Developing Global Competence in a Virtual Classroom

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Abstract
In today's globalized economy, effective leaders must be able to relate to and work with people from diverse cultures. Higher Education has a leading role in creating global citizens through intentional student global competence development opportunities, such as education abroad (American Council on Education, 1998). The importance of developing global competence is reflected in an increasing number of new curricular programs with a global focus offered by universities. As one of the many strategic and systematic efforts to promote global education, the Institute for International Education's Generation Study Abroad program reports a 300% growth in study abroad programs from 2014-2020 (Institute of International Education, 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the implementation of intercultural programs, particularly those that require student travel. Given the amount of uncertainty that the future holds, educators must find alternative ways to deliver meaningful learning experiences that focus on the development of global and intercultural competencies. In this paper, we will discuss how two study abroad programs transitioned to a virtual format, enabling students to engage in cross-cultural collaboration and develop global competence in a virtual classroom.

The first program is Croatia Learning Abroad, a faculty-led program for undergraduate business students. Taught abroad over the May-mester term, twenty-four students and two faculty members travel to Zagreb, Croatia for one week and get a first-hand look at international business through company visits and presentations from senior-level executives. In addition to company visits, students join planned and impromptu social events, allowing them to immerse themselves in the local culture. Coursework is completed online once the group returns from the trip. The second program is the International Business Residency (IBR), a week-long, faculty-led learning abroad experience that is an integral part of the lock-step Executive MBA (EMBA) program. All students in the EMBA program participate in the IBR over the May-mester, which involves travel to one or two countries, company visits and presentations from senior-level executives, and cultural immersion. The learning abroad experience is coupled with an International Business course that traditionally features components that are completed prior, during, and following completion of the trip.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both programs had to transition to a virtual format. This paper will outline how the faculty leaders adapted their study abroad programs to create a cross-cultural experiential learning environment online. We will discuss the pedagogical tools that were used to drive home global learning, such as cross-cultural project groups, student reflection journaling, intercultural case studies, and virtual city and company visits. The paper will also include recommendations for future practice, including ways to incorporate global competence learning outcomes and assessments in a virtual program as well as ways to leverage university partnerships in countries abroad in order to deliver successful virtual study abroad programs.

Introduction

In today's globalized economy, effective leaders are called to relate to and work with people from diverse cultures. Higher Education has a leading role in creating global citizens through intentional student global competence development opportunities like education abroad (Department of Education, 2018). The importance of developing global competence is reflected in part by an increasing number of new global curricular programs offered by universities. In support of globalizing U.S. higher education, the Institute for International Education has served as a guiding organization providing institutions with support in their internationalization efforts. As one of the many strategic and systematic efforts to promote global education, the Institute for International Education's (2022) Generation Study Abroad program resulted in partnering institutions with a 300% increase in study abroad growth from 2014-2020.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the implementation of intercultural programs, particularly those that involve student mobility. "There is a need to come together as a community to rebuild, reinvent, and double down on our shared belief that international education remains as important as ever" (Institute of International Education, 2022, p. 3). Given the amount of uncertainty that the future holds, educators must find alternative ways to deliver meaningful learning experiences to their students that focus on the development of global and intercultural competencies. In this paper, we will discuss how students can engage in cross-cultural collaboration and global competence development through two study abroad programs and their transition to a virtual format. We will also provide recommendations for pivoting to and development of virtual global learning.

Global learning experiences traditionally happen in a new country and culture, allowing participants to fully immerse themselves into the new setting. Faculty structure their programs abroad with some preparation in the classroom before and after, however a majority of the teaching and learning takes place in-country. Students can view their course curriculum focused on the host country in person, within that cultural context. Whether considering the frescos and architecture of DaVinci in Florence, or touring a sustainable engineering firm in Rio, students can learn from the immersion into the city and culture. Travel is not always an option, however, due to factors from cost to citizenship to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, learning abroad programs were forced to cancel or adapt to the newly closed borders and quarantine restrictions. The student learning outcomes focused on providing global learning development had to change, and many of these outcomes can still be met with a new approach.

Although there is a lack of a consensus definition, global competence is broadly defined as open-mindedness, cultural knowledge and awareness, global skills, and global action (Deardorff, 2006;

Todd, 2017). This definition is similar to other concepts including cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, and cultural competence. These concepts share many similar core tenets, including disposition and attitudes, self-awareness, intercultural communication, global skills and abilities, cultural knowledge and awareness, having an open mind and varying perspectives, and the ability for global action and collaboration. These tenets provide attainable student learning outcomes that combine to support global competence development.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) developed rubrics to measure student learning, with their Global Learning VALUE Rubric serving as an assessment for global knowledge and competence (AAC&U, 2009). This rubric outlines the criteria for globally-focused student learning outcomes, including similar tenets as above: "global self-awareness, perspective taking, cultural diversity, personal and social responsibility, understanding global systems, and applying knowledge to contemporary global contexts" (AAC&U, 2009, p.2). This rubric provides educators with a guide for teaching to these outcomes. The rubric is readily accessible in an open-source format, and the AAC&U encourages educators to use it in their efforts to develop global learning outcomes for their students.

The Asia Society also provides a similar rubric with identified global learning outcomes to develop student global competence. This rubric notes slightly different tenets than above, mentioning language competency and critical thinking, but also including varying perspectives, cultural knowledge and awareness, intercultural communication and global action (Mansilla and Jackson, 2011). Their rubric for global competence is also online and available without cost to educators at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels (Asia Society, 2020). In addition, many organizations have developed assessments and measures for global competence available with and without costs. Using these resources, faculty can develop curriculum and programs in a virtual setting that establish a baseline of global competence development. By setting student learning outcomes focused on these tenets and providing learning opportunities that support those learning outcomes, this intentional curriculum and program development can yield similar outcomes as a program hosted abroad.

Faculty-led study or learning abroad programs can adjust to a virtual setting and maintain some of their student learning outcomes through intentional learning opportunities that focus on the development of global competence. Through the identification of these tenets, faculty can determine the desired student learning outcomes and align class activities. With the emergence of online video calls and virtual tours of on-site locations, these class activities can provide a digital approach to the previously in-person activities.

Examples of intentional course activities include guest speakers with interactive conversations, virtual individual informational interviews with professionals from the host country, reading news and watching video clips of recent events in the country. Structuring a collaborative online learning environment with another class and faculty member from another country or culture can also provide strong global competence development. Students from both classes can be partnered or grouped to collaborate on a project, and the experience would encourage them to interact across time zones, cultures, and academic styles. This structure furthers the goal of immersion within another culture as students are embedded into a new cultural environment, even only periodically, through interactions and collaboration with their partners in another country. Discussions and

journaling or reflection on these activities also allow students to self-reflect and think about those experiences. Reflection journaling can be further supported by intentional prompts about cultural values, self-awareness, open-mindedness, intercultural communication styles, cultural knowledge, and their attitudes and perceptions throughout and after the interactions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, two business courses were faced with the decision to cancel or adapt to the new learning environments. The professors applied many of these practices mentioned above and were able to successfully transition the programs to a virtual format. Their adaptation to a virtual global learning environment and lessons learned provide strong examples of this virtual approach, and also provide recommendations for further practice.

Cross-Cultural Management in Croatia
Croatia Learning Abroad is a faculty-led program for undergraduate students majoring in business. The program consists of two online courses, Cross Cultural Management and International Environment of Business, paired with a one-week trip to Zagreb, Croatia. During the week in Zagreb, students get a first-hand look at international business through company visits and presentations from senior-level executives. Through these presentations, students learn about companies' strategies and corporate cultures, as well as the challenges and opportunities that business leaders face in their environments. Companies represent a variety of industries including retail, healthcare, IT, transportation and media. In addition to business visits, students join planned and impromptu social events throughout the week, allowing them to immerse themselves in the local culture. Students experience that culture as they eat meals, take public transportation, shop and interact with the local population.

Due to travel restrictions and safety concerns due to COVID, the Croatia Learning Abroad program had to be cancelled. The Cross Cultural Management course that is a part of the program was still offered, but without the travel component. Without the "experience on the ground," it was necessary to find a different way to deliver the experiential component of the course so that students can still experience cultural diversity and practice perspective taking. The course was reimagined so that instead of traveling to Croatia, students worked on cross-cultural virtual teams with students from Croatia. Using technology, students from the US interacted with students from Croatia and completed a series of assignments in their cross-cultural teams.

The collaboration occurred between two Cross-Cultural Management classes, taught at two different universities, one in the US and one in Croatia. The only coordination required for this collaboration was that of the two instructors teaching the two courses. As part of the planning process, the two instructors discussed common learning objectives across the two courses that could be achieved through cross-cultural, virtual teamwork. It was decided that more than one project would be necessary to allow students to experience a meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

At the start of the semester, each instructor discussed the cross-cultural collaboration project with their class and explained the expectations associated with completing their team assignments. Teams were formed through email and each team consisted of two students from the US and two students from Croatia. In that initial email, students received each other's contact information along with instructions for the first assignment. The first assignment was intended to be a low-stakes assignment that would help students establish a communication channel and introduce

themselves to one another. Students were given the option to choose the technology that works best for them (Zoom, WhatsApp, etc.). The second assignment involved a case analysis, in which teams were required to solve a business case. The third assignment was a reflection assignment, in which students commented on their overall experience with the cross-cultural team.

The main challenges with implementing this type of project come from coordinating the teams and establishing communication between students from two continents, with a 7-hour time difference. Another important consideration is how the assignments are graded and how the grades are allocated, given that students are enrolled in two different courses, with different grading criteria.

International Business Residency in Latin America
The International Business Residency (IBR) is a week-long, faculty-led learning abroad experience that is an integral part of the lock-step Executive MBA (EMBA) program. All students in the EMBA program participate in the IBR in the summer. For every iteration of the IBR, there are approximately 20 student participants. The program includes travel to one or two countries, company visits and presentations from senior-level executives, and immersion in the political, economic, and cultural environment. The learning abroad experience is coupled with an International Business course that traditionally features components that are completed prior to, during, and following international travel.

The inability to travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the replication of the immersion experience virtually. The first iteration of the virtual IBR took place in summer 2020. The college had been working with an educational travel agency who had facilitated company visits as well as logistical travel details for the in-person IBR. In summer 2020, this collaboration was maintained, and the educational travel agency facilitated virtual company visits over the course of the week when the trip would have taken place. The virtual platforms used for the visits were Zoom and Microsoft Teams. For each visit, a group of representatives from the company delivered a presentation on the company, with a focus on strategy adaptation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The presentations were followed by an interactive session where the students were able to ask questions and network with the company representatives. Faculty delivery of course content had occurred in person prior to the start of the pandemic. Students were asked to choose a country from the region of focus - Latin America, conduct an analysis of the political and economic environment for business in the country, identify an investment opportunity for a US investor in the country, and develop a business proposal. The course instructor held virtual synchronous research and writing support sessions over the course of two months.

The second iteration of the virtual IBR took place in summer 2021 and implemented lessons learned from the first iteration. A college collaboration with a Guatemalan university eliminated the need to use an educational travel agency. Company visits and interactive visits with local business and politics experts were arranged by leveraging the network of the partner university abroad, the network of the course instructor, as well as the professional networks and employers of the students themselves. This strategy resulted in a rich array of visits with experts and companies from Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, as well as in higher visibility of the students in their home companies and a strengthening of their professional networks.
The faculty content delivery was conducted online asynchronously. In addition to the course content provided by the faculty, the course included virtual company and expert visits across Latin

America and the student projects analyzing the environment for business in a Latin American country. It also required students to identify an investment opportunity for a US investor in order to develop a business proposal. New course elements were also added in the second iteration.

Students were supported in identifying a news source from their Latin American country of choice and were asked to follow the news over the course of the week when the trip would have taken place. Moreover, students wrote in journals to reflect on the daily news and their relation to course learning objectives. Summer 2021 pandemic conditions allowed for finalizing the virtual IBR with a cultural dinner at a local family-run Uruguayan restaurant, where the students were joined by college staff with expertise in Latin American affairs. The dinner was a successful example of leveraging local resources to develop global educational experiences.

Getting acquainted with a news source from the country of focus and consistently following the news, coupled with the cultural dinner, allowed for a political, economic, and cultural immersion experience that enhanced the learning outcomes of the IBR beyond what was achieved in the first virtual iteration. Moreover, the journaling assignment was an opportunity for students to reflect on their global experience that significantly enhanced the learning outcomes of the IBR.

The virtual IBR was developed to address the travel restriction challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are other types of constraints unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic that make it difficult and sometimes impossible for many students across a variety of degree programs to participate in traditional learning abroad programs. The virtual learning abroad programs developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic have proven that it is possible to have meaningful virtual global immersion experiences, which can drastically expand the number of students who can partake of these experiences. Another opportunity born out of this challenge is related to the geographical realm that may be covered as part of a learning abroad program. The traditional in-person IBR features travel to one or two countries. However, the virtual IBR, over the same period of time, may have a significantly broader geographical reach. In the summer 2020 iteration of the virtual IBR, students traveled virtually to Brazil and Chile, which was the original plan for the trip; in addition, they had the benefit of virtual visits with companies in Peru and Argentina, and with one company in South Africa. In the summer 2021 iteration, students were able to include both Central and South American countries in their comprehensive Latin American virtual global program.

Recommendations for Practice

These two case studies provide tangible examples of the modification of global competence learning to an online setting. The professors adapted their student learning outcomes, activities, and assessments to adjust to the new learning environment. Although in-country, immersive experiences were not possible, their intentional curriculum design aligned to some of the tenets of global competence. These programs' experiences and the research focused on global competence tenets and measurements provide recommendations for practice in developing and successfully leading virtual learning abroad programs.

Virtual learning abroad programs can increase effectiveness through curriculum alignment, tailored assessments, intentional course activities, and with the support of technology. Faculty can begin their course development by aligning their course curriculum outcomes to the components

of global competence learning outcomes. Through the review and application of global competence tenets, these outcomes can be aligned to the course content outcomes.

Intentional course design can also support global competence development. The case studies above, for example, used reflections and journaling as tools for students to contemplate the cultural values, norms, and practices of the host culture compared to their own. This intentional reflection makes space for students to notice their attitudes, awareness, knowledge, and actions in relation to culture. Faculty can grade reflections by coding responses for a qualitative outcomes assessment using online tools like a word cloud generator to identify common pieces of feedback. A quantitative assessment approach can be done through the use of rubrics or online assessments to note student growth and understanding of the host culture.

Finally, faculty should explore the technological options for intercultural connection in the virtual classroom. A simple approach includes video conferencing for live conversations across borders. This technology can support guest lectures, panel conversations, and group work. A more effective method of using video chatting is seen through cross-course group work, with students from separate countries or cultures video chatting to complete a group project as they have to navigate their communication across cultures, time zones, and academic norms. Students can also explore new cities and cultural sites through immersive and interactive virtual tours hosted by various online tour providers. Faculty can take these virtual tours further through the use of virtual reality. As technology continues to evolve, faculty should consider creative solutions to their cross-cultural course needs through the use of new and more open-source tools.

Global competence continues to be a crucial skill for students to develop during their time in higher education. Educators should enhance their curriculum in inclusive ways, especially in developing virtual opportunities for cross-cultural learning. Virtual learning abroad programs are possible as evidenced by the two case studies, and the noted recommendations for practice provide examples of how to structure virtual courses. A globally-focused education prepares students to thrive in a diverse, interconnected world, and higher education is charged with developing these global citizens (Nair and Henning, 2017, Department of Education, 2018).

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