

## [CAMPUS PRACTICE]

# Defining Global Learning at Florida International University

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Florida International University's (FIU's) institution-wide Global Learning for Global Citizenship initiative is deeply informed by our experience of place. We are Miami's first and only public research university, a Hispanic-Serving Institution with over fifty-four thousand students, 55 percent of whom depend on Pell grants to complete their studies. The majority of our graduates hail from our city, a global crossroads, and go on to spend their working lives here. Our community members' knowledge and identities are constantly evolving in response to global issues that transcend borders of all kinds. For example, flooding streets affect our view of statehood: the nearby city of South Miami, led by Mayor and FIU Biology Professor Philip Stoddard, recently passed a resolution to secede from Florida due to state lawmakers' neglect of rising sea levels (Butler 2014). Our diverse ancestry influences the way we produce and consume information: Miami is home to a proliferation of immigrant newspapers, *periodiquitos*, which cover transnational problems of interest to readers attached to both their country of origin and their country of residence (Shumow and Pinto 2014).

Miami's multicultural populace and multifaceted problems drive our approach to learning about and resolving issues we encounter. We embrace global learning, which we define as the process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders. The global learning strategies

we implement, in courses and activities at home and abroad, enable our highly diverse student body to engage with others to find connections among divergent perspectives. These connections are the bedrock upon which we learn to create innovative, equitable, sustainable solutions for our interconnected human and natural communities.

### Essential Learning

At FIU, global learning is essential—not elective—for the twenty-first century. We provide every undergraduate with multiple opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of global citizenship. Guiding the design of these opportunities is our North Star, which consists of three graduation-level outcomes: (1) **global awareness**, or knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems; (2) **global perspective**, or the ability to conduct a multiperspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems; and (3) **global engagement**, or the willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

Since fall 2010, FIU has supported students' achievement of these outcomes through a two-course global learning (GL) requirement for all undergraduates. The more than 160 faculty senate-approved GL courses that fulfill this requirement are located in nearly every academic program. These courses fall into two categories: interdisciplinary

foundations courses in the university's general education curriculum, and discipline-specific courses in major programs of study. Students entering as freshmen take one course in each category, and students transferring with sixty or more credits take two discipline-specific courses. All GL courses include active, participatory learning strategies; diverse, interdisciplinary, and intercultural content; and performance-based assessments. Students also participate in cocurricular activities to extend and enrich classroom global learning.

### Diversity, Collaboration, Problem Solving

Diversity, collaboration, and problem solving—these conditions underpin our conception of global learning and its outcomes, and they are evident in our initiative's activities and organizational structures.

Our definition of global learning emphasizes learning *with* rather than just *about* diverse others. Most FIU undergraduates identify with historically underrepresented populations that are experiencing disproportionately negative effects of global problems such as environmental degradation and income inequality. These students' voices are critical to global learning in the classroom. Instead of conceiving of education as a means of conveying privileged knowledge to passive learners, FIU engages our diverse students' valuable first-hand knowledge of the forces that underlie our world's most persistent dilemmas, including poverty, violence, and racism. These dilemmas will continue to undermine everyone's well-being until everyone's wisdom is brought to bear on their resolution.

Collaboration also is essential to global learning and to implementing mutually reinforcing GL opportunities in the curriculum and cocurriculum. To this end, FIU's Office of Global Learning Initiatives (OGLI) supports a broad

network of institutional and community partners offering not only domestic GL courses, but also study abroad programs; global living/learning communities; and international internship, service-learning, and social entrepreneurship opportunities. The OGLI provides professional development focused on course and activity design to faculty, staff, and student leaders and offers annual fellowships for research collaborations between faculty and undergraduate students. Fellowship projects generate new knowledge that researchers bring back to the classroom to facilitate engaged global learning.

Finally, all GL courses present students with opportunities to grapple collaboratively with real-world problems experienced locally and globally. For example, several of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals focus on health issues, and Florida is consistently among the top three states with the highest percentage of residents who lack medical insurance (Medalia and Smith 2014). In the interdisciplinary course *Challenges in Healthcare*, students from different majors work in teams to research the determinants of well-being in Miami's underserved neighborhoods. Using real street addresses, students use Google Earth and other sources to discover demographic variables and health markers such as the number of clinics, amount of green space, kinds of supermarkets, and cost of medicines in the area. Equipped with this information, teams design culturally appropriate health plans for families living at their assigned addresses. Classmates critique the plans and help develop concrete, diversified actions to overcome community healthcare obstacles.

### More Is Better

As powerful as a single course or activity can be, our research has found that one experience is generally not enough to develop robust, transferable GL



Florida International University students use multiple perspectives to solve a global problem. (Photo by Eduardo Merille)

outcomes. Since 2010, we have conducted a longitudinal pre/post study of student learning using the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) (Braskamp, Braskamp, and Engberg 2014), a survey with scales that align with our GL outcomes. Academic year 2013–14 was the first in which we were able to analyze a student cohort that had entered and graduated from FIU under the two-course GL requirement. It was also the first year that we found a statistically significant increase in students' average GPI scores for all survey scales (FIU 2014). Additionally, a quasi-experimental study of students' global learning revealed that those who entered GL courses having already achieved minimum levels of global awareness and perspective experienced significantly and disproportionately higher increases in these outcomes than students with little or no prior knowledge (Doscher 2012).

These results, along with student and faculty calls for more GL opportunities and Miami's ever-present need for active, prepared problem solvers, inspired us to launch the Global Learning Medallion program in fall 2014. This honor is conferred upon students who graduate having completed at least four GL courses, a significant number of GL cocurricular activities, a

capstone project, and a personal reflection. Students value the medallion as recognition of their personal successes. But we believe that the strongest benefits will accrue not to individual students alone, but to Miami, home to an ever-growing contingent of engaged global citizens. ☐

### REFERENCES

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