

Building Bridges: Preparing Globally-Competent Students for Local and International Success

Inside Higher Ed published an article on October 5, 2010 entitled “The State of Global Higher Ed” based on a survey from the International Association of Universities that explored global trends in internationalization. According to the survey, trends suggest that one, institutional rationale for internationalization focuses on preparing students for a globalized world; two, faculty interest is no longer an obstacle as increasing numbers of faculty are themselves involved in international scholarship; and, three, more institutions reported implementing budgets and monitoring systems specifically to address the demand for internationalized curricula and undergraduate experiences. UNC Charlotte has a strong foundation of international education and in many of the aforementioned areas: the hiring of new faculty with international expertise and experience has become a priority in many units; increasing numbers of courses and curricula are being developed and offered to respond to student interests; study abroad participation is rising; and multiple programs, student organizations and events of an international character populate the campus schedule. Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of the institution and its situation in a city of growing international significance necessitate a more extensive effort to provide students with international experience and intercultural development.

This proposal advocates for a five-year initiative to further internationalize, in a sustainable framework, the undergraduate experience at UNC Charlotte. The infrastructure and offerings available for students to have an international experience grow steadily, but large numbers of students continue to graduate with little or no intercultural development. Intentional efforts to address the disparity between the outstanding growth of UNC Charlotte numbers and available opportunities for undergraduate students to enhance their intercultural competence are needed. Curricular and co-curricular efforts are instrumental in engaging a broader cross-section of students and take into account the demographics of the traditional UNC Charlotte student.

The impetus for this proposal originates in UNC Charlotte’s mission of connecting its students to the greater Charlotte region. Specifically, this proposal would build on the strong international foundation that exists at UNC Charlotte using strategic and comprehensive efforts to engage a broad cross-section of undergraduates who would then graduate prepared to enter the workforce of a dynamic and globalizing city. Increasingly, globalization manifests itself locally. Indeed, analysts have developed a term to describe this phenomenon – glocalization. Charlotte exhibits this blend of the global and the local. In order for UNC Charlotte to fulfill its mission to address the “cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health and social needs of the greater Charlotte region,” graduates must have a functional understanding of the ways in which international issues and people influence their city and job market.

This proposal would address three key components – three bridges – from existing goals and programs to sustainable, global relevancy. First, international efforts need to connect UNC Charlotte students with the issues and populations of global Charlotte. As many students pursue careers in the greater Charlotte region, their familiarity with the social, economic, cultural and political realities of the diverse city will create graduates who are more prepared and inclined to engage.

The concept of promoting internationalization at UNC Charlotte is not new, yet the lack of a cohesive and campus-wide effort across colleges yields fragmented success and limited student engagement. The second bridge is to strengthen UNC Charlotte's global campus in terms of programming here and abroad. Incorporating international experiences into curricular and co-curricular opportunities for undergraduates encompasses a wide demographic and accounts for the diverse interests and priorities of UNC Charlotte students. An effort of this scope and duration would intentionally facilitate resources, opportunities and considerations for all undergraduate students.

The third bridge would be to incorporate learning that challenges students to reflect on their discipline in a global context and from a multi-disciplinary perspective. This is intended to prepare students to communicate, contribute and collaborate on projects, problems and possibility in an interconnected world. Solutions to complex global concerns, issues and innovations must involve more than one discipline. UNC Charlotte students must be prepared to think critically and comprehensively to respond to the opportunities and challenges of their generation – seen and unseen. It would be a disservice to produce graduates who are only prepared to engage in one field without understanding and appreciating the impact of their work on others. Alternatively, graduating students with a better sense of this interconnectivity will only increase their capacity to solve universal challenges and create innovative opportunities to advance their discipline and their community.

A variety of measures and approaches will be incorporated into a five-year commitment to internationalize the undergraduate experience. These will include the development of a Global Citizen Certificate program blending curricular and co-curricular opportunities; the creation of volunteer and service learning programs designed specifically to engage students with international Charlotte; concentrated efforts to expand study abroad opportunities through the development of short-term, faculty-led programs, spring, summer and possibly winter programs; the launch of a study-abroad curriculum integration project; and/or integration of key ideas and concepts into the first-year experience. The opportunity to develop a full proposal with the expertise of representatives from appropriate areas would yield a comprehensive and strategic plan for creating a sustainable international experience for undergraduate students at UNC Charlotte. Assessment measures using formative and summative measures would guide progress throughout the five-year cycle.

By focusing on the above areas, the International QEP would develop the KSA's (knowledge, skills, and abilities) necessary for globally-competent students to succeed in Charlotte and globally. Undergraduate students will graduate with a greater knowledge pertaining to the world and the interconnectivity between their profession and contemporary global issues. Their skills to successfully engage with an ever-increasing multicultural world in their professions and communities will be enhanced. Finally, students would have the ability to synthesize their knowledge and skills to provide innovative, interculturally-sensitive and collaborative solutions to 21st-century challenges. These are the KSA's of the leaders who must graduate from UNC Charlotte.