

# Democracy & Education

## Valuing International Student Presence with a Global Curriculum A Cosmopolitan Approach

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### Abstract

Against the backdrop of increasing political polarization and growing contention over ideological differences, U.S. colleges and universities are facing the daunting challenges of trying to prepare students for economic and personal engagement with a globalized world. Although many institutions admit students from other countries, they often overlook the opportunity to engage with the growing numbers of international students in their midst. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of how international student presence could be incorporated and valued by adopting a cosmopolitan approach in U.S. higher education. Recognizing that a cosmopolitan approach presents many educational challenges, contemporary critiques of cosmopolitanism are considered. Despite deliberation with flaws in this approach, the authors contend that adopting a cosmopolitan perspective in this lens can inspire a global curriculum and foster reflection on new influences to local priorities.

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### Introduction

**I**N RECENT YEARS, many U.S. colleges and universities have put an increased emphasis on internationalization and academic and cocurricular policies and programs that can facilitate global learning (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). A global curriculum can be defined as a way to broaden perspectives by “looking beyond ways in which one teaches (or the ways of a particular location or cultural norms) and tries to understand alternative perspectives in curriculum as ‘what gets taught and how’” (Sparapani, Callejo Perez, Gould, Hillman, & Clark, 2014, p. 2). The need for a global curriculum is generally agreed upon by students, teachers, and administrators alike, who understand that students have to be prepared for engagement with

a diverse and globalized world for college and career readiness (Metlife, 2011).

Despite this support, these initiatives tend to emphasize curricular changes and overlook opportunities to engage in authentic, face-to-face interactions among differing communities on campus. In particular, the large population of international

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students on U.S. college campuses, comprising 5.5 percent of all students in 2017–2018 (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2018), often report feeling marginalized in classrooms and social settings, indicating that they have difficulty making friends with domestic students and that there is a lack of support from faculty and staff (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). As a way of addressing this tension, the authors suggest that colleges and universities develop a cosmopolitan outlook that goes beyond the superficial to incorporate and value international students' presence.

Recognizing that a cosmopolitan-minded orientation represents but one possible lens through which to view this issue, the authors accentuate how a cosmopolitan approach may help higher educational communities extend their perspectives beyond local norms and welcome the many alternative perspectives that international students bring. In this discussion, critiques to cosmopolitanism as an educational project across U.S. colleges and universities are deliberated, and the potential benefits of cultivating a cosmopolitan curriculum are explored.

### **A Cosmopolitan-minded Orientation in Education**

Cosmopolitanism can be characterized as an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1956, pp. 167–198). That is, different people often disagree about its meaning, and it has been interpreted in various ways. Broadly defined, cosmopolitanism is the ideology that humans have equal moral and political obligations to each other based on their humanity and have a shared capacity to reason (“Cosmopolitanism,” 2019). Origins of the term can be traced to the Greek *kosmopolitês*, or “citizen of the world,” the attitudes and practices of the Sophists, and with its first spoken expression by the Cynic Diogenes. More recently, scholars have associated cosmopolitanism with a variety of commitments and interests, and this wide range of applications “mirrors the fact that the idea [of cosmopolitanism] historically has been a source of creative thinking about political and moral concerns” (Hansen, 2011, p. 8). Although various interpretations may fail to gain universal acceptance and agreement of use, cosmopolitanism ideas persist and offer considerable promise for education, where educators must attempt to guide students across a landscape of difference in increasingly global contexts.

In *The Teacher and the World* (2011), Hansen (2011) mapped a cosmopolitan-minded perspective on the challenges and opportunities of teaching in a globalized world. In his view, cosmopolitanism “constitutes an orientation in which people learn to balance reflective openness to the new with reflective loyalty to the known” (p. 1). Hansen’s approach seeks to nourish the art of living, thereby “reconstructing one’s perceptions of and conduct in the world” in a way that fuses perception and action into a formative approach (p. 48). This orientation can respond to institutional obligations to serve all students, an essential emphasis as student bodies become increasingly more diverse. A cosmopolitan stance “finds it reasonable to prefer a process that seeks to include the arguments, opinions, and beliefs of as many of the members of the to-be governed group as is possible” in a human and shared existence (Hayden, 2018, p. 21). However, the challenge of including and

valuing diverse voices is that “globalization gives us a feeling of connectedness, but it also gives us a feeling of fragmentation,” as Daniel Porterfield, a former president of Franklin and Marshall College (PA) pointed out (Wong, 2018, para. 6). As a way to address this potential fragmentation, a cosmopolitan approach to education can assist “people in moving closer and closer *apart* and further and further *together*” (Hansen, 2011, p. 3) in a way that allows students, teachers, and the community to engage with each other in thoughtful and meaningful ways.

One of the strengths of cosmopolitanism in educational contexts is that it “embodies an attempt to fuse the moral and the ethical—that is to say, to merge the cultivation of self (ethics) in its humane relation with others and the world (the moral)” (Hansen, 2011, p. 90). While education is clearly occupied with students’ self-development, the element of humane relation with others and the world may at times be less accentuated. Teaching as a moral activity acknowledges the multiple factors at play: thoughtfulness, generosity, fair-mindedness, and a respect for truth. Engaging the world “at whatever level their resources and strength permit” (Hansen, 2011, p. 89) can foster reflection on school settings and their relation to the world. Thinking of “difference” in a pluralistic way can position educators and students “to appreciate how difficult it can be to discern how other persons *see* the world” (Hansen, 2011, p. 11). Thus, an emphasis on local interests and commitments in connection with global challenges and opportunities reflects how cosmopolitanism may orient institutions to creatively integrate engagement with diversity on college and university campuses.

Further, the importance of listening as a cosmopolitan teacher, and the shift of attention to listening, is a particularly compelling element of a cosmopolitan approach to education. Hansen (2011) wrote that it is by “shifting one’s attention from oneself to listening, to speaking thoughtfully, and to thinking as best as one can about the meanings of experience that the human being can most fully come into one’s own” (p. 36). Findings from Tichnor-Wagner’s (2017) multiple case study reflect practical evidence of how teachers can integrate listening into globally competent teaching practices. As a way of connecting teachers’ and students’ global experiences and perspectives to the curriculum, Tichnor-Wagner suggested that “teaching students to act as responsible global citizens relies on the principles of inquiry-based, student-led learning . . . in authentic settings for authentic audiences” (p. 72). Such a shift in one’s attention calls on the educator to be open to new possibilities that students bring to bear in the classroom and help students to reflect on local values and customs in the flux of globalization. In this regard, instructor responsiveness to the dual demands of self-improvement and relating to others represents a way that teachers can orient a global curriculum.

### **Cosmopolitan Critiques**

A fault of early conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism is that they did not adequately take into account the intricate power dynamics of human interactions and how those dynamics influence participation and engagement with others and the world. Contemporary

applications of cosmopolitanism presuppose sophisticated transnational politics, institutions, conflicts, and other complexities inherent in globalized societies that seem to inherently pivot on a metaphorical sense of the “citizen of the world,” one that allows us to appreciate our differences and learn from one another. Appiah (2006) has supported this claim, considering that one of the main goals of a cosmopolitanism education is to become familiar with one another through contacts across difference. However, critics justifiably question the universality of cosmopolitanism and point out the challenges in its practical application.

Among contentions in cosmopolitan practice, critics have argued (Hoy-Peterson, Woodward, & Skrbis, 2016; Unterhalter, 2008) that cosmopolitanism is grounded in implicit assumptions of a masculine global citizen with access to various forms of social advantage. Extending this critique, it may be further reasoned that the assumption of a masculine global citizen is also White in that the discourse of exclusion is pervasive for non-White individuals as well as women (Buhr, 2013, p. 359). Additional critiques (Unterhalter, 2008) have drawn attention to gender discrimination and economic, political, and cultural inequalities that reflect imbalances in how gender can be afforded equal weight in universal claims. Critics (Buhr, 2013; Gahir, 2016) further theorize that in political reasoning, adopting cosmopolitanism is complicated by the assumption that each individual has agency and rests on equal footing.

To be sure, global inequalities, transnational conflicts, power structures, and hegemony present a need for a heightened focus on marginalized populations, of which international students are often members. While not making universal claims, contemporary cosmopolitanism is in fact uniquely oriented to address issues of inequality in that it represents a “commitment to take the well-being of individuals wherever they are located in the world as central and is concerned with distributive justice across nation states and through transnational institutions” (Unterhalter, 2008, p. 240). Hollinger (2001) has contended that a cosmopolitan outlook can be defined in part by “its determination to maximize species-consciousness, to fashion tools for understanding and acting upon problems of a global scale, and to diminish suffering, regardless of color and class and religion and sex and tribe” (p. 238). In its willingness to engage with diversity, a cosmopolitan orientation toward education “urges each individual and collective unit to make as much varied experiences as it can, while retaining its capacity to achieve self-definition and to advance its own aims effectively” (Hollinger, 2001, p. 239). In light of this, we feel that critics’ focus on the limitations of a universal application fails to acknowledge the potential benefits of such engagement on individual and local levels and, in this sense, how people might appreciate and learn from difference while holding separate values. Further, there are many cosmopolitanisms, such as postcolonial, feminist, political, cultural, economic, and other associations, that can emphasize a particular set of concerns and questions, although an extended discussion of various types of cosmopolitanism is outside the scope of this paper.

Other critics (Smeyers & Waghid, 2010; Thaler, 2010) point to the difficulties a cosmopolitan approach to education may

encounter in a pluralist society. As teachers consider opportunities of being “open reflectively to the world *and* loyal reflectively to the local” (Hansen, 2011, p. 18), essentially requiring students to rethink their values, it may be that engaging with students’ specific local values could pose a tension. In particular, teachers may face problems such as which values citizens are “to embrace, to what extent social practices of a particular group may differ from what is generally held, whether or not fully endorsing the positions . . . creates an injustice toward that group, and whether values of a paradigmatic Western society . . . are to be preferred” (Smeyers & Waghid, 2010, pp. 450–451).

In response, Hansen (2011) has offered the cosmopolitan premise that individual and cultural purity is impossible and that influence from without is continual. In this sense, the adoption of a cosmopolitanism perspective encompasses movement beyond “background presumptions of cultural and individual purity that, in some articulations, makes mutual understanding across difference inconceivable” (p. 9). However, cosmopolitanism does not presume to ignore the “homogenizing pressure that globalized forces exert on local community and individuality” (p. 9). Recognizing these considerable external influences on local settings, “people would be well served to respond to it thoughtfully—as contrasted with reacting to it passively or violently—if they wish to retain individual and cultural integrity” (p. 9). This thoughtfulness, Hansen argued, should guide students toward “the adjudication of existing values—values taken as given and self-contained” (p. 8) as they navigate new ideas, which may in time lead to alterations in how students conceptualize and describe values. In this way, a cosmopolitan encounter is not a question of “abandoning outright one’s prior views or conceptions, nor is it a question of defending a standpoint at all costs” (p. 25). A cosmopolitan stance therefore encourages thoughtfulness, compassion, respect for others and their traditions, and openness to changing one’s own views. Further, as Feinberg (2003) has pointed out, it is precisely because cosmopolitanism allows for pathways of meaning that are not defined by customary borderlines such as nationality or ethnic heritage that it has the power to “result in a stronger dialogical approach to difference” (as quoted in Hansen, 2011, p. 53).

Without dismissing concerns about the ways in which engaging with difference creates challenges for students, teachers, and institutions, nor disputing the limits of cosmopolitanism, we contend that cosmopolitanism can be one way to address the pressing mandate to grapple with issues arising from diversity, both abroad and in our midst. Although critics point to the limitations of finding common ground across difference and more generally, universal applications of cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitan stance provides an opportunity for individuals to engage thoughtfully with as many diverse encounters as possible and develop openness to new ideas. Cosmopolitanism “widens the significance of education by shedding light on the value of the common and shared features of human life” through “practices of the self” (Hansen, 2011, pp. 2, 35), or those that guide participants toward self-improvement, and which can ultimately result in improved relations with others.

## Cosmopolitanism in Higher Education

Considering the significant international student population on U.S. higher education campuses and the potential rewards to be found in intercultural relationships, the application of Hansen's (2011) cosmopolitan principles is particularly relevant to this context. There is evidence that U.S. colleges and universities are making efforts to address global competencies in schools (Redden, 2017); one only needs to open the websites of most major universities to find statements, forums, task forces, and training programs about diversity and inclusion on campus. Several recent studies (Boni & Calabuig, 2017; Divala & Waghid, 2009; Su & Wood, 2017) have pointed to the relevance of cosmopolitan teaching and learning in higher education, emphasizing engagement with diversity and "the application of skills of listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting on experiences" (Caruana, 2014, p. 90). These practices, however, do not come without risk. Certain concerns can be found in international students' narratives, recounting the "discomfort and frustration of functioning in an unfamiliar, often unpleasant and sometimes hostile, social environment which manifests in a host of different ways" (p. 92). To address the challenges, anxieties, and fears of international students, "cooperation between different internal and external actors committed to the values of cosmopolitanism is an indispensable task of the contemporary university" (Boni & Calabuig, 2017, p. 35). In this sense, establishing a cosmopolitan community within universities involves the need to create spaces for reflection and acknowledge tensions, such as when and how members of the community are challenged by an unfamiliar environment and culture. Appiah (2006) has reminded us that there is much to be learned from our differences and that "we need to develop habits of coexistence" (p. xix).

Moreover, higher education ought to be a curricular space where ideas are challenged and complicated conversations are fostered. In order to advance this kind of classroom dynamic, Hansen (2011) suggested that educators develop the ability to balance the local and the global within the curriculum; include as much diversity in the curriculum as possible, with the proviso that engagement with these topics is in-depth rather than superficial; incorporate items in the curriculum that were derived from cosmopolitan circumstances; and highlight "ways in which subject matter expresses the human quest for meaning" (p. 91). Our home institution, the University of New Hampshire (UNH), has made sensitivity to diversity in the curriculum a priority by implementing faculty training programs around teaching to and about diversity. In addition, some programs have reoriented curricula to include global competency and/or diversity awareness through the inclusion of texts from diverse sources, the consideration of diverse perspectives, and the instruction that values alternative educational and learning traditions. Programs even incorporate critical thinking about diversity, equity, and inclusion into learning objectives, as the UNH English department has done in their first-year composition course. These initiatives exemplify Hansen's approach to a cosmopolitan curriculum in that they infuse the curriculum with worldly knowledge, thereby inviting deep

engagement with global issues and new perspectives on local issues. Cosmopolitanism in the curriculum in this sense naturally binds a sense of worldliness by "cultivat[ing] comprehensions of alterity, including the self-knowledge that enables understandings of others" (Pinar, 2013, p. 50).

Altering curricula and teaching is no easy task, and schools and teachers should be applauded for this effort. At the same time, there is reason to believe that the inclusion of diverse curricular materials alone is not enough to encourage students to consider diverse perspectives, particularly those most resistant to valuing diversity and global awareness. Hansen's (2011) cosmopolitanism asks us not only to consider other ways of thinking and being in the world but also to interact with others and to embrace "listening *with* others . . . trying to see the world as they do" (p. 116), thereby allowing "deliberative, compassionate, and cosmopolitan encounters [to be] cultivated" (Davids & Waghid, 2016, p. 35). These ideas are consistent with recommendations by other global education organizations. For example, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2018) recommends that teachers "[f]acilitate intercultural and international conversations" and "[d]evelop partnerships that provide real world contexts for global learning opportunities" and that teachers have "[e]xperiential understanding of multiple cultures" ("The Continuum"). Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) recommends that global education programs include local and global collaborations and involve interaction and authentic activities to help students develop global competencies.

These considerations are especially important when international and other marginalized students are present because they are so particularly susceptible to othering and exclusion. In this regard, positioning cosmopolitanism in higher education can assist students as they are "taught to recognize the vulnerabilities of others and to actually do something about changing others' vulnerable situations" (Davids & Waghid, 2016, p. 36). As cosmopolitanism naturally implies a connection with others, in particular those who may be marginalized, it can accompany students as they learn "*how* to respond to other people's responses to the world" (Hansen, 2011, p. 98). This orientation can support students as they reflect on new perspectives and ideas and engage in participatory inquiry (Hansen, 2011).

With the frequent conflicts that arise when people from different backgrounds interact in the public sphere, one may wonder whether these types of activities can really bring about a cosmopolitan mindset and cultivate openness. However, as Hansen (2011) has said, we should not "presume unbridgeable axiological, ontological or epistemological divides between groups of people or individuals," though he also warns that "[m]utual understanding is not easy or assured" (p. 52). As difficult as it might be, however, there is clear evidence from studies based on perspective-taking and intergroup contact theory that interaction with those who are different from oneself is key to transforming one's outlook. For example, Pettigrew and Tropp (2008), key figures in contemporary intergroup contact research, conducted a meta-analysis of more than 500 studies that "established the

theory's basic contention that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudices of many types . . . by (1) enhancing knowledge about the outgroup, (2) reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and (3) increasing empathy and perspective taking" (p. 922). In another example, a study on the relationship between college diversity interactions and first-year-student outcomes found that the presence of a diverse student body alone is not enough to bring benefits to students; frequent intergroup interactions are required (Bowman, 2013). Many of these studies focus on diverse groups of domestic origins; however, applicability for interaction between and among domestic and international students is also a natural conclusion here.

To mitigate the risks of essentializing international students and/or positioning them as existing in service of local students' development and global education (Milatovic, Spoto, & Wangren, 2018), intergroup contact theorists advise that we strive to create environments in which people from different backgrounds can approach each other as equals in order to defuse asymmetry of power that might preclude open minds and mutual respect (Pettigrew et al., 2011). To begin with, this requires demonstrations of institutional support for programs that develop an educational environment conducive to positive interactive experiences congruent with a cosmopolitan approach to education, often through guidance, training, and funding. Many schools now have administrative offices that focus on diversity and inclusion to serve this function; for example, at our home institution, the UNH, there is a commission specifically devoted to "community, equity, and diversity," and this commission as well as the UNH faculty senate have published statements about valuing diversity on the UNH website (University of New Hampshire, 2018). While these types of administrative structures and statements communicate that the institution takes diversity and inclusion seriously, the next programmatic steps might apply cosmopolitan principles to break down dynamics that tend to present international students in a deficit lens (e.g., positioning domestic students as "tutors" or "helpers" for international students). This move can emphasize international students' strengths and the benefits for domestic and international students alike as they interact and learn together.

Soka University of America (SUA), a liberal arts college in Southern California, is an example of a higher educational institution with a cosmopolitan curriculum that offers unique opportunities for engagement and interaction across cultural and national borders. SUA's educational values involve "a commitment to rigorous academic endeavors, free and open dialogue, and an appreciation for human diversity" (n.d., para. 1). Three major elements highlight cosmopolitanism in its curriculum: a high percentage of international students (40%, whereas international students only make up 5.5% of all students nationwide [Institute of International Education, 2018]) with generous scholarships available, a fully residential campus, and a mandatory semester of study abroad in the junior year for all students that is included in the tuition. These elements clearly demonstrate institutional support for a curriculum that engages students deeply and actively with diversity, and it makes an effort to place domestic and

international/multilingual students on an equal footing by requiring all students to experience the challenges and rewards of studying abroad and confronting global perspectives inside and outside of the classroom. These dynamics instantiate student interactions with and appreciation of other cultures and traditions and can nurture students as they develop "comprehensions of alterity, including the self-knowledge that enables understanding of others" (Pinar, 2013, p. 49).

While many schools may not have the resources to dedicate to initiatives like those at SUA, smaller scale projects also have the potential to encourage engagement by creating supported, interactive experiences where cosmopolitanism is "expressed through the interconnections and relationships located in everyday situations in the context of higher education" (Su & Wood, 2017, p. 25). While everyday interactions in higher education may seem quite unremarkable, they may nevertheless exist as possibilities to start a conversation "which leads to better understanding of each other, and even the formation of ongoing or formalized friendship networks" (Su & Wood, p. 25). For example, UNH has the Office of International Students and Scholars, which is responsible for, among other things, developing and supporting programs for international and domestic student integration. One such program is Buddies Without Borders, in which international and domestic students are partnered up as "buddies" and provided with supportive social contexts in which to get to know each other. With much cultivation, participation in this program has grown over the years despite a declining international student population on the UNH campus. Programs like this demonstrate how a cosmopolitan orientation enables people to appreciate their "shared capacities while holding different values" (Hansen, 2011, p. 9) and spotlight additional ways that universities can enable students to respond to flux and instabilities of a globalized world.

## Conclusion

Without question, cosmopolitanism as an educational project presents many challenges. Among the broadest criticisms, cosmopolitan's application of "all" to certain educational contexts that may not lend themselves to universal values are at the meta level of such concerns. However, as Hansen (2011) has argued, engaging the world, thinking about one's settings, and "putting (one's) foot forward both figuratively and literally" (p. 89) are ways in which teachers, students, and administrators can intentionally focus on how international student presence might be afforded an elevated status in higher educational settings. Further, a cosmopolitanism stance that highlights face-to-face communication as a way to engage with a global curriculum presents a practical opportunity to advance this opportunity.

Although leaders in higher education maintain the intrinsic value of international student presence, universities and colleges ought to further reflect on how they can address equity and ethics by those experiencing education on U.S. campuses. A global curriculum with a cosmopolitan orientation represents one way to cultivate ways of understanding and perspectives beyond a particular location or cultural norms (Sparapani et al., 2014).

Further, considering cosmopolitan in this lens places an emphasis on continuity in values and beliefs, but not their fixity. This orientation “implies learning from rather than merely tolerating value differences” (Hansen, 2011, p. 8). Thereby, reflection on new influences on local priorities represents one avenue of support for international student presence. In this view, international student presence represents a sine qua non possibility in a global curriculum that should be considered more intently.

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