Understanding the “Global” in the Global Citizens Project

Sara Dykins Callahan, Instructor

“Now, what exactly is a global citizen?” I asked, my tone shaded with just a bit of skepticism.

Karla Davis-Salazar looked around the room and was met with the expectant faces of beleaguered members of the Undergraduate Council. Davis-Salazar was presenting a draft of the Global Citizen’s Project initiative, one of the many drafts that would be presented to the UGC over the coming months.

When Davis-Salazar explained that, for the purposes of this initiative, global citizenship means attention to cultural diversity with a commitment to promoting social justice and sustainability, my skepticism dissipated, and I knew I wanted to be a part of this program. Through the GCP, students are not only encouraged to develop awareness and appreciation for a wide range of cultural norms, practices, and products, but are also compelled to acknowledge responsibility for their actions and to exercise their agency.

“I’m in!” I declared when, at a later meeting, Davis-Salazar announced the formation of the first GCP Course Redesign Cohorts. “How do I apply?” After my application to convert my course, Introduction to Food Studies, was approved in September 2015, I began meeting with my GCP cohort and the GCP Learning and Development Facilitators, Sommer Mitchell and Kara Fulton, in an effort to “globalize” our courses and receive certification. In this essay, I would like to share what I found most useful about this process, starting with the collaborative examination of this currently sexy term, “global,” followed by a brief discussion of two techniques I found particularly useful in redesigning my course.

While I was excited about the premise of the GCP and its commitment to active (if not activist) principles, I was skeptical as to its actualization. Particularly questionable is the focus on what, to me, seemed a nebulous and rather empty term: global. Our first cohort meeting addressed exactly this concern. After leading us through a conversation about our colloquial and professional understandings of the term “global,” Mitchell and Fulton offered a

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Teaching Outside the Classroom

C. David Frankel, Instructor & Assistant Director

Last Fall (on October 12th, to be exact), the School of Theatre and Dance’s production of Rhinoceros closed. I served as the director of the production which means, among other things, I collaborated with a team of faculty and student designers, student stage managers and crew, and student actors all working to create a theatrical world that would hold an audience’s interest.

In the theatre, the director often provides the central vision of what that theatrical world should be, then, as much as possible, allows the other theatre artists to use their knowledge and skills to transform that vision into costumes, sets, lights, sound, and actions. In directing a college production, though, I’m always functioning as a teacher – not just a theatre artist.

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clear, relevant definition of global as it is applicable to the GCP. Global refers to the interconnectedness of systems (social, cultural, economic, political, natural, etc.) across the world. Global learning, which is one of the primary goals for students participating in the GCP, requires students engage with and critically analyze these global systems and their impacts on the sustainability of the natural world, as well as human life. Broad? Yes, purposefully so. One of the goals of the GCP is to foster connections across departments and colleges through the curriculum of GCP courses. My humanities-based Food Studies course will be meaningfully and explicitly connected to GCP certified courses in departments like Anthropology and Sociology, as well as STEM programs, by way of the three GCP Global Competencies (global awareness, responsibility, and participation).

All certified courses, no matter the discipline, must choose to focus on at least two of six GCP Course Objectives. Because my course is offered at the 3000-level and is an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of food systems, I chose to focus on Self-Awareness and Practice. While the course already addressed, implicitly, the attendant learning outcomes of these two GCP Objectives, I found the workshop’s focus on backward design invaluable in helping me to more directly identify where and how course materials, activities, and assessments supported student achievement of these outcomes. With the assistance of my peers, I was also able to identify and address gaps in the curriculum. I found a couple of the techniques offered by Mitchell and Fulton particularly useful in this process: distributed practice and building problem-based assignments.

To achieve GCP certification, courses must not only focus on global subject matter, they must also structurally manifest the GCP definition of global. Topics, even if sufficiently diverse and internationally focused, cannot be addressed in isolation. GCP courses must focus on articulating the interconnectedness of these topics. In a similar vein, materials must not be offered or skills taught in isolation. A GCP course must provide students the opportunity to revisit materials and practice skills throughout the semester. Using strategies of distributed practice increases the likelihood that students will retain information over time and master skills; it also facilitates connections between topics and ideas throughout the semester. With this in mind, I revisited my course calendar and considered the location and contents of all activities and assessments. This conscious, deliberate rethinking of my teaching strategy resulted in a revised calendar that focused less on “getting it all in” and more on making sure students have the time and opportunity to think about connections between materials, share their ideas, and practice skills.

In addition to demonstrating distributed practice, GCP courses must feature a problem-based assignment that directly engages the Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes. I already had an assignment I favored; one I had been using for years. The trick was reimagining it as the designated GCP problem-based assignment. First, I had to carefully consider my selected Course Objectives (Self-Awareness and Practice) and the attendant Learning Outcomes (also referred to as behavioral indicators): students will be able to

1) define personal values and beliefs by identifying some of the ethical and practical implications of contemporary processes of food production for individuals and societies (Self-Awareness); and
2) evaluate the impact of individual choices on local and global communities through the creation of projects that identify relevant issues and propose solutions to those issues through a relevant medium (Practice).

The key components were already present in the assignment, but I had to rearticulate the goals and parameters within a problem-solution model. The workshop proved extremely helpful as I brainstormed this repositioning. Now, the assignment clearly defines a problem for my students to tackle: How can beloved cultural rituals that reify problematic food practices be reimagined in ways that are more ethical and sustainable while retaining the cultural importance of the ritual? Whereas the assignment initially asked students to research and perform a personally relevant food ritual (including preparing a meal), it now requires that they also think critically about the implications of that ritual for all subjects involved. It asks them to think about and posit options that could be more sustainable and ethical; to acknowledge their responsibility to act. In the terms of the GCP, the assignment now asks students to demonstrate their global citizenship.

As I worked to “globalize” my Intro to Food Studies course, I was appreciative of the support and camaraderie of my GCP Course Redesign Cohort. The professional assistance I received along with the opportunity to work with peers who shared similar pedagogical interests and commitments were invaluable. And, importantly, I walked away with an improved course design that honors my original intentions and commitments while expanding the opportunities my students will have to understand and act upon their worlds.

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