

Globally Competent Students

– An Excerpt From:

A Call to Leadership

***The Presidential Role in
Internationalizing the University***

**A Report of the NASULGC
Task Force on International Education**

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Globally competent graduates...

1. Have a diverse and knowledgeable worldview

As graduates of an internationalized university, students develop a conceptual framework that informs the way they look at the world—both its history and current events as they unfold. Students continually use this framework to analyze and compare political, cultural, economic, historical, environmental, scientific and technological developments. Students do not view the world through a single cultural lens and are able to identify and appreciate various viewpoints. While globally competent students recognize and value cultural differences, they also are aware of the growing interconnectivity of the world and of the necessity of their ability to function within it.

While the materials to build this framework are made available to students through general education offerings, foreign language courses, and study abroad

“As we set about the task of trying to revitalize undergraduate education, we felt that study abroad needed to be very much at the center of that picture. Internationalizing the curriculum is about transforming the student experience—transforming in a real sense, the kind of contributions we make to the development of our students as they study with us and also as they go out into the world.”

*—Bob Bruininks, President,
University of Minnesota*

programs, what really strengthens this framework is the globally competent university’s curriculum, which infuses all things international into all possible realms of the university. The university’s curriculum is widely internationalized, regardless of department, at the undergraduate,

graduate and professional school levels. At the University of Rhode Island, for example, the International Engineering Program offers students a dual engineering and language degree and a six-month internship with international companies abroad. The program has proved so attractive that despite no institutional language requirements, 20% of URI engineering students are enrolled in the program.

2. Comprehend the international dimensions of the major field of study

Globally competent students not only construct an overall framework to inform their worldview, they also seek to understand the international dimensions of their chosen major. While some disciplines may appear to be “international by nature” (e.g., anthropology) or unrelated to culture or location (e.g., physics), globally competent students recognize the need for international awareness regardless of subject. Students therefore actively seek out—and the university deliberately provides—faculty members and curriculum offerings that fulfill this need across disciplines.

3. Communicate effectively in another language and/or cross-culturally

Globally competent students recognize that while English is often considered the world’s dominant language, it may not always, nor should always be the case. Institutions continue to debate the case for mandated language requirements; the methods each college and university chooses to encourage language study must reflect each institution’s history and environment. What should be consistent across institutions is a commitment to increasing language study and opportunities for all students (science majors as well as those in the humanities) to develop expertise across three types of competencies: at the specialist level, at the general proficiency level, and at the cross-cultural communication level.

At the specialist level, students study foreign language with the specific intent of becoming specialists in one or more non-English languages. The demand for such specialists is ever increasing and NASULGC institutions can be vital partners in meeting this need.

Most students can—and should be encouraged to become—proficient in at least one language other than English. Globally competent students recognize that knowledge of a foreign language opens the door to a more in-depth understanding

of the cultures and peoples associated with that language. Even if fluency is not fully achieved, students gain basic cross-cultural communication skills by learning about other countries and cultures.

Due to the lack of emphasis on foreign-language acquisition at the elementary and secondary levels, proficiency may not be possible, but achieving cross-cultural communication competency can be attainable for the majority of students and should be a university-wide goal.

4. Exhibit cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability

In addition to foreign language skills, globally competent students exhibit both cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability, taking advantage of opportunities to interact with diverse individuals. In doing so, globally competent students question assumptions and challenge stereotypes of their own culture and of others.

"The world just knows so little about [China], its culture, and its history. And it will be interesting to see how things change here as the nation opens up more and more to the world and its influences."

— Breene Busch, Texas A&M student,
Peking University, Beijing, China

Examples of meaningful interactions and experiences are membership in one or more internationally oriented student organizations, involvement in activities that bring together

international and American students, and participation in an education abroad experience through study, internship or work programs. Learning in another country not only uproots students but also immerses them within the host country's culture, providing the opportunity for students to assess their assumptions about the world and their own culture.

5. Continue global learning throughout life

Globally competent students recognize the worth of international understanding for its own sake as well as for personal fulfillment. The importance of being globally competent does not rest solely on the promise that it guarantees a better job upon graduation, but that it prepares students for lifelong growth as citizens of

the world. Internationalization should connect students to the ideas and people who can instill habits of thought and practice that embrace larger vistas, worldwide challenges and opportunities to serve the global family.