

The Importance of a Global Perspective

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The value of acquiring a well-developed global perspective – a one-world view – as part of every College students’ academic experience cannot be overstated. Such a worldview provides the context from which students can better analyze the social, political, and economic events of history and their own generation. Such a worldview also provides the context for more informed decision-making in many facets of life, from future career and geographic location choices to such seminal “modus operandi” life decisions as celebrating diversity and inclusiveness across vastly dissimilar cultures and peoples.

In fact, I would go even further and argue that developing a solid base of knowledge about the world beyond the US is essential to what it means to be an individual well-educated in the liberal arts. Whether the Lehigh student is working toward a BS, MBA or MS degree, a global perspective embedded in the curriculum inherently expands the mind and the student’s base of knowledge. Such broad-base knowledge is a fundamental building block for the formation of well-rounded students equipped to compete for the most desired positions in the US. In the near future if not already, virtually all occupations will be international in scope. Students with knowledge about and experience in other cultures and peoples have a wide-ranging variety of career options available to them: international trade, banking and financial services, law, all levels of government, human services, health and environmental organizations and education, to name a few.

In an important study published by AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), the task force¹ concluded that “globalization is one of the most significant forces of changes for business.” By extension, globalization also becomes one of the most important forces for necessary change in business education, at all levels but particularly at the undergraduate and professional masters levels. The task force’s call for academic leadership to lead this change is noteworthy and appropriate. The College embraces this call to action.

Developing and delivering a global education that is highly valued and effective is a multi-faceted and complicated problem, challenging many of the things we do in academe currently that seem so right for our students. For almost a ten-year period prior to arriving at Lehigh, I was integrally involved in leading two graduate business programs that had intrinsic international experience (and travel) to them. Inevitably, students participating in the programs clustered into three demonstrative camps: (1) I’m wonderfully a different person because of the experience; (2) I’m fighting it, but I know the experience is what the future is all about; and (3) I’m fighting it, I’m out of my comfort zone, and the experience is not one I want to repeat. The challenge is to address this complicated problem on all fronts, from all angles and over time, so that we students falling into the third camp are very few in number.

¹ Report of the AACSB International Globalization of Management Education Task Force, “Globalization of Management Education: Changing International Structures, Adaptive Strategies, and the Impact on Institutions” (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011).

Global education is multi-faceted because is it about what is offered; how it is delivered, including consistent and reinforced over time; and by whom. At the undergraduate level, the College's faculty (the "whom") took an important next step recently in the evolution of global business education at Lehigh by endorsing a set of learning goals and objectives for our undergraduate students that will set the path for curriculum changes (the "what") in years to come. Embedded in the goals is the unquestionable importance of a global context to everything we do. The first goal – **understand functional areas of business and how they create value in a global context** – is a particularly relevant end as we review our curriculum. The College's students need to understand how global forces affect business decisions and outcomes, and they need to formulate and implement effective business strategies that embrace the global competitive environment.

A second goal endorsed by the College faculty for our undergraduate students is also particularly relevant – **collaborate with others to accomplish work in business contexts**. Recognizing the value of interpersonal and intercultural differences, a learning objective rooted in this goal, curriculum enhancements will necessarily note that collaboration demands a global perspective. A male US business leader collaborating with a female Japanese counterpart has a whole host of intercultural collaborative challenges in front of him, and our undergraduate students need to be equipped for this type of work setting, a typical 21st century global experience.

The College's graduate program leadership is addressing this type of challenge as well on behalf of our graduate students, but with the additional challenge that many of the students are currently in positions of leadership because they are working on their degree part-time while employed full-time. It is invigorating, but daunting, for the MBA student to be studying the dynamics of global supply chains while at the same time "on the ground" in a work situation. Lehigh's MBA program is driven by four core themes – globalization, leadership, sustainability and integrity - and I would make the argument that globalization is the glue that binds together the themes.

I believe AACSB leadership is correct when it identifies globalization as one of the most significant forces of change in business. As we review our curriculum for continuous improvement, our faculty and staff are committed to having every Lehigh student equipped with a one-world view through a series of coordinated, in-depth and reinforced experiences throughout the course of her or his studies. I surely appreciate that as leaders we cannot be complacent on any of the dimensions of our educational efforts, but I'm convinced that in the end developing leaders for global impact is a trademark benchmark for judging our success.