

Consciousness in the Now: Creating Global Citizens through Interdisciplinary Co-Education

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Abstract

Objective/Purpose/Rationale: Three professors in different disciplines collaborate across languages to make a priority at our college the education of our students to become global citizens. Whether raising consciousness about gender discrimination, sustainability, international human rights, global genocide, or any number of other world issues, our philosophy is to combine intellectual pursuits with the international learning experience and engage what we call a “co-educational experience.” **Research Design/Methodology:** Through our own experimental co-education and sharing our learning experiences and enthusiasm with our students and college community, we’ve created programs, as well as a space, both physical and abstract, for celebrating and encouraging international awareness, discussion, and learning for students and faculty alike. Faculty grow and share that growing with our students and the larger campus community by creating resources and infrastructure that will persist into the future and only continue to evolve and grow. **Sample Involved:** Silicon Valley community college professors in fields of French, English, and Women and Social Justice Studies have led the way in producing the Global Education Conference, Global Gender Symposium, Global Citizenship alliance (from high school through community college to university), an interdisciplinary study abroad learning community in France, international service learning, international publication, and scholarships to encourage faculty study internationally. **Overview of Major Findings/Trends:** When faculty are energized, that positivity transfers to students. This cooperative work across disciplines and nations has resulted in the Global Citizenship committee, Global Citizenship space, Salzburg Fellows program, Study Abroad program, and international scholarships.

Keywords: International education, “co-education,” experiential education

Introduction

Context: The California Community College and Our Students

American community colleges present often disenfranchised students an opportunity to attend college and pursue a two-year Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Sciences (A.S.) degree, and/or to transfer to a four-year Baccalaureate degree-granting university. Community college students may have had life experiences that have made it difficult or impossible to attend college directly out of high school/secondary education, or may opt for community college as a less expensive alternative as they begin their pursuit of a

B.A./B.S. degree. The California Community College system is the largest system of higher education in the United States, serving more than 2.1 million students at 114 colleges across the state of California. These colleges offer associate degrees and workforce training and certification in over 175 fields. ("Key Facts," 2018). Community college education is much less expensive than most four-year universities in the United States, and admission is open to all. Community college students not only pursue degrees but also attend in order to earn training and certification in a variety of fields such as nursing, business management, human resources, medical assistance, interior design, park management, restoration and preservation, paralegal, and graphic design.

West Valley College, located in Saratoga, California, just west of Silicon Valley, serves over 12,000 students annually, and grants A.A. and A.S. degrees in over 60 programs, as well as certificates in more than 90 career and technology fields. The college's mission statement reads: "*The West Valley College Community supports students along their pathways to reach transfer and career goals in an environment of academic excellence*" ("Fast Facts about WVC," 2018).

The **purpose** of our study is as follows: Dr. Anna Brichko, Vicky Kalivitis, and Leigh Burrill have worked collaboratively across disciplines, languages, and international boundaries to raise consciousness and enhance global awareness and scholarship through offering both faculty and students dynamic, interdisciplinary, and scholarship-enhanced opportunities to grow as global citizens and scholars in a variety of environments both on the immediate campus and globally. Our guiding philosophy is that we "co-educate," learning from each other in a globalized academe, sharing both academic and cultural expertise as we navigate relationships and scholarship. Our **objective** is to design curriculum, and create programs, events, and academic opportunities for students to internationalize their educational experiences and future careers. The **research question** we sought to answer is: **What does it take to motivate an oft disenfranchised, disadvantaged community college student to believe they have scholarly worth and contributions to make in a global context?** We've answered this question via a combination of theoretical approaches to education and global scholarship, as well as through direct experiential experimentation with various programs at our California community college and the collection of data from our students first-hand, as is revealed in the paper that follows.

Methodology

The Co-Education Project

Through what we describe as "co-education," we create cross-disciplinary learning experiences for students and the larger college community, and have created a space, both physical and abstract, for celebrating and encouraging international awareness, discussion, and collaboration. Our cooperative work across disciplines and nations has resulted in the college's Global Citizenship committee, a dedicated Global Citizenship space on campus, faculty and student participation in the Salzburg Fellows program, and enriched and scholarship-supported student study abroad and faculty international conference programs. Silicon Valley community college professors in fields of French, English, and Women and Social Justice Studies have led the way in producing the *Global Education Conference*, and *Global Gender Symposium*, the Global Citizenship pipeline (from high school through community college to university), an interdisciplinary study abroad learning community in France, international service learning in Dominican Republic, faculty and student publications, and college-supported international study opportunities. Whether raising consciousness about gender discrimination, sustainability, international human rights, global genocide, or any number of other world issues, our philosophy is to combine

intellectual pursuits with the international learning experience. Faculty grow and share that growing with our students and the larger campus community by creating resources and infrastructure that will persist into the future and only continue to evolve and grow.

Findings

Agency and Engagement: Active Learning with Global Scope

Community college students often come from experience that makes attending and/or succeeding in college challenging. Students are often academically empowered when provided opportunities to learn outside traditional classroom settings, or to share their scholarship with communities greater than the individual 25-50 student classroom setting. When students see that their scholarly contributions fit into a greater body of work both within the college and in a world academe, they are likely to find a larger sense of meaning and fulfillment in their educational experience. When surveyed about their contributions to student-led global-themed conferences on campus, 70% of participants expressed that they felt presenting built their decision-making skills. Students presenting at conferences designed for their scholarship inspire students in their audience to participate, which leads to a culture of scholarly growth and development. When the focus includes a global perspective, the potential for consciousness-raising across disciplinary and national boundaries is expansive, indeed. And this is just one example of the concept of “co-education,” academic evolution through shared scholarship, in action. What follows comprises is a partial list of various successful interdisciplinary coeducational opportunities we’ve devised over the past six years at West Valley College, and which we recommend as models of success for empowering student global learning.

Discussion and Recommendations

A Multi-institution “Global Education Pipeline”

With the goal of developing a thematic approach to education and heightening the mindfulness of global and local citizenship responsibilities, West Valley Community College, Leigh High School and San Jose State University established a partnership that promotes a global citizenship approach to education from secondary school through community college and on to the four-year university. Students gained global competence through research, engaged in dialogue about global and local contemporary issues and evaluated the implications of their personal actions. The partnership led to an annual Global Citizenship and Entrepreneurship Student Conference, with themes including “Placed and Displaced: A Global Citizenship Approach,” “Technology in a Global World,” “Sustainability - Global Citizenship and Entrepreneurship,” and “Career Choices: Entrepreneur vs. Employer in the Global Working Community.” Student participants who were surveyed described an increased awareness of cultural diversity as well as a heightened sense of social and global responsibility.

A Global Citizenship Center

In *The Practices of Global Citizenship*, Schattle (2007) clarifies that “citizenship” can be defined “as a way of life rather than as a legally binding tie to any particular country,” a way of life that recognizes how each of us affects the rest of the people on our planet. The college’s Global Citizenship Committee, comprised of faculty across the disciplines, student representatives, and administrative leaders, has worked to create a campus culture that is committed to the principles of Global Studies and Global Citizenship. Those principles describe a transformative attitude and approach to learning, teaching, and being that centers on the recognition that people, cultures and our environment are inextricably

woven and interdependent, and that as a result we are all individually and collectively responsible for addressing issues across cultures and geopolitical boundaries. This intentional work helps prepare students and the campus community to reach global competency and therefore to be better prepared to meet the personal and professional challenges of the 21st century. The Global Citizenship Center, which opened on April of 2012, is a dedicated space in the college campus center where lectures, meetings, films and other activities are scheduled, and where there are display cabinets that house changing exhibits and other passive learning content.

Annual Global Citizenship Conferences

Beginning in 2012, faculty leaders worked together to bring international participants to present a global conference on our campus to heighten awareness about global scholarship and engagement. This begot a tradition that has evolved into conferences with specific themes connected to social justice and awareness, such as this year's "The Faces of Genocide."

Seventh Annual Global Citizenship Conference: "The Faces of Genocide"

In the most recent 2017-2018 academic year, the main focus of the Global Citizenship Committee was to organize the *Seventh Annual Global Citizenship Conference*. Dr. Tim Kelly, led this effort with a conference titled "The Faces of Genocide." Speakers aimed to explain why genocides happen, explored the impact and legacy of genocide and called global citizens to action. The driving question: What can we do to help prevent genocide and to foster social justice?

Earth Stewardship Symposium

In 2013, the Global Citizenship Committee created the *Earth Stewardship Symposium*, which has brought. The most recent symposium included speakers such as: Newton Harrison, the co-founder of the Center for the Study of the Force Majeure at UC Santa Cruz, who spoke about bringing artists and scientists together to design ecosystem-adaptation projects in critical regions around the world in order to respond to climate change; Toby Hemenway, who spoke about his latest book, *The Permaculture City: Regenerative Design for Urban, Suburban, and Town Resilience*, which provides practical examples for creating abundant food, energy security, close-knit communities, local and meaningful livelihoods, and sustainable policies in our cities and towns; and Lynda Grose, an eco-pioneer, a practicing designer, consultant, educator at the California College of the Arts, and the co-founder of Esprit Ecollection Clothing, the first ecologically responsible clothing line developed by a major corporation, who spoke about sustainability in clothing and in practice.

"The F-word is Feminism" Global Gender Symposium

"*The F-word is Feminism*" *Global Gender Symposium* emerged to inspire Women and Gender Studies students to expand their in-class consciousness-raising to the larger campus community and beyond via a student-led conference on campus. Since its inception in 2013, more than 50 students have presented their research on issues of concern to gender and sexuality in a global context. These forums have proven a dynamic environment for learning on many levels. Students share research on topics ranging from struggles for abortion access to lack of adequate sex education to the fight for LGBTQ rights worldwide and African ecofeminism. In addition to raising awareness about international policy, politics, and identity, the campus global gender conferences have

encouraged students to contextualize their studies with a world perspective, and imagine presenting their own work in future student-centered conferences.

Student Clubs

In addition to faculty-led projects, student-led efforts that promote the vision of the Global Citizenship Center via clubs such as the Intercultural Club and the Global Student Club. In its latest presentation, the Global Student Club presented *Global Visions of Beauty*. Students discussed beauty in a global context from the Māori people of New Zealand to the Padaung women of the Kayan people to the western vision of the U.S. Students' goal was to enhance cultural acceptance by enhancing knowledge and to further demonstrate that although we don't all share the same vision, we share similar struggles and consequences. One of the messages of the presentation was to consider the source of our vision of beauty. Does our vision of beauty originate from internal thought or from external messages? Ultimately, students concluded that the beauty of a person is not measured by her/his ability to conform to a society's standard, but by her/his ability to accept the beauty in others. Seventy-three students and six faculty members attended the presentation.

Study Abroad Program and scholarships

The institution went a long road from the 2010-era, individual faculty-led trips, both with and without an attached curriculum, to an organized and structured institution-wide Study Abroad Program in 2017. After building support from administration and receiving a substantial financial commitment from the district, the college started to develop a coherent Study Abroad Program in order to achieve the college's Educational Master Plan Goals, which include "creat[ing] a vibrant and engaging campus community," "commit[ting] to developing and supporting values, practices and a campus community environment that supports equity and diversity", and branding the college as a "distinctive institution" (West Valley-Mission, 2018). The planning started early in 2017 with a creation of Intercultural Student Club, a development of criteria and processes for student scholarships, Study Abroad webpage, and a development of co-curricular between the disciplines learning community. Plans for study abroad in Greece, Belize, China, and South Africa are underway for 2019 and 2020.

Interdisciplinary France and more

In January 2018, three faculty were able to implement the interdisciplinary curriculum, taught three courses, and led a short term study abroad trip to France. 31 students benefited from the program, out of which 15 students were recipients of a full scholarship. Courses included French language and culture, English Modern Fiction, and Women in the Arts.

During the summer 2018, study abroad courses in English composition and Administration of Justice were also offered in the faculty-led, short-term format in England, and a Music course in the Baltics, and a Business and Culture course in Japan.

Salzburg Fellows Program

In 2011, West Valley College began a partnership with the Salzburg Global Seminar (now, as of 2017, the Global Citizenship Alliance), whose statement of purpose is to "promote education for engaged knowledge and responsible action in an interdependent world" (Global Citizenship Alliance, 2018). The college offers study abroad scholarships to students selected through a rigorous application process to attend the week-long Global Seminar convened at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria each summer. Through

this seminar, students develop an understanding of what it means to be a global citizen and how to apply global citizenship values in their academic, professional and personal lives. College faculty members have also received scholarships to participate. West Valley College is further committed to sending faculty to the respective Seminar.

Service Learning: Costa Rica and Dominican Republic

Students also had the opportunity to participate in faculty-led, short-term service learning projects in Costa Rica and Dominican Republic in the summer of 2018. Many participants received either full or partial scholarships. The Costa Rica service learning course included a group of students and one faculty member engaged in environmental activism in the form of beach trash pick-up, planting hundreds of trees, and assisting with hurricane clean-up of the ecotourist center in Cieba at El Centro Ecoturistico Del Este. The Dominican Republic service learning project involved 11 West Valley College students and one faculty member working with girls ages 8 to 18 in an after-school program inspired by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, centered on girls' education and empowerment, and building "sustainable solutions to end generational poverty" (World Health Organization, 2018).

Scholarship-supported faculty conference opportunities

In summer 2017 seven faculty received scholarships to participate in international seminars in Argentina, England, France.

Conclusion

An Educational Model for Global Awareness and World Citizenship

In our cross-disciplinary collaborations and via surveying student global conference participants we've found that offering opportunities to discuss world concerns such as human rights and sustainability helps students find their voices as scholars and empowers their overall college experience both personally and academically. Personal engagement and sense of larger academic and global purpose were a repeated refrain in responses from students about their conference and study abroad participation. Written feedback from student participants reveals that providing students with a sense of the larger academic and world perspective inspires a sense of social responsibility that stretches beyond the bounds of nations. Writing about their decision to present at the *Global Education Conference*, one student writes that "Choosing to participate in this project was one of the best decisions I've made at community college." Interdisciplinary co-education enables students and faculty alike to learn together in communities both at home and abroad, preparing to become the responsible global citizens of the future.

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