

Global Learning in a New Era

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Abstract: Our nation's colleges and universities frequently adapt their approach to education in response to the reality of social, economic, and environmental challenges. Today the reality is that we are increasingly interconnected on a global scale. This new era of globalization impacts every facet of society, and it offers both an exciting blend of generational change and complex, multi-faceted challenges. This essay examines several questions: How shall we educate our students in this new era? What can we expect of our graduates in a global world? The answer to these questions requires our institutions to make significant changes in their approach to educating students and interacting with the communities they serve. This new approach should be shaped by a sense of what it means to be a globally prepared graduate and should be guided by clear learning outcomes exercised along a sequential pathway of experiences from the first year of college through graduation. These experiences are supported by the use of engaged learning practices that draw students into work that is both personally and socially meaningful and that includes cross-disciplinary inquiry focused on the goal of addressing big questions in ethical, responsible, and effective ways.

Keywords: changing organizations, changing world, community engagement, globalization, global learning, higher education, internationalization, public good, VALUE rubrics

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

Our nation's colleges and universities have undergone a number of transitions over the past century in their roles, responsibilities, and approach to educating students (Rudolph, 1990, p. 110). The pressures for change have always been shaped by a combination of new generational values and expectations as well as social, economic, and environmental forces in the world itself. Today's societal context offers an especially exciting and challenging blend of cross-generational change combined with the emergence of a pattern of complex, multifaceted problems (United Nations, 2015). These problems are often called *wicked problems* (Camillus, 2008). Faced with the need to address these wicked problems, communities are developing new forms of collaboration including collective action approaches (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015), social movements (Ganz, 2010), and movement networks (Leach & Mazur, 2013). Although colleges and universities have been supporting many forms of scholarship and pedagogies within the curriculum that address societal issues, these new problem-solving models are often incompatible with the culture and organization of our institutions.

The new community collaborations that are emerging are focused on creating sustainable communities in which individuals of all backgrounds can thrive in an ever-changing world. According to the Institute for Sustainable Communities, a sustainable community is one:

... that is economically, environmentally, and socially healthy and resilient. It meets challenges through integrated solutions rather than through fragmented approaches that meet one of those goals at the expense of the others. This approach takes a long-term perspective – one that is focused on both the present and future, well beyond the next budget or election cycle. (2015)

However, higher education often focuses on individual achievements through the perspective of designed courses, individual disciplines, faculty members, and scholarships. It is challenging to draw upon the resources of an academic community that is only built on individual efforts when trying to contribute to community-based efforts that are increasingly collaborative. The insight captured by the commonly heard phrase that “real world problems do not manifest themselves in disciplinary form” summarizes the challenge that academic communities face. In the face of challenges like climate change, rapidly growing population centers, and cultural diversity, universities are being called upon to create new ways to work together and share resources with the communities they serve.

Interactions between colleges, universities, and surrounding communities are beginning to influence the internal structure and capacity of higher education institutions, supporting new forms of collaboration both within the academic community and within the neighborhoods, cities, and regions with which the institutions interact. However, many institutions are experiencing the conflicts and tensions that arise when a university designed to promote individual excellence is called upon to support collaboration and shared responsibility. This is a shift from *MY course* or *MY research question* to a working model that also supports *OUR curriculum* and *OUR engaged scholarship*.

University-community collaborations depend upon the ability to work together and find ways to develop strategies for addressing problems that require the knowledge and skills of all parts of the community. This emergence of new voices and a variety of ideas will slowly reshape the academic community and move closer to the concept of *transdisciplinarity* while continuing to draw upon the domains of the traditional disciplines (Gibbons et al., 2004). As we seek to create equitable and inclusive environments in which to educate a more diverse group of students (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), we also must create the capacity to work with an increasingly diverse society that interacts with a global community in ways that we are only beginning to explore and understand.

The focus of this article is the development of how interactions between campuses and communities are changing and the effects these changes have on the people who participate. What will we learn from our engagement with society and what can our partners learn with us and from us? What will happen as we explore new ways to interact with society that will strengthen our own ability to educate and the value and impact of our scholarship? How will these experiences build greater capacity in the community for collaboration and mutual benefit? How will our experiences in our local environments contribute to our capacity to contribute to larger collaborations on a global scale that will be focused on issues that affect lives around the globe?

How Can We Best Prepare Our Graduates for a Rapidly Changing World?

In a recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Levine (2015) captured the gist of the transition that we are undergoing. As he explained it, our nation is “making a transition from a national, analog, industrial economy to a global, digital, information economy.” Industrial economies focus on common elements that unfold over a predictable timeframe. Think of a repertory company in the theater where the performers follow a script, plays are performed on a defined stage that separates the actors from the audience, every part is defined, and there is a formal ending to the play. Information economies are more like improvisational theater where innovation and discovery play a key role. The audience can become performers as well. The action may weave through a space that does not look like a formal theater. The story that develops, and the outcome and the process of achieving that outcome, are variable. The audience is often left wondering what might happen next and will probably be invited to participate in shaping the next act of the story.

We are all familiar with how the industrial model applies to education. The roles in this play are defined, as are the tasks to be performed. Teachers teach and students learn. The phrase often used to describe the role of the faculty member in this play is “sage on the stage,” which Levine (2015) summarized succinctly: “In education, [the assembly line] translates into a common four-year undergraduate program, preceded by 12 years of schooling, semester-long courses, credit hours, and Carnegie units.” The coins of that realm are seat time and individual courses selected from a menu of options rather than a coherent sequence of increasingly demanding and consequential learning experiences.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) explained the tools and tactics for changing our organizations for a changing world. This approach also applies to how we design and enact our curriculum. The kinds of challenges we face are not solvable by well-researched, well-practiced *technical* expertise. These unresolved dilemmas require *adaptive* strategies:

What is needed from a leadership perspective are new forms of improvisational expertise, a kind of process expertise that knows prudently how to experiment with never-before-tried-before relationships, means of communication and ways of interacting that will help people develop solutions that build upon and surpass the wisdom of today’s experts. (Heifetz et al., 2009, pp. 2-3)

Given this succinct concept of what it will mean to live and lead in the future, how will this guide us in determining how we educate our students, and how will we work together in our campus communities and model the qualities and behaviors of well-educated people who are creating a community together—in this case an academic community? Since the publication of *Greater Expectations* (AAC&U, 2002) and the emergence of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) portfolio a few years later, followed by the LEAP Challenge in 2015 (AAC&U, 2015b), efforts to rethink the undergraduate curriculum and the experiences that accompany it have led to a shift of emphasis from teaching to learning and from individual courses and requirements to increasing integration of learning over time. This new learning path is structured around the study of increasingly complex problems and increasingly collaborative efforts that bring faculty, students, and community members together to learn and work in a collaborative manner to address “real world problems.” This approach is often improvisational in character and design, and more likely to prepare graduates to work in an increasingly collaborative and networked environment. In this model, anyone may play the role of teacher or learner at different times, and knowledge is developed through collaboration in which participants learn with and from

each other. Unlike the assembly-line or industrial model, the support structure for this kind of learning must be *adaptive* rather than *technical* (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The goal of this shift in the enactment of what it means to be educated is to prepare “intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives” (AAC&U, 2002, p. xi). While foreshadowing the realities of today’s world, in which our graduates will use their education in new ways, *Greater Expectations* focused largely on the adaptations taking place in the colleges and universities that participated in the studies and conversations that led to the report. The societal changes that were generating the need for new approaches to the curriculum, to faculty, and student work, and to relationships between the campus community and society as a whole, were an important but background element. In this paper, we will look at those societal changes in the foreground and explore how our concepts of learning are changing in the face of the new reality generated by the growing challenges that we face as citizens of the world, rather than citizens of a particular community or nation.

Internationalization and Globalization

We are entering an era of accelerating social change (Rudel & Hooper, 2005), generated by a number of interlocking factors, including industrialization, demographic changes, and human-induced environmental change, all intensified by the growing communication networks that spread news rapidly around the globe. The combined effect of these and other pressures is creating a new reality and context for the lives we lead. In a report on *Trends in Global Higher Education* prepared for UNESCO in 2009, Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) defined globalization as a “key reality in the 21st century” (p. ii). Globalization is “the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communication technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the rule of the English language and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions” (2009, p. ii). They contrast this concept with the term *internationalization*, which they apply to the policies and programs that universities and governments put in place to respond to the new reality of globalization (2009, p. ii). For universities, these efforts have until recently consisted of study abroad, the recruitment of international students, efforts to set up a branch campus overseas, or joining international collaborations with other universities (2009, p. ii). For some observers, the response to globalization offers new opportunities for study and research that transcend jurisdictional boundaries and disciplinary lines. For others, it may represent “an assault on national culture and autonomy” (2009, p. ii).

In the past decade, more colleges and universities in the United States have updated their vision and mission statements to embrace the goal of preparing their graduates with the “capability to meet the demands of future economic, social and civic challenges and opportunities in a complex, globally interconnected world” (Hovland, 2014a). It is important to distinguish this trend from earlier curricular programs in foreign languages and international area studies. In 2001, AAC&U launched a program on Shared Futures that was based on engaging colleges and universities in the exploration of ways that the principles and traditions of liberal learning could be aligned with the emerging new reality of globalization in order to foster the “knowledge, skills, and perspectives” that students now need “in order to thrive within dynamic social, political, cultural, and economic contexts---contexts more and more frequently characterized as global” (Hovland, 2014b). The shift to a focus on larger societal and global questions has been motivated in different ways on different campuses. For some, it is a moral imperative; for others, it is driven by demands for a globally prepared workforce. There are those for whom the impetus is simply a recognition of how the world is changing and what their graduates will face during their lifetimes.

As Hovland (2014b) pointed out, there are two ways to think about what it means to be prepared for a global century. For some, it means developing specific global expertise that will open up career opportunities in corporate settings, NGOs, or Foreign Service (2014b). For others, the goal of global learning is more comprehensive and is focused on preparing graduates who can thrive in an interconnected world and can work with others to address the complex problems that globalization has created (2014b). These problems have recently been articulated in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations and released in September 2015. The agenda is a “plan for people, planet, and prosperity” (United Nations, 2015). What is especially important about this formulation of the impacts of the new reality created by globalization is the focus on partnership. The momentum for addressing these challenges will be generated by a revitalization of a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development focused on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable among us around the world, and built upon collaboration at a global scale. For these ambitious plans to bear fruit, we will need to educate our young people differently and foster new skills and patterns of working together.

The label for this new educational model is *global learning*. As we enter a new reality and adapt our educational models to prepare people who can thrive in a world shaped by globalization, a question naturally arises that will shape our work. The questions are: What will be the consequences of the ability to recognize oneself as a member of a complex and interconnected world, where choices made in one part of the world can have unexpected effects at a great distance from oneself? Will the people who follow us have the capacity to address the many global challenges that we must face in the mutually dependent world of the 21st century and beyond?

Global Learning

Question One: *What knowledge, skills, motivations, and values will all of our graduates need in order to thrive in the 21st century as members of the workforce, as family members and citizens of their communities, and as members of a global community?*

In her article on global learning, Kahn (2015) defined one outcome of global learning as “being able and willing to recognize oneself as part of a complex and interconnected world” (p. 4). To achieve this goal, a course of study should create ways for students to “view the world through multiple vantage points assembled through their studies and experiences, thus answering academic questions while also exploring themselves” and applying their learning to the process of working with others to make the world a better place (2015, p. 1). By doing this, students acquire knowledge about the world and also begin to see themselves as participants in that world and contributors to addressing the challenges facing humanity in a changing world. Those problems can play out locally or across a wider landscape, but whatever the scale or particular shape of the issues, we all must learn to look beyond our own small place “in which we often imagine our lives are anchored” (2015, p. 5).

Kahn (2015) outlined three elements that underlie the ability to see globally while acting locally. First, students must be able to see complex situations through multiple perspectives (2015, p. 2). Second, they need to be able to shift their perspective between different scales of understanding and practice (2015, p. 2). Finally, they need to be able to move from an understanding of complex problems to embrace a sense of commitment and responsibility to others, including people they do not know and may never meet who are affected by the problem they are exploring (2015, p. 2). As in any form of critical thinking, the capacity to see in new ways requires “a learning process that focuses on (a) uncovering and checking assumptions, (b) exploring alternative perspectives, and (c) taking informed actions as a result” (Brookfield, 2012,

p. xi). This discipline is not new but it is essential if students are to develop the capacity to see in new ways.

The overall goal of global learning is to offer students experience in developing and exercising practical wisdom in an ever more complex and contradictory world (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). According to Schwartz and Sharpe (2010), we all have the capacity to be wise, but wisdom is rarely learned in a classroom (p. 49). It is developed by working alongside others, including faculty members and community members who are practicing the qualities of wisdom—nuanced thinking, flexibility, creativity, and empathic engagement with others.

While writing this article, I talked to my favorite millennial, my grandson, Adam. Adam is a senior at Portland State University and a keen observer of human nature. He is also very adept at understanding intergenerational issues. After listening to me talk about global learning and what it will mean to be prepared for life in an interconnected and often contradictory world, Adam looked across the table and said, “My friends and I already think that way.” Although I offer only a sample of one, it does raise a cautionary note. As we talk about global learning and about the challenges of creating diverse, equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities, are many of our young people way ahead of us? Is it worth thinking about this question in an intergenerational way? Do we need to educate our young people or might they sometimes be in a position to educate us? Surely, we need to work with them to draw upon the experiences, knowledge, and skills that we all possess in order to address the challenges that shape the task of creating sustainability.

Question Two: *What kinds of experiences will enable students to see their relationships to other people, to other places, and to concerns and issues with which they have no personal experience?*

Whitehead (2015) argued that global learning “prepares students to critically analyze and engage with complex global systems, their implications for the lives of individuals, and the sustainability of the earth.” Global learning shifts the focus from a specific location or culture to larger issues that affect many parts of the world in interconnected ways. Globalization has generated a range of complex and wicked problems that require new ways of learning, new ways of working together, and new ideas about what a successful outcome should look like. In order to help their students and to understand and address global challenges both at home and in a larger setting, educators must employ pedagogies that prioritize outcomes where students learn to see themselves as related to other people, locations, and issues around the world and to recognize that their own choices have consequences beyond their immediate environment (Kahn, 2015).

The goal of a global education is to equip graduates with theories, methodologies, and ways of analyzing and responding to complex questions “economically, culturally, nationally, politically, historically, globally” (Kahn, 2015, p. 4). It also seeks to equip them with the ability to work well with others who bring different perspectives and experiences to the task. This way they develop effective approaches to understanding and then taking action to address these kinds of global and local problems.

Primary and Secondary Education

UNESCO has been promoting education for sustainable development at the primary and secondary level for a decade. As the lead agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2005–2014), UNESCO is responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress during the DESD. UNESCO published three reports during the DESD—in 2009, 2012, and 2014. The DESD promoted a more sustainable world through different forms of education,

training, and public awareness activities. It is an opportunity to rethink considerably our approach to global challenges (UNESCO, 2012, p. 9). The second report in 2012 focused specifically on processes and learning in the context of education for sustainable development (ESD).

In the world of today, educators must help children and youth deal with an uncertain future—a future where there will be more people and fewer resources, where governing equitably will be even more challenging—and the changing workplace of the coming decades. What skills will citizens, workers, and leaders of tomorrow need? They will need to ability to analyze complexity, view problems from multiple perspectives, work in teams with people of different backgrounds, formulate questions, communicate clearly, envision solutions to community and global problems that are equitable and respectful of the different ways that people understand problems and experience their impact, and take responsible action.

Admittedly, these skills are beyond what is currently mandated in primary and secondary education through the Common Core State Standards and most national curriculum models in use in the United States today.

Although the term sustainability education has little traction in the educational community in the United States, it is a concept that has engaged the education community around the world. “Around the globe there are literally tens of thousands of ESD [education for sustainable development] projects” (UNESCO, 2012, p. 32). Furthermore, countries like Scotland and Pakistan have included ESD in teacher education requirements.

Pilot research studies show that adding sustainability to the curriculum has positive effects on students and teachers.

- In schools where sustainability is part of the curriculum, student intellectual engagement is above average (Alberta Education, 2011).
- Sustainability gives purpose (e.g., promotes global stability and resilient societies) to education (UNESCO, 2012).
- Sustainability gives a common vision to education and to the future (UNESCO, 2012).
- Sustainability gives relevance to the curriculum and gives concrete examples to abstract concepts (UNESCO, 2012).

Teachers bring to the classroom a number of principles that are not part of the written curriculum but are important to the future of our society. Two such principles are equity and working for the common good. In a world that is marked by a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, these two principles are essential. Teachers can implement equity in their classrooms in many ways, such as soliciting answers to questions from every student, not just the verbally quick. Although classrooms of yesteryear were based on independent learning and competition for the best marks, the classrooms of today are becoming more cooperative, with students sharing information and supporting one another’s learning. Working for the common good, rather than individual gain, prepares students for life in the community and for the complex new reality of globalization.

Pedagogies associated with ESD stimulate pupils to ask questions, analyze, think critically, and make decisions. Such pedagogies move from teacher-centered to student-centered lessons and from rote memorization to participatory learning. ESD pedagogies are often place-based or problem/issue-based. ESD pedagogies encourage critical thinking, social critique, and analyses of local contexts. They involve discussion, analysis, and application of values. ESD

pedagogies often draw upon the arts using drama, play, music, design, and drawing to stimulate creativity and imagine alternative futures. They work towards positive change and help pupils to develop a sense of social justice and self-efficacy as community members (UNESCO, 2012 p. 15).

Individually, ESD pedagogies are not new. They come from a variety of disciplines, such as inquiry from science education, spatial analysis from geography, and futures thinking from global education. However, when brought together with a focus on creating a better, fairer, and more equitable world, they form a new set of pedagogies that can change classrooms and educational outcomes around the world.

Undergraduate Education

Hovland (2014b) pointed out that while the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) model and the learning outcomes that accompany it do not explicitly identify global learning, they are clearly consistent with the call for innovative approaches to the curriculum and cocurriculum that will promote the qualities of mind and approaches to learning that are called for in the concepts of global learning. He puts the elements of LEAP together to generate a useful portrait of an education based on a global context:

Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world ... focused by engagement with big questions; intellectual and practical skills ... practiced across the curriculum; personal and social responsibility ... anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges; [and] integrative and applied learning ... demonstrated in new settings and in the context of complex problems. (Hovland, 2014b, pp. 5-6)

Many colleges and universities are creating ways to help students prepare for lives of global citizenship and participation in community life (Wobbe & Vaz, 2015). Students are realizing that their lives and careers will play out across a global stage and that they will require cross-cultural competencies and the capacity for collaboration in order to work locally and think globally about the impact of the choices they make. Wobbe & Vaz (2015) argued that "global learning should be intentional: connected to student learning both in the major and in general education and clearly situated at the center of the curriculum rather than at its periphery" (p. 15). They described how their institution, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, approached this goal by utilizing experiential learning and other high impact practices across the curriculum (2015). Worcester Polytechnic Institute engages its students in solving problems in real-world settings in increasingly challenging ways as students progress through their college experience. These opportunities are built into both the major and in general education courses. The pathways described match up nicely with the overall design and learning goals of LEAP.

At Florida International University, Miami's rich multicultural community and the problems that emerge from the global character of Miami itself as well as its connections to the Caribbean, provide a rich context for engaging "a diverse group of people in collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders" (Landorf & Doscher, 2015). These examples can be multiplied by many other efforts across the country that draw upon the distinctive characteristics of the communities in which colleges and universities play increasingly meaningful roles in community development and from which they draw an ever more diverse student body.

These examples illustrate the elements that must be combined to create an environment in which students can practice the skills we expect from global learners. The approach is shaped

by a clear sense of what a globally prepared graduate knows and can do, guided by clear learning outcomes exercised along a sequential pathway of experiences extending from the first year of college through to graduation and engaged learning practices, often called high impact practices, that draw students into work that is both personally and socially meaningful that leads to advanced cross-disciplinary inquiry that focuses on big questions with the goal of finding ways to address those questions in ethical, responsible, and effective ways.

Question Three: *How will we assess the global learning of our students?*

AAC&U has developed a package of Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubrics and engaging high impact practices to articulate expectations for learning outcomes along a pathway designed according to the LEAP principles (Kuh, 2008). There are currently 16 VALUE Rubrics with more on the way. While all of the rubrics can inform and assist in the assessment of global learning, one in particular, the Global Learning VALUE Rubric, is especially useful. The rubric offers a workable definition of global learning and language to use to frame this concept in terms that allow for the development and effective “use of assessment practices that deepen, integrate, and demonstrate student learning, through advocacy of learning-centered assessment policies, support for campus work to develop meaningful assessment approaches, and experimentation with common e-portfolio frameworks” (AAC&U, 2015a). The components of the rubric cover six overlapping areas: global self-awareness, perspective taking, cultural diversity, personal and social responsibility, understanding global systems, and applying knowledge to contemporary global contexts (2015a).

Combined with the use of assessment approaches that allow for the evaluation of authentic student work, the Global Learning VALUE Rubric offers a useful framework for creating a progressive exploration of problems in a global context as studied through multiple frames of reference and disciplinary approaches that lead to a sense of personal agency and commitment to contributing to the development of a sustainable world.

While this approach offers clear guidance for a coherent and intentional curriculum that prepares students for the challenges that lie ahead in the new reality of globalization, it fails to address the fact that a growing proportion of undergraduates will not complete their undergraduate degree at a single institution. A growing number of students find their way through a network of educational options in a variety of ways, ranging from matriculating at a 2-year school and then transferring, with or without an associate degree, to a 4-year campus. Others enroll at more than one institution simultaneously or sequentially. Efforts have been launched to create pathways between institutions that are well articulated and easy to navigate (AAC&U, 2015b), but more attention must be given to how we can guide students through educational environments that are not well connected or that do not have a set of common goals.

Conclusion

In the past 5 years, more attention has been paid to the global context that will shape the lives of people around the globe through telecommunications, images, and stories spread quickly from one place to another. Choices made in one nation affect everyone else across the globe. Global learning encompasses the knowledge, skills, and propensities for action that we all will need to live in an interconnected and mutually interdependent world. We are moving beyond a curriculum composed of separate building blocks consisting of courses and course-based learning objectives to a model of integration, coherence, and increasingly meaningful and responsible action across time and from repertory curricula to improvisational ones. These changes are placing new demands on our academic communities, which have heretofore been

based largely on individual achievement rather than on collaboration and mutually beneficial and respectful exchanges of ideas and experiences. Preparing globally competent graduates will require our universities and colleges to become globally competent themselves and to model the qualities of a collaborative and equitable community of learners.

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