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Jill C. Jurgens
Old Dominion University, utktrace@gmail.com

Carrie Robbins-O'Connell
University of Pittsburgh, utktrace2@gmail.com

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Jill C. Jurgens
Old Dominion University

Carrie Robbins-O'Connell
University of Pittsburgh

ABSTRACT

The lack of intercultural competencies among students in higher education is one of the most significant issues facing higher education and society in general. As institutions of higher education embark on the journey of embracing the increasingly diverse student populations, some universities have revamped university mission statements to reflect their support for "creating and maintaining" a diverse student population and for graduating interculturally competent students. This study compared reports from the three participating universities (one university in the United States and two in Ireland) on four different variables regarding student diversity, student participation in study abroad programs, types of study abroad programs offered, and types of intercultural programs available to students. Implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL COMPETENCY OPPORTUNITIES ON AMERICAN AND IRISH UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

As institutions of higher education embark on the journey of embracing the increasingly diverse populations now attending institutions of higher education; some have revamped university mission statements to reflect their support for "creating and maintaining" a diverse student population, including an international component. Additionally, these missions also focus on graduating competent individuals ready to face the challenges of the 21st century. However, studies have shown that more and more students graduate from their colleges and universities with little to no global awareness or sensitivity.

One of the most critical issues facing higher education in America, and society in general, is the lack of intercultural competencies among the stu-

dent body. Intercultural competency as defined by Deardorff (2004) refers to: knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself. Few U.S. colleges and universities address the development of interculturally competent students, and even fewer colleges and universities have designed methods for documenting or measuring intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2004).

Due to the United States' considerable size and relative geographical isolation, many Americans have limited international perspectives, which may result in a generally narrow-minded view of culture. Such individuals are often embedded in their own sub-cultural groups in spite of the diversity of people, ideas, and regions that make up the country (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004).

Much about achieving "intercultural competency" remains in question, especially with relation to students attending institutions of higher education. The challenge remains to see what can be done in order to provide awareness and promote change within the college environment.

Some institutions of higher education embark on the journey of embracing increasingly diverse student populations by creating programs that stimulate students' movement from ethnocentric thinking to intercultural competency. Some universities have even revamped their mission statements to reflect their support for graduating interculturally competent individuals and for "creating and maintaining" a diverse student population, however, a simple statement of support proves useless without any action involved in making the statement a reality.

Intentional international experiences, such as study abroad and international exchange programs, are especially important in developing intercultural competencies in students (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004). Through these experiences, students are introduced to scholars and educators and brought into intensive contact with people of different cultures.

In addition to intentional international experiences, non-academic and global competency opportunities exist on many U.S. college campuses and on many campuses abroad. Multicultural Program Organizations (MPO), for example, serve as one unit on college campuses with the primary responsibility of engaging differing populations of the campus community in services and educational interventions that, broadly defined, work to overcome systems of social oppression (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, Balon, & Alimo, 2005). MPO's offer a variety of educational supports targeting specific traditionally under-represented ethnic and/or racial groups; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students; international students; students with differing abilities; and non-traditionally aged students, among others (Pope, 1995).

Although a variety of studies have investigated definitions, opinions, and training of intercultural and global competency on a broad basis, few studies have attempted to investigate the types of programming and services offered or promoted to undergraduate students within higher education and the impact of such programs on students' intercultural competencies. The purpose of the study was to identify and compare reports from the three participating universities (one university in the United States and two in Ireland) on four different variables: international student demographics, student participants in study abroad programs, the various types of study abroad programs offered, and the types of intercultural programs available to students.

In addition, this research sought to compare participation rates of students in the various intercultural and global programs offered at these three universities.

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of one male and three female full-time staff members of International Program and International Student Services Offices at three separate universities. The first university, University A, is located in the southeastern United States. It is a mid-sized, public university with an enrollment of approximately 20,802 students. Of these enrollees, 14,209 students are undergraduate students. Minority representation consists of approximately 4,035 students identifying as African-American, 1,295 identifying as Asian, 578 identifying as Hispanic, and 121 identifying as Native American.

The second university, University B, is a mid-sized university in Dublin, Ireland. The college itself was established in 1592 and serves as the oldest institution of higher education in Ireland, as well as one of the oldest institutions in Western Europe. Enrollees of the college consist of approximately 15,600 students. Of the enrollees, 87% identify as Irish, 7% identify with European heritage, 3% identify as either Canadian or American, and another 3% identify from other parts of the world.

The third university, University C, is a mid-sized public institution located in Dublin, Ireland. The enrollment consists of approximately 22,000 students. The college currently accommodates over 2,000 international students from over 80 countries. American students serve as the largest single international population, with approximately 350 students participating in short and long-term study abroad. Additionally, nearly 12% of the students are international undergraduate and graduate students, and over 25% of students have been committed to postgraduate study and research.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted within a two-month time-frame, both in the United States and in Ireland, beginning in June 2005. Each interview was completed within a two-hour time period. In order to gain insight into intercultural and global competency opportunities available to students at the three separate universities, the following interview questions were posed:

- What are the current demographics of your university, including international students?

- What study abroad exchange partnerships exist with your university and what is the participation rate for study abroad?

- What have been the most popular destinations for study abroad by your students including, length of visit?

- How often does your office and/or university sponsor or participate in intercultural programming on campus?

RESULTS

Table 1 provides demographic information on the international student population on each of the three campuses. Thirty-three percent of international undergraduate students studying at University A came from European nations, whereas 45% of international undergraduate students on University B's campus came from North America, and 40% of the University C's international undergraduate population came from the United States.

Table 2 describes the number of students participating in study abroad experiences for each of the three institutions. Short-term study abroad participants at University A made up 87% of the total study abroad participants at the university. Short-term study abroad participants at University B accounted for 22% of the total study abroad participation rate. The short-term study abroad participation rate at University C was 17%.

Table 3 describes the various types of university study abroad programs available at each of the three institutions. Table 4 provides information on the types of intercultural programming available on each campus.

DISCUSSION

When comparing the broad demographics and study abroad participation among the three universities, some similarities were evident. Each university identifies as mid-sized, with approximately the same number of enrollments. Additionally, each university has roughly the same number of students par-

ticipating in study abroad programs through their university's International Programs Office.

However, when examining the demographics of each institution's international population, University A fell nearly 900 students short of both University B and University C's international populations. Additionally, the highest percentage of international undergraduate students studying at University A come from European nations, whereas the highest percentage of international undergraduate students on University B and University C's campuses came from North America and the United States respectively, with nearly 350 international students studying on the campus of University C identifying as American.

According to the April 2005 Annual Report by the Office of International Programs at University A, the number of international students studying at this university has consistently decreased year after year since 2001, with an overall decline of 2.4% in the United States as a whole. This slowdown has been attributed to the continuing effect of the U.S. response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and more specifically to the enactment of the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 (Office of International Programs, 2005). The Patriot Act has led to firm restrictions in the issuance of student visas and regulations of the international student population. The effect of this law and the residual effects of 9/11 are expected to continue with future decline in overall international student populations on colleges and universities across the United States (Office of International Programs, 2005).

In contrast to the declining incoming international student population at University A, an increase has been detected with respect to departing American students as international students worldwide since 2001, with a rise from 147 study abroad participants in 2001 to 278 study abroad participants by 2005 (Office of International Programs, 2005).

As reflected in Table 2, an overwhelming 87% majority of study abroad participants from University A engaged in a short-term study abroad experience, versus a long-long term experience. The majority of these students sought out their study abroad experiences in predominately English-speaking nations, including Australia, England, and Ireland. Conversely, however, roughly 78% of University B study abroad participants engaged in long-term experiences, and 83% of University C students engaged in long-term study abroad experiences, with the majority of these students seeking out their experiences within the European Union (EU) and in North America.

Within the Irish institutions, a steady rise in both incoming international students and departing study abroad participants continues to be reflected in reports. Much of this has been attributed to Ireland's participation in the European Union (EU). The EU serves as a union of 25 independent states, founded to

enhance political, economic, and social cooperation. Cooperation by members of the EU has led to much easier access for university students from Irish institutions to participate in study abroad opportunities and, likewise, for Irish institutions to accept incoming international students from participating EU nations.

Although the three institutions offered some similar intercultural programming and services, University C offered a unique "student-run" Student Union center. Selected students are required to take a one-year sabbatical from classes, but in turn they receive a small stipend for their work during that year. A benefit of the "student-run" Student Union is the involvement of the student body with their university. Aside from its daily initiatives to reach the students at University C, the Student Union works in collaboration with the International Services Office to organize trips for both international and Irish students. Having a hands-on approach to program development and execution provides University C students with a greater advantage of interacting and working with others whose values, beliefs, and culture may be dissimilar from their own.

When examining the American perspective, University A also has a student-run programming board on campus in the Student Activities Council; a student-run campus government in the Student Senate; a student-run media outlet in the form of a student newspaper; as well as many other student-run programs and offices.

Perhaps the major difference between the Irish and American students and their success with intercultural development within their institutions of higher education has been linked back to the notion of cross-cultural adaptation. Cross-cultural adaptation describes the way in which an individual moves from sole identification with his/her home culture and the concepts, attitudes, actions, and verbal and non-verbal communication skills related to that culture to the acquisition of their host culture's practices and norms. Interviewees from both University B and University C stated that their American student population has a tendency to remain "uninvolved" in campus activities. As an example, during University C's "Diversity Week," American students consistently refrain from participating in the event year after year, despite the fact that the American student population serves as the highest international undergraduate student population on campus. A couple of predictive reasons for this lack of involvement have been identified.

First, in order for cross-cultural adaptation to take place, the learning of the host culture's practices and norms must occur, or, the acculturation to the Irish culture and similarly, the unlearning of some of the old cultural elements of the home culture must take place, or, the deculturation of the American culture. As Kim (2005) emphasized, the losing of something old is often the cost

of acquiring something new. Americans tend to function ethnocentrically, in many ways viewing the American culture as the dominant and "only" culture. By not participating in international events on Irish campuses, American students have been able to avoid situations where, as a group, they must integrate the American culture with other cultures.

In contrast to this first argument, a second predictive reason for the lack of participation in programs and activities on Irish campuses may simply be the lack of understanding of what defines "American culture." As Americans, we have been taught to focus on our ethnic heritage to find our identity. For black Americans, the quest is to identify as African-American; for white Americans, the quest is to identify with European roots, and so on. By not participating in international events on Irish campuses in this respect, American students have been able to avoid situations where they have to explain a culture (American) that they themselves have not entirely found an identity within.

Additionally, many beliefs about the American people and the American culture exist in Ireland, including the notion that Americans do not travel outside of their own state, let alone outside the country. Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, one University C student spoke of his experience with American culture by stating, "up until then many of them [Americans], both young and old, had been living in a bubble, which blocked out the goings-on in the world. To them, the world didn't exist outside of America." Another view of Americans held by many Irish is that Americans are extremely conservative and feel their culture is superior to all other cultures. By contrast, Irish citizens view themselves as more liberal.

When asked how often the university or office sponsored or supported programming or activities geared at enhancing the cultural competency levels of students, interviewed representatives from each of the universities reported that no current method for maintaining such data was being utilized. Indeed, each of the interviewers stated that not only were they unable to comment on the frequency of such programming or activities, but also that no current method of determining the level of such need, nor for determining the success of current programming and activities had been developed or utilized by their respective departments or the universities in general.

CONCLUSION

As the study continues to unfold and the limitations of this current study are addressed through the selection of additional American universities and an institution in Northern Ireland to join the evaluation process of intercultural/global competency development among undergraduate students, future outcomes may vali-

date or refute many of the predictive scenarios indicated within this discussion.

Based on information obtained through interviews, literature on the subject of intercultural/global competence, and general observations of both the Irish and American cultures, one could theorize that undergraduate students studying within Irish institutions of higher education have greater access to intercultural competency development. This potential for development can be seen through the range of intercultural programming available on Irish campuses, the number of international students studying at Irish universities, the number of Irish students traveling abroad for study, and access to the Irish culture that tends to embrace and respect the differences among everyone. Glimpses into different cultures can provide students in higher education with a greater appreciation and understanding of diversity. With this knowledge, students can strengthen their intercultural competence, which will enable them to work and survive more effectively in a pluralistic society.

Overall, the value of this study and subsequent results serves to illustrate the point that, while colleges and universities may understand and promote themes of "diversity," "multiculturalism," and "global competence" within the university community and among the university's students, beyond the words printed within college and university mission and vision statements, a model of measuring the factuality of such claims does not readily exist. As such, future research should focus on the impact that universities' mission statements have on providing effective programs and services to assist students in developing and enhancing their cultural competencies. In addition, effective tools are needed to measure and compare a university's mission statement in regards to its vision of graduating culturally competent individuals with the actual cultural competencies of their graduates. Mission statements that purport universities' support for "creating and maintaining a diverse student population" and "for graduating interculturally competent students" are essentially useless if the institution does not provide the means necessary to achieve these goals.

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TABLE 1.

Demographics of International Student Population on Campus

University	Total Enrollment	Highest Undergraduate International %	
University A	1072	Europe	33%
University B	1861	North America	45%
University C	2000	United States	40%

TABLE 2.

Number of Study Abroad Participants (Approximate Numbers)

University	Total	Short Term	Long Term
University A ('03-'04)	278	239	39
University B ('03-'04)	250	55	195
University C ('03-'04)	350	60	290

TABLE 3.

University Study Abroad Exchange Programs

University	Countries
University A	Australia, China, Germany, Japan, Korea, Denmark, United Kingdom, France, ISEP (125 partner universities)
University B	Countries of the EU, recent outreach to Africa and South Africa
University C	Australia, Austia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States

TABLE 4.

Intercultural Programming on Campus

University	Programming & Services
University A	**American/International Connection, Cultural Explosion, International Clubs & Student Organizations, International Student and Scholar Services, Diversity Institute**
University B	**International Clubs & Student Organizations, International Program Office sponsored socials, Irish/ International student mentoring program**
University C	**Diversity Week, Mentor Program, Socials, Campus Clubs, Student run Union, International Student Society, Organized trips by Student Union and International Programs Office**