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7.

INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES FOR PROMOTING UNIVERSITY GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Steven R. Hawks

Even as universities, institutes, and professional associations are renewing their commitment to global engagement and the internationalization of higher-education campuses, there are significant geopolitical and social challenges that are pushing back (van der Wende, 2017). The immediate crisis posed by the global coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has further hampered progress by bringing a number of critical global engagement activities to a sudden halt (Brimmer, 2020). In the midst of these challenges there is an opportunity to consider theory-driven pedagogical innovations that can move the global engagement agenda forward even in times of complexity and crisis.

This chapter begins with a careful review of the considerable ongoing efforts that many institutions of higher learning are putting forth to enhance global engagement activities and outcomes among students and faculty. The nature of these activities and the growing political, social, and health-related challenges to their full implementation are categorically presented and discussed. The body of the chapter presents a theory-based approach for designing and implementing pedagogical strategies that can meaningfully address key challenges, while at the same time moving forward important elements of the higher-education global engagement agenda. Specifically, I analyze and apply best practices from traditional study abroad programs, as informed by transformative learning theory, to new pedagogical frameworks that are capable of achieving similar results. Virtual study abroad and domestic study away programs represent two promising strategies for achieving global engagement outcomes that are comparable to traditional study abroad programs, and in some ways superior. By embracing these types of theory-based pedagogies, higher-education institutions can continue to be deeply engaged in the promotion and development of global engagement competencies among students and faculty even in the age of COVID-19 and other daunting challenges.

Declaration on University Global Engagement

According to the American Council on Education, “comprehensive internationalization” as it relates to university campuses entails a variety of interconnected components, including articulated institutional

commitment; administrative structure and staffing; curriculum, cocurriculum, and learning outcomes; faculty policies and practices; student mobility; and collaboration and partnerships (Peterson & Helms, 2013). Efforts to strengthen each of these components have become an important priority for many higher-education institutions in recent years as they seek to broaden and strengthen global engagement efforts (van der Wende, 2017).

As one encouraging example of this trend, President Ángel Cabrera of George Mason University led a group of international education leaders in 2017 in the development of a Declaration on University Global Engagement (Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.). Along with widespread endorsement by numerous universities across multiple nations, the declaration has been signed by several organizations, associations, and institutes such as the American Council on Education, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, the Institute of International Education, and NAFSA: Association of International Educators (Signatories – Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.).

Significantly, the pledge is student oriented, competency-based, and specifically commits higher-education institutions to “educating students who can successfully live and work in our globally connected world and change it for the better” (Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.). Such strengths and abilities among university graduates will be essential as the world continues to face difficult geopolitical, social, cultural, and health challenges.

In order to achieve this outcome, the pledge (Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.) commits universities to a series of five actions, including:

- Developing the global competence of all students so they have the skills to productively engage with individuals from different cultural and national backgrounds.
- Increasing our students’ understanding of the most pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges facing the world today.
- Significantly increasing student physical and virtual mobility across nations so that many more of our students experience realities outside their domestic contexts and deepen their understanding of challenges and opportunities in other parts of the world.
- Committing to cross-border and cross-sector research, knowledge sharing, and innovation in collaboration with our public and private stakeholders in pursuit of novel solutions to the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals].
- Communicating publicly about the progress and importance of our global engagement.

The development of this declaration, the articulation of the outcomes it strives for, ongoing efforts to achieve the five actions it proposes, and the broad endorsement of the declaration by many key stakeholders are all deeply positive signs of a higher-education system that is committed to “discovering, producing, and sharing new solutions to the world’s most pressing problems” (Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.). Implementing these five pledged actions, however, has become increasingly difficult due to a number of unexpected and troubling developments.

Global Engagement Under Fire

As part of its University Futures Project, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Economic Development’s Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) published a 2006 report titled “Four Future Scenarios for Higher Education” (CERI, 2006). Some scenarios were predicated on expectations of greater cooperation among countries, the expansion of international networks, advances in civil society, and a growing culture of openness. At the time, there seemed to be widespread optimism that these underlying currents would characterize ever-greater levels of global engagement and interconnectedness among universities and well-trained students (CERI, 2006).

Of the four scenarios, Scenario 2, “Serving Local Communities,” however, envisioned a darker future in which university global engagement would shrink based on a backlash against globalization, a stronger emphasis on nationalistic agendas, and skepticism in regard to internationalization due to the pervasiveness of terror attacks, threats of war, concerns about the loss of national identity, and intense political debate surrounding the perceived threats of immigration (CERI, 2006). Sadly, many aspects of this scenario, by far the bleakest and most unanticipated of the four, have become present-day challenges facing the internationalization and global engagement initiatives of universities (van der Wende, 2017).

Indeed, if anything, Scenario 2 understates the current challenges facing higher education in relation to the promotion of global engagement. Marijk van der Wende (2017) noted that support for open borders, multilateral trade, and cooperation are being weakened as evidenced by walls being built, borders closing down, and rising populist tendencies that reject internationalism. And all of these forces were in full swing when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The Impact of COVID-19 on University Global Engagement

The COVID-19 crisis has in many ways exacerbated the geopolitical challenges outlined above, while at the same time dealing a crushing blow to the specific role of international education and education abroad in the promotion of university global engagement (Brimmer, 2020; Rumbley, 2020). All aspects of comprehensive internationalization are being challenged by COVID-19, but especially the development of global

curriculum, faculty practices related to global engagement, student mobility, and international collaboration (Chan, 2020).

Since the arrival of COVID-19, for example, ongoing changes and challenges to visa requirements and eligibility for international students and scholars in the United States has universities and international students deeply concerned (Department of Homeland Security, 2020). It has been argued in the media that the proposed changes “could devastate science research and tech innovation nationwide”—and that it sends the message that international students and scholars are “not wanted” in the United States (Schnell, 2020). In the spirit of populism and nationalism, the current proposal indicates that national security trumps openness and exchange. Without providing any evidence that international students and scholars pose a new or growing national security threat, the justification for international student and scholar visa restrictions nevertheless states that “This change would provide the Department with additional protections and mechanisms to exercise the oversight necessary to vigorously enforce our nation’s immigration laws, protect the integrity of these nonimmigrant programs, and promptly detect national security threats” (Department of Homeland Security, 2020). The proposal is being vigorously contested by many universities and organizations (NAFSA, n.d.-a). In the meantime, the education of students is being interrupted, lives are in chaos, and the financial impact to students, universities, and the Midwest college towns where these students live is substantial (Fischer & Whatley, n.d.; Gewin, 2020; Schnell, 2020).

Additionally, COVID-19 has ground the US study abroad complex to a halt, inflicting hardships on offices, institutions, and other entities that are funded in part by participant fees. At the same time, a large cohort of students has been denied the unique and powerful learning opportunities that experiential, study abroad programs afford. The potential role these traveling students and scholars could have played in integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension back into their communities and home institutions’ learning culture has been correspondingly diminished (Brimmer, 2020; Mitic, 2020).

Attempts to redirect global learning to technologically based, virtual, and online formats have been hampered—especially on the global stage—by unequal levels of, and access to, distance education technologies among institutions, educators, and students. Finally, US border closures, travel restrictions, and visa changes have reduced the flow of international students, researchers and educators into US higher-education institutions, and have thereby had a severe negative impact on the intellectual and cultural contributions of these visitors—not to mention a significant economic impact (NAFSA Financial Impact Survey Summary Brief, n.d.-b). At the time the crisis broke, for example, there were over 1,000,000 international students studying in the US contributing \$48,000,000,000 to the economy and supporting 458,000 jobs (Brimmer, 2020).

In short, as national borders close, geopolitical events provoke hostilities, populist tendencies undermine open and equitable societies, and the COVID-19 pandemic rages, fulfilling the Declaration on University

Global Engagement pledge and realizing the internationalization of university campuses grows increasingly difficult (Table 1).

Table 1
Challenges Posed by Current Geopolitical and Pandemic Disruptions in Relation to the Five Actions Proposed by the Declaration on University Global Engagement

Current Geopolitical and Pandemic Crisis	Five Actions of Univ. Declaration
Populism Creates Skepticism Regarding Internationalization	Develop Global Competence and Engagement Skills of All Students
Nationalistic Agendas Diminish Global Concerns	Increase Student Understanding of Global Challenges
Travel Restrictions Halt Education Abroad	Increase Student Mobility to Experience Global Realities
International Students and Scholars are Hampered in Studies and Research by Visa Restrictions	Enhance Cross-border, Cross-sector Knowledge and Information Sharing
Importance of Global Engagement and Internationalization is Questioned	Communicate about Progress and Importance of Global Engagement Efforts

Due to these challenges and the threats they pose, it is becoming vitally important to take immediate, proactive steps to reframe strategies for achieving the ideals championed by the University Commitment to Global Engagement (Brimmer, 2020; Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.; van der Wende, 2017). Given that the five actions promoted by the Declaration on University Global Engagement are student-oriented and competency-based, one promising avenue that should be explored involves the development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative, theory-driven pedagogies that can lead to student mastery of the competencies described in the five actions—even within the current geopolitical environment and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Traditional Role of Study Abroad

One area where concrete action can be taken is in relation to strategies for maintaining study-abroad-type programs and experiences. Indeed, traditional study abroad programs have been one of the primary avenues for “educating students who can successfully live and work in our globally connected world and change it for the better” (Collins, 2019; Maharaja, 2018; Tarrant et al., 2014). The number of US students studying abroad has grown by 40% since 2008, exceeding 340,000 participants annually (Open Doors/Fast Facts, 2019), and over 90% of US higher-education institutions offer some type of study abroad program (Hoffa & Depaul, 2010). Study abroad programs that utilize sound pedagogy have been shown to promote intercultural competence, global awareness, global citizenry, and self-confidence in the face of growing diversity and globalization (Bai et al., 2016; Tarrant et al., 2014). Among past study abroad participants, such programs can also lead to higher levels of long-term civic engagement, philanthropy, global engagement, and voluntary

simplicity (i.e. avoidance of materialism and conspicuous consumption) (Murphy et al., 2014; Paige et al., 2009).

Decades of research have identified a number of best practices in relation to study abroad pedagogy that are associated with outcomes consistent with the Declaration on University Global Engagement. In general, successful study abroad programs require skillful instruction and facilitation, deep levels of culturally respectful engagement, and adherence to ethical principles and standards (Gammonley et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2019).

Faculty Engagement

For short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs, one study found that instructor facilitation of spontaneous learning, combined with the instructor's commitment to the importance and value of intercultural learning, was the most important variable predicting significant gains among students in intercultural development from pre- to post-travel (Anderson et al., 2016). High impact instructors placed emphasis on taking advantage of in-country teaching moments as they occurred rather than rigorously following the content outline for their course. This strategy allowed students to engage in an ongoing evaluation of their own value systems and assumptions, which helped them better comprehend content topics with greater appreciation for diverse perspectives (Anderson et al., 2016). More broadly, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to prepare clear, strong academic content that gains added value by being taught abroad (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

The Centrality of Community Voice and Local Knowledge

As noted above, the role of engaged faculty members is paramount in designing courses that not only are academically strong, but also value intercultural competence and take spontaneous advantage of teaching moments. Of equal importance, perhaps, is a faculty-led course design that shares the stage with local instructors and experts who can provide an authentic voice for local knowledge in a community-based setting (Collins, 2019; Hartman et al., 2018). Being exposed to local knowledge by community members allows students to broaden perspectives that can build intercultural understanding and competence. It can also be immensely rewarding for local community members who feel that their long-held values and knowledge are being respected (Collins, 2019; Hartman et al., 2018).

Participatory Approaches

Numerous studies show that experiential education, service learning engagement, practicum-type experiences, students as researchers, or other participatory approaches can be powerful catalysts for developing new understandings and perspectives that strengthen intercultural competence, global awareness,

and global citizenry among study abroad participants (Dyjack et al., 2001; Wasner, 2016). Whatever form the local integration takes, students learn best in programs that put them in direct contact with the host community, engaged in meaningful activities that have relevance to both the student and the community members (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Hou, 2018; Strange & Gibson, 2017). This adds the additional burden on the faculty leader of being adept at facilitating experiential learning (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection

Critical thinking and reflection have become essential components of well-designed study abroad programs (Hartman et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2011). Reflection becomes a catalyst for converting experiences and new understandings into new and sometimes transformative perspectives (Perry et al., 2012; Savicki & Price, 2017). Guided reflection can include prompts for daily journaling, group discussions, or reflection papers tied to specific experiences (Elverson & Klawiter, 2019). One study found that guided reflection methods helped promote critical thinking in relation to course concepts; inspired students to process the experience in a meaningful manner; and helped students make important connections between academic concepts, experiences, and service learning activities (Elverson & Klawiter, 2019). Another study used technology-mediated reflection activities that helped students become more aware of their surroundings and increase their levels of cultural awareness (Lomicka & Ducate, 2019). Many returning study abroad participants are given further opportunities to internalize new perspectives by becoming study abroad ambassadors at their institutions and sharing transformative experiences with others (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Mitic, 2020).

A Theoretical Framework for Moving Forward

Transformative learning theory provides useful constructs for developing new pedagogies that align closely with best practices and desired outcomes associated with study abroad programs (Bain & Yaklin, 2019). This alignment of theory and practice (if applied creatively) can provide a well-adapted and well-researched format for testing and evaluating innovative pedagogies designed to promote intercultural competence and global citizenship skills among students (Bell et al., 2016; Chwialkowska, 2020; Hartman et al., 2018; Table 2).

Table 2
Alignment of Transformative Learning Theory with Study Abroad Best Practices

Transformative Learning Theory	Study Abroad Best Practices
Cultivate Experiential Intelligence, Holistic Learning, and Transformative Perspectives	Develop Intercultural Competence, Global Citizenship, and Personal Development Skills
Question and Rethink Assumptions about One's Own World View	Create Deep Engagement with Diverse Communities and Local Knowledge
Be Immersed in Disruptive Experiences and Active Learning	Maximize Participator, Experiential Learning
Use Critical Thinking and Reflection to Foster Understanding	Engage in Guided Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Learning Activities
Transform Global Perspectives and Develop New Frames of Reference	Share Experiences and Transformative Outcomes Realized through Deep Self-Reflection

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1997) has evolved into one of the most robust and heavily researched theories underpinning modern approaches to adult learning (Biasin, 2018; Kitchenham, 2008). Of particular interest, transformative learning theory (TLT) is considered a useful construct for reframing higher-education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction—such as the current challenges discussed above (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015).

TLT posits that immersion in uncomfortable or disruptive situations, in tandem with deep reflection, critical thinking, and active learning, enables students to reassess their assumptions about the world and arrive at transformative perspectives with increasingly robust frames of reference (Strange & Gibson, 2017). These new perspectives become the foundation for positive, long-term behavioral changes (Schalkwyk et al., 2019). All of these TLT pedagogical techniques have been applied and studied within the context of study abroad programs for many years (Chwialkowska, 2020; Myers et al., 2005; Perry et al., 2012; Sobania, 2015).

Fortunately, there are evolving pedagogical strategies for achieving the transformative benefits of study abroad programs, even without the opportunity to travel or engage on site with international partners. Using the tenets of TLT and best practices from study abroad programs, these emerging avenues for achieving global engagement outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent geopolitical challenges are worth understanding and pursuing.

Virtual and Domestic Study Abroad as Viable Alternatives

Several fruitful ideas have been put forward that include virtual education abroad, domestic study away, faculty-led programming, and global education at home (Phillips & Riner, 2018; Whalen, 2020). Two options that seem promising are virtual study abroad and domestic study away.

Virtual Study Abroad

Rapidly evolving and highly effective educational technologies, including virtual design studios (Dave & Danahy, 2000), have created an opportunity to create virtual study abroad experiences that achieve many of the same benefits as traditional study abroad programs (Amerson, 2020; Hilliker, 2020). Case studies (Lipinski, 2014; Pertusa-Seva & Stewart, 2000) and road maps are beginning to emerge that can provide a template for creating robust, virtual study abroad programs that build upon transformative learning theory and incorporate traditional study abroad best practices (Amerson, 2020; Coleman & Chafer, 2010).

One early attempt at creating a virtual study abroad experience was designed for students enrolled in the Spanish curriculum at the University of Kentucky (Pertusa-Seva & Stewart, 2000). The creation of the Segovia Virtual Study Abroad Program was prompted by the acknowledgement that study abroad experiences were very valuable for language learners (linguistically and culturally), but only a small portion of students were able to participate in distant, costly study abroad programs. The intent was to bring the benefits of study abroad to a broader audience by creating a virtual experience. The Segovia Virtual Study Abroad Program created a virtual connection between campus-based students and an existing, semester-based study abroad program taking place in Segovia, Spain. In the traditional study abroad program, students live with local families and attend Spanish language classes at a private academy (Pertusa-Seva & Stewart, 2000).

In the 12-week virtual program, a website-based interface was created that included student biographies, portraits, an album of photographs taken by students and the program director, and student journal entries about their experiences. Two language composition classes at the University of Kentucky, and traditional study abroad students already in Segovia, used the platform to make observations, ask questions, and provide responses to each other using an electronic bulletin board. This strategy allowed for meaningful exchanges between students based at the University of Kentucky campus and traditional study abroad students studying in Segovia. A series of “contact assignments” provided opportunities for engagement between students in each group related to study abroad students’ routines, daily life, excursions, and independent travel. For study abroad students in Segovia, the assignments provided opportunities for critical thinking and self-reflection that enhanced their study abroad learning experience. For students on the University of Kentucky campus, the engagement stimulated their interest in learning about culture and language and pursuing future study abroad opportunities (Pertusa-Seva & Stewart, 2000).

A more recent effort to create a virtual study abroad experience involved linking two classrooms, one at Middle Tennessee State University and one at the University of Pécs in Pécs, Hungary (Lipinski, 2014). After working through logistical and technological challenges, instructors for each classroom chose a common textbook, developed the curriculum, and created learning activities that could take advantage of the joint, one-hour class periods, as well as out of class activities that engaged students from both classrooms. A primary objective was to get the students from each classroom to work together. Technology was used to help students

work together on case studies and other out-of-class assignments. Student feedback was very positive in relation to the program objectives of increasing international cultural awareness and stimulating interest in pursuing traditional study abroad experiences in the future (Lipinski, 2014). Other current research papers have reported strong educational gains in global citizenship skills through virtual classroom interchanges with international partners (Bothara et al., 2020; Hilliker, 2020; Wojenski, 2019).

Amerson (2020) has suggested a number of pedagogical strategies for achieving global engagement competencies without study abroad. In addition to collaborative online international learning (COIL), similar to the examples overviewed above, she recommends global health blogs, mapping vulnerable populations, international collaboration on case studies, and study-abroad-type engagements with local communities and cultures in the immediate vicinity (Amerson, 2020). This leads us to a more thorough exploration of study abroad at home or domestic study away as viable options for developing global competency skills.

Domestic Study Away

A key principle of study abroad experiences is to “not forget home,” implying that many issues that characterize international settings (e.g., diverse cultures, languages, income levels, etc.) can often be found domestically, even in the near vicinity of home campuses (Amerson, 2020; K. Fischer, 2015b). Domestic off-campus programs can be designed and implemented in ways that achieve many of the benefits associated with traditional study abroad programs (Sobania, 2015; Soria & Troisi, 2014).

A study by Coyer et al. (2019) used qualitative research methods to evaluate the potential of a local, service-based, experiential learning opportunity to yield global learning outcomes. In this study, students cooked meals collaboratively with underserved populations while applying food preparation and planning skills. Student discussion groups met weekly to reflect on experiences, discuss progress and make plans. Learning activities were designed and outcomes assessed using constructs of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1997). Based on an analysis of student responses, the researchers concluded that a number of emerging domains mapped well to global learning objectives and provided promising evidence that local, community-based experiences can foster student learning outcomes associated with global engagement competencies (Coyer et al., 2019).

In a similar study, nursing students in New York City were immersed in partnership-driven, sustainable, community-based projects within their own city (Lane et al., 2017). Traditional study abroad best practices of reflection, community interaction, and faculty engagement were built into the program and led to explorations of global issues and trends, along with social and cultural issues and needs at the local level. As a result of the experience, researchers found that student perspectives were broadened, cross-cultural competencies developed, and the ability to apply nursing skills in diverse settings strengthened. The authors

concluded that domestic study away led to intercultural competence gains similar to more traditional study abroad programs (Lane et al., 2017).

As a push back to growing levels of global populism, Toms (2018) argues that greater efforts are needed at home to engage students in domestic-based global learning experiences that can help students analyze, understand, and engage with the complex realities that face the nation and the world. She presents a case study involving a partnership with a local food bank where students can “apply the theory and practice of global civic commitments through place-based, experiential inquiry” (Toms, 2018, p. 77). She concluded that deep commitment to and understanding of local place, culture, needs, and engagements is foundational to the broader ambitions of global outreach.

In addition to domestic study away, internationalization efforts on home campuses may be of significant importance. Based on a large-scale study of students’ participation in traditional study abroad versus participation in on-campus global/international activities, Soria and Troisi (2014) found that on-campus participation involving global/international coursework, engagement with international students, and participation in global/international cocurricular activities may actually yield greater student benefits in relation to the development of global, international, and intercultural competencies (Soria & Troisi, 2014).

Table 3

Critical Parallels Between: Challenges Posed by Current Geopolitical and Pandemic Disruptions; Five Actions Proposed by the Declaration on University Global Engagement; Constructs of Transformative Learning Theory; and Study Abroad Best Practices

Current Geopolitical and Pandemic Crisis	Five Actions of Univ. Declaration	Transformative Learning Theory	Study Abroad Best Practices
Populism Creates Skepticism Regarding Internationalization	Develop Global Competence and Engagement Skills of All Students	Cultivate Experiential Intelligence, Holistic Learning, and Transformative Perspectives	Develop Intercultural Competence, Global Citizenship, and Personal Development Skills.
Nationalistic Agendas Diminish Global Concerns	Increase Student Understanding of Global Challenges	Question and Rethink Assumptions about One’s Own World View	Create Deep Engagement with Diverse Communities and Local Knowledge
Travel Restrictions Halt Education Abroad	Increase Student Mobility to Experience Global Realities	Be Immersed in Disruptive Experiences and Active Learning	Maximize Participatory, Experiential Learning
International Students and Scholars are Hampered in Studies and Research by Visa Restrictions	Enhance Cross-border, Cross-sector Knowledge and Information Sharing	Use Critical Thinking and Reflection to Foster Understanding	Engage in Guided Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Learning Activities
Importance of Global Engagement and Internationalization is Questioned	Communicate about Progress and Importance of Global Engagement Efforts	Transform Global Perspectives and Develop New Frames of Reference	Share Experiences and Transformative Outcomes Realized through Deep Self-Reflection

Putting it All Together

One major criticism of study abroad programs is that they do not reach a large number of students, especially those from diverse backgrounds and those with financial or other constraints (K. Fischer, 2015a; Lipinski, 2014; Mullen, 2014; Pertusa-Seva & Stewart, 2000). In 2017–2018 only 1.9% of all US students participated in a study abroad experience (Open Doors, 2019). For that reason alone, pedagogical strategies for achieving outcomes associated with study abroad experiences—that can reach a greater number and diversity of students—should be a priority regardless of pandemics and geopolitical issues that constrain cross-border mobility (Lipinski, 2014).

With traditional study abroad programs at a standstill due to COVID-19, and a preexisting need to provide a much larger percentage and diversity of students with global engagement opportunities and skills, this is an important moment for educators to envision, implement, and evaluate new pedagogical methods that can deliver global engagement learning outcomes similar to traditional study abroad programs. As noted, new approaches must be able to thrive not only under current complexities and crisis conditions, but in ways that can engage a much larger proportion of students from all backgrounds.

As shown in Table 3, building upon the alignment between transformative learning theory and traditional study abroad best practices, virtual study abroad and domestic study away programs are two instructional candidates for broadening the reach of student engagement and moving forward in meeting the five actions proposed by the Declaration on University Global Engagement—even in the midst of complexity and crisis (Coyer et al., 2019; Declaration on University Global Engagement, n.d.; Schalkwyk et al., 2019).

Conclusion

It is tempting to view the COVID-19 pandemic, as it converges with a host of social, political, and cultural trends that directly impinge on the internationalization and global engagement efforts of higher-education institutions, as highly exceptional and out of the ordinary, something akin to a once-in-100-years flood. However, as with catastrophic floods that are occurring ever more regularly due to rapid climate change; the piling on of challenges to global engagement and internationalization activities is more likely to be the new norm, rather than the exception. Whether it be an inconvenient pandemic, or some other crisis of the moment, higher-education institutions may indeed continue to face unprecedented challenges to the attainment of increasingly important global engagement objectives.

The answer to these challenges will in part come from a nimble pedagogical philosophy that is able to keep one eye on desired outcomes while using the other to analyze theory-based strategies, grounded in evidence-based best practices, which can be applied in innovative ways, using new formats, to reach larger audiences while attaining enhanced outcomes. The road ahead will be bumpy, but the tools for success are in place.

Applying transformative learning theory and study abroad best practices to innovative virtual study abroad and domestic study away programs are but two examples of how this nimble pedagogical philosophy can be employed to keep the global engagement initiative alive and well in times of complexity and crisis.

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