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Florida International University attempts to infuse global learning across the curriculum

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Florida International University may have “international” as its middle name, but only recently has it moved to make global learning a centerpiece of its undergraduate curriculum.

The Miami-based university is very diverse: it is a Hispanic-serving institution, and more than 80 percent of its 40,000 undergraduates are racial minorities. But in seeking input a few years back on possible topics for a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) – an institutional improvement plan required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as a condition of reaccreditation – it became apparent that FIU wasn’t taking full advantage of its diversity through work in the classroom.

“Being in Miami, you have an incredible mix of nationalities; you can just walk around campus and feel that you’re at an international university,” said Douglas Wartzok, the provost. “But we weren’t sure that the feeling went any further than that, in that students were actually being academically engaged in understanding global issues.”

For universities across the country grappling with what it might look like to “internationalize the curriculum,” FIU’s new two-course global learning requirement and its dual emphases on assessment and professional development offers one model. The university’s [“Global Learning for Global Citizenship”](#) ^[1] initiative grew out of the QEP process, and is geared toward helping students meet three universitywide learning outcomes: global perspective, global awareness and global engagement (defined in

the box below). Beginning with entering freshmen in 2010, FIU students must now take at least two courses that have been designed – or in many cases redesigned – with these outcomes in mind. There are now 124 “globally infused” courses, all of which had to be approved by the Faculty Senate’s Global Learning Curriculum Committee – as well as the Senate as a whole – and which must utilize active learning pedagogies, incorporate readings and course materials by international authors, and include embedded assessments designed to measure whether students are meeting the global learning outcomes.

Joan Wynne, an associate professor of urban education who collaborated with several colleagues to redesign a course on the cultural and social foundations of education so it would count as a global learning course, said the previous version of the course focused exclusively on issues in U.S. public higher education, from California to Florida. In redesigning the course, Wynne said the focus has shifted to emphasize international comparisons. She’s increased the number of readings from international journals and, for the final team project, students identify a problem that exists in both the U.S. and a foreign educational system and conduct a comparative analysis. “The idea is to have students start grappling with the larger context of education as it spans the globe, so they become familiar with [things like] how do I get statistics on what’s working in other countries versus what’s not working here, and what’s working here versus what’s not working in other countries,” Wynne said.

For each course, faculty are expected to evaluate students' global learning based on an assessment matrix. In a course called International Financial Management, for instance, students are assigned a final report in which they analyze the activities of a multinational corporation. Specific questions that students are to answer in that report are designed to correspond with the global learning outcomes. Using a rubric, faculty determine whether students are meeting minimum criteria for success by, for example, “exhibit[ing] adequate knowledge of the major cultural, economic, social and legal environment faced by multinational organizations and incorporat[ing] this knowledge into analyses and discussion” (thus demonstrating global awareness) and “employ[ing] understanding of a few obvious cultural differences with the other regions/markets and includ[ing] this understanding into strategic planning and operational details” (a proxy for global engagement).

Deanne Butchey, associate dean for accreditation in the College of Business and a senior lecturer in finance, said the college has an established track record of teaching international business, but the focus on student attitudes (or engagement) is new since the implementation of the global learning requirement. “What we were doing was teaching the important content, the important skills; we were not teaching the attitude – the willingness to solve global problems, the willingness to expand into global markets,” she said.

Investment and Assessment

FIU's Global Learning Outcomes

- Global perspective: the ability to view the world from multiple perspectives
- Global awareness: knowledge of the interconnectedness of issues, trends, and systems
- Global engagement: willingness to address local, global, international, and intercultural issues

FIU is investing about \$600,000 per year in its global learning-related activities, which includes funding for a four-person office of global learning initiatives. The office sponsors (stipend-bearing) professional development workshops for faculty and student affairs staff and is working to increase the number and awareness of co-curricular activities that relate to global themes. The office also coordinates assessment: in addition to collecting data from the embedded course assessments, it is using the Global Perspective Inventory and an internally designed Case Response Assessment (CRA) to determine levels of global awareness, perspective and engagement among entering freshmen and transfer students and departing seniors. It's too early to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of a single cohort, but preliminary results are already yielding some intriguing findings.

"One is that global perspective is the most difficult outcome to gain high achievement in: it's harder than global awareness and global engagement," said Hilary Landorf, the director of the office of global learning initiatives and an associate professor in the College of Education. "We're also seeing that more is better – that one global learning course, one global learning co-curricular is not enough, so we're very pleased that we offer and actually require multiple opportunities."

As Stephanie Doscher, the associate director of the global learning office, explained, one study compared the pre-test and post-test CRA scores of students who took a single global learning course with those who took a comparable non-global course. There was no discernible difference from pre-test to post-test in the scores of students enrolled in the non-global courses, while for those who took a global learning course, there was a notable change -- but that change was tied to their pre-test scores. "If you simply compared the average score of all the students at the beginning and end of the course, you wouldn't see a change," Doscher said. "But then when I compared the students in terms of their pre-test score and their post-test score, what I found was that if students came to the course scoring at least a 1 -- that's a basic knowledge or awareness of interrelatedness, a basic knowledge or awareness of multiple perspectives -- those students did significantly and disproportionately better on the post-test than the students who came in with a zero. And that makes sense in terms of our understanding of cognitive science. If you come to any experience with a cognitive framework, some kind of basic understanding of the information that you are taking in from that experience – if you have drawers in your mind in which to put that information – then you're going to learn more. "

"What we know is that students need opportunities to get to that point where they at least start to get that [basic] knowledge," Doscher continued. "That's why one course isn't necessarily enough for all of our students."

In introducing a global learning requirement FIU did not choose to go one of two other obvious routes: to strengthen its existing foreign language requirement ^[2] or to require a study abroad experience, as some smaller colleges or schools have done. Administrators attribute the decision not to focus on these areas to the profile of its students, well over half of whom are Hispanic and, in many cases, already bilingual. As for study abroad, about 60 percent of FIU's students are low-income and eligible for Pell Grants; a majority are working their way through school and have transferred from community colleges. In other words, these are not, by and large, traditional, 20-year-old undergraduates with the financial wherewithal and freedom to spend a semester in Paris. (Which is not to say the university doesn't encourage study abroad: three of the global learning courses approved so far are study abroad courses.)

"Of course it's something we value, but we know from best practices in study abroad that students need to go abroad within the context of an internationalized home campus experience," said Doscher, who pointed out that given Miami's demographics, many of FIU's students travel independently in the Caribbean or Latin America. "One of the reasons that we focused specifically on the curricular and co-curricular learning experiences here is that so that students who do go out of the country, whether it be with a university program, or whether it be on their own, will have a good, internationalized home campus experience."

Moving forward, there are challenges in keeping the initiative relevant on campus and preventing the global learning courses from losing their distinctiveness. Many of the professors or graduate instructors who are teaching global learning courses at this point are not the people who designed them, and they haven't necessarily taken a global learning faculty development workshop. Just over half of faculty teaching global learning courses in the fall completed the assessment matrix expected of them. And that matters not only in terms of the data collection effort but also because, as Landorf and Doscher have found, in their experience completion of the assessment component correlates with teaching the course "with fidelity."

"I'm seeing some regression back to the mean," said Wartzok, the provost. "It's still going well, but we need to be constantly vigilant to make sure that we don't lose enthusiasm for the whole approach. It's a tremendous amount of faculty time, which is our most important resource, and money."

[Assessment and Accountability](#) ^[3]

[Accreditation and Student Learning](#) ^[4]

[Learning Outcomes Measures](#) ^[5]

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Links:

[1] <http://goglobal.fiu.edu/Pages/index.aspx>

[2] <http://dll.fiu.edu/about-us/gen-lang-req/>

[3] http://www.insidehighered.com/news/focus/assessment_and_accountability

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