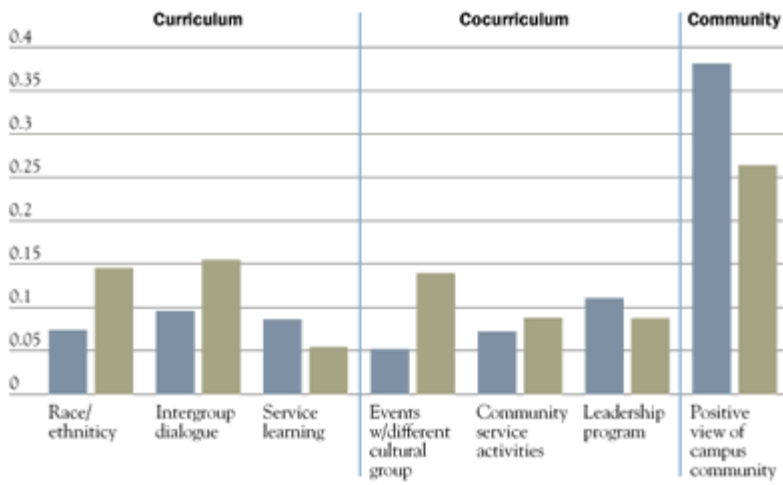


Figure 3. Effect sizes for curriculum, cocurriculum, and community items across interpersonal interaction/responsibility domains (■ Interaction ■ Responsibility)

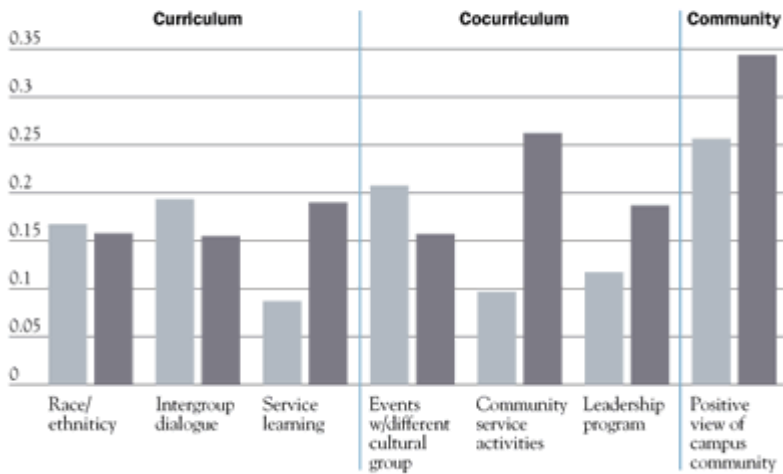
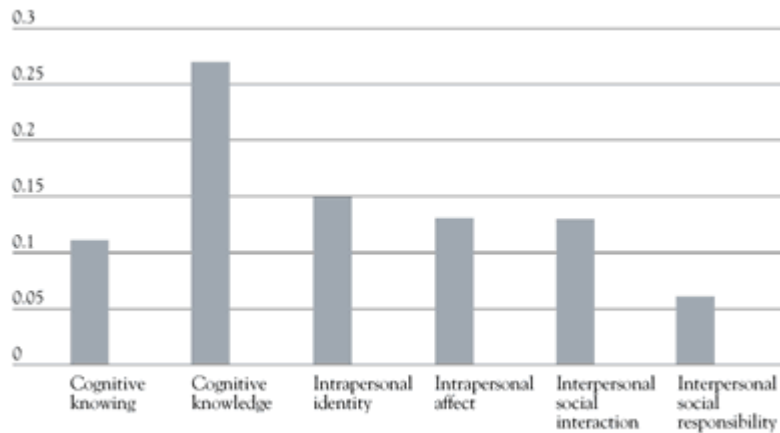


Figure 4. Mean pretest-posttest differences on the GPI for study abroad



Implications

We present these results with the goal of having campus leaders focus on the connections between desired outcomes of college—global perspective-taking—and the program, practices, and activities educators can employ most effectively to foster the development of students. In conclusion, we point to four implications of these results. First, not all students are similar in their global perspective-taking when they enter college or when they leave. Students vary within colleges as well as between colleges. Thus, educators need to take into account where individual students actually are on their journey to become global citizens in their thinking, self identity, and relationships. Readiness for change may also be an important factor to consider. That is, colleges should intentionally structure and sequence opportunities that take into account the developmental readiness of their students.

Second, student experiences within the classroom matter.

Faculty can influence global perspective-taking by the types of assignments they provide and by the way they structure their classroom settings—neither of these requires any extra funds to implement. Third, “study away” experiences (Sobania and Braskamp 2009), in which students are engaged in domestic and international off-campus learning (i.e., study abroad and service learning), are effective educational practices but are not equally effective in fostering desired learning and developmental outcomes. In fact, educators who use a compliment of both study abroad and service learning may be better positioned to achieve optimal rates of global learning for their students. **Finally, for the traditionally aged students, experiences outside the formal classroom setting are influential, especially those in which students are able to interact with others who are unlike them.** In their early days

away from home, students tend to respond positively to campus interventions that get them out of their comfort zone—especially if they feel they have some social support to explore and expand their horizons.

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