

Worldview Diversity Education at Global Liberal Arts Campuses

Renee L. Bowling
The Ohio State University, USA

*Corresponding author: Email: bowling.187@osu.edu

Address: Dept. of Education Studies, 122 Ramseyer Hall, 29 W. Woodruff Ave., Columbus, OH 43210, USA

Abstract

In this emerging scholar summary, the author joins together scholarship on religion and culture and advocates for socially just education for religious understanding that is linked to global citizenship and diversity education. A comparative case study methodology that incorporates a survey and elite interviews is used to explore the manner and degree to which global liberal arts colleges and universities are engaging with religious diversity. Three axes are applied to analyze the ways education for religious understanding may function across place, space, and time within global education policy networks.

Keywords: global liberal arts, comparative case study, religious diversity, worldview

Introduction

As inclusion, equity, and diversity initiatives become increasingly foregrounded in comparative and international education (CIE) (Deardorff et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2022), it is essential to note which identities, communities, and topics are commonly excluded from the discussion. This is necessary from the perspective of seeking epistemic justice (Clarke, 2021) for Indigenous and spiritual knowledge (Lin et al., 2021), for creating equitable and inclusive campuses, and in preparing students to address global challenges. Authors in this journal have noted that intentionality is required to counter “the mainstream Anglo-American imaginary” (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020, p. 94) and to reimagine internationalization in and across contexts for the common good. Many international higher education institutions have missional commitments to develop global citizens (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020; Marinoni, 2019), yet religious, secular, and spiritual worldviews, referred to in higher education spiritual and interfaith development literature as “RSS” (Snipes & Manson, 2020), are often absent, despite their interwovenness with culture. This inquiry into leaders’ framing of education for religious understanding, also referred to as worldview diversity education (Edwards & Kitamura, 2019), is an exploratory attempt to understand the manner and degree to which global liberal arts campuses are engaging intentionally with religious diversity.

I join with scholars who link global and domestic diversity agendas from a social justice lens (Deardorff et al., 2021; Özturgut, 2017; Williams, 2013) and with those who argue for alignment between global citizenship education and worldview diversity education that champions interactional diversity (Edwards & Kitamura, 2019, Geibel, 2020). These authors share a humanistic orientation to the common good mission of the university, a rhetoric that many universities espouse but that is frequently found to be in the service of neoliberal aims (Brunner, 2022; Zhang, 2020). To counter the dominant imaginary, humanistic goals must be clearly articulated and woven into international higher education strategies and pedagogies (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020; Geibel, 2020). Thus, I propose education for religious understanding as a purposeful companion to diversity, intercultural, and global citizenship education within the expanse of global learning (Green & Hassim, 2022).

Informed by Critical Lenses

CIE and religious studies scholars frame religion and spirituality as aspects of identity, culture, and knowledge (Edwards, 2018; Lin et al., 2021; Shahjahan, 2010) that are dynamically interconnected with politics, history, and geography (Beyers, 2017; Moore, 2022; Sivasubramanian & Hayhoe, 2018).

Religion & Secularism

Higher education's neutrality on the topic of religion in many locales demonstrates a privileging of secularism in the academy that devalues what are, for many, meaningful ontologies and epistemologies (Dei et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2021; Shahjahan, 2010; Zine, 2004). Paradoxically, this secularism often functions within larger societal religious hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2020; Small, 2020) that may also be present in global liberal arts contexts. The modernist division of sacred/secular is itself asserted to be a Western construction rooted in the modern/colonial imaginary (Horii, 2019; Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017). These perspectives inform my approach to the study from a critical internationalization studies lens (Stein & McCartney, 2021).

Critical and Decolonial Approaches to Internationalization

My racial, citizenship, and religious heritages as a White American Protestant Christian, experiences living and working in religiously plural contexts, and the histories in which contemporary religion and education are embedded, including Christian privilege and secular bias in Western-patterned institutions, sensitize me to the importance of decolonial and contextualized approaches to education for religious understanding (Edwards, 2016, 2018; Shahjahan et al., 2021; Vázquez, 2015). Similarly, a critical approach to qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2022) informs my posture toward both the inquiry – rejecting objective neutrality – and people: valuing leaders as collaborators and fellow human beings, not sources of data. In response to authors who advocate for the explicit naming of values in comparative education research (Appadurai, 1990; Hayhoe, 2021), I disclose that I am motivated by my faith to seek decolonial and contextual approaches to education for religious understanding to enhance global justice and peace.

Research Questions

The forthcoming study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent education about religious diversity is a concern of global liberal arts colleges and universities;
- (2) How it is expressed by senior leaders in relation to select campuses' purposes, priorities, or initiatives;
- (3) What approaches to worldview diversity education are these campuses adopting and why.

Purpose of the Study

The study explores the extent to which education about religious diversity is an area of attention at global liberal arts colleges and universities (GLAC&U) through the perceptions of senior university leaders. Building on research by

Godwin (2013, 2015a, 2015b) and others (Bowling, in press; Boyle, 2022; Jung et al., 2019; Yang, 2016), GLAC&U are self-identifying campuses that combine interdisciplinary undergraduate teaching with foci on the liberal arts and developing students' global citizenship. As of a decade ago, there were over 200 global liberal arts programs located outside of North America (Godwin, 2013), including international branch campuses and American Universities Abroad (Long, 2018), although most GLAC&U campuses partner with a regional institution (Godwin, 2015b). As institutions characterized by an intentionally high degree of student mobility and internationalization of the curriculum, they are environments poised for interactional worldview diversity.

Conceptual Framework

I follow Rizvi and Lingard (2010) in conceptualizing educational practices and discourses as policy that can be studied across global networks and flows. Responding to calls for multidisciplinary research from international education scholars (Ball et al., 2017; Carnoy, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Stromquist, 2002), the study considers qualitative nuance, layers of culture and context, and global education networks and policyscapes. I incorporate concepts such as *connected sociologies* (Bhambra, 2014) from the social sciences, ecological network theory (Neal & Neal, 2013), and complexity leadership theories (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009) to understand global higher education leadership and global education practices as adaptive, emergent, and connected. Higher education interfaith development studies have underscored the importance of interactional diversity for students' growth in a "pluralism orientation" (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 2), convergent with its importance for intercultural learning (Geibel, 2020). In keeping with a critical lens, I incorporate Stein's (2021) matrix of internationalization rationales and purposefully decenter Western individualistic and belief-centered understandings of religion, instead conceptualizing religion and culture as interconnected and related to belonging and practice for many communities (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Edwards, 2018; Iliško, 2017; Sivasubramanian & Hayhoe, 2018). Leaders, too, are conceptualized as embedded in religious cultures and both shape and are shaped by the policyscapes in which they move.

Methodology

Research Method

To study multiple levels and layers of CIE, including the local, regional, and transnational across space, place, and time, I selected Bartlett and Vavrus' (2016; 2020) comparative case study (CCS) methodology. It is compatible with my critical realist (Maxwell, 2012) view of a Reality of which there are multiple situated perspectives. Given that "internationalization is less about geographic location and more about the participants involved" (Geibel, 2020, p. 72), CCS studies "look at how policies or processes unfold, influenced by actors and events over time, in different locations, and at different scales, including transnationally" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009, p. 1). I focus on approaches to education for religious understanding as the unit of analysis across three axes. A horizontal axis guides comparison across sites, a vertical axis by scales ranging from local campuses to regions to transnationally, and the transversal axis is used to trace networks and policyscapes temporally. In CCS methodology, contexts are viewed as constructed (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019) and research is seen as an iterative process.

Stages of the Study

The study will unfold in two stages. In the first stage, I broadly survey GLAC&U campuses to better understand the landscape of education for religious understanding. From this pool, a smaller sample of three to five senior leaders will be purposively selected for the second stage of elite interviews. Selection criteria were established to capture variation in approaches to religious diversity and a range of senior positions relevant to worldview diversity education. The survey incorporates network generator questions to aid in mapping approaches to global education policy discourses.

Analysis

Emergent networks and descriptive statistics will be analyzed post-survey. Prior to the interviews, I will explore the historical and contextual background of the campuses and their regions, and following the interviews I will extend member check opportunities to center leaders' meanings and interpretations. The three axes of CCS serve as both guides and analytic tools of the developing inquiry. I will utilize codebook thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and may incorporate mapping and network visualization tools that may be incorporated per the developing inquiry. Given the iterative, qualitative nature of the study and the potential for positionality issues with elite interviewing (Dexter, 2006), the study incorporates reflexive memoing and audit trail practices.

Conclusion

As a proponent of socially just international education for the common good, I am keenly aware of the harm that has been done by linking religion and education in the past and of the damage done in the present by divorcing religious worldviews from global learning. This includes harm done to students whose worldviews are marginalized or unwelcome in higher education, and to global society, which needs future leaders capable of navigating RSS diversity to solve global challenges. I advocate for the intentional inclusion of decolonial and contextual approaches to worldview diversity in conversation with other types of diversity as a necessary component of global learning. Through this comparative case study, I aim to explore the extent to which religious, spiritual, and secular diversity are being addressed on global liberal arts college and university campuses, and the larger policyscapes that approaches to education for religious understanding may be embedded in.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7(2–3), 295–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>
- Ball, S. J., Junemann, C., & Santori, D. (2017). *Edu.net: Globalisation and education policy mobility*. Routledge.
- Banton, M., & Geertz, C. (Eds.). (1966). Religion as a cultural system. In *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–44). Frederick A. Praeger Publishers.
- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2016). *Rethinking case study research: A comparative approach*. Taylor & Francis.
- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2019). Rethinking the concept of “context” in comparative research [Ch. 11]. In R. Gorur, S. Sellar, & G. Steiner-Khamsi (Eds.), *World yearbook of education 2019: Comparative methodology in the era of big data and global networks* (pp. 187–201). Routledge.
- Benson, P. L., & Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2008). Spiritual development: A missing priority in youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2008(118), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.253>
- Beyers, J. (2017). Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative. *HTS: Theological Studies*, 73(1), 1–9.
- Bhambra, G. K. (2014). *Connected sociologies*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2022). Embedding critical, creative, and contemplative data analysis in interview studies. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview* (pp. 371–389). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Blumenfeld, W. J. (2020). Challenging Christian hegemony and Christian privilege in academia. In R. Papa (Ed.), *Handbook on promoting social justice in education* (pp. 2387–2416). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14625-2_113
- Bowling, R. L. (In press). Global liberal arts colleges and universities: A source of critical hope. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*.
- Boyle, M.-E. (2022). Global liberal education: Contradictory trends and heightened controversy. *International Higher Education*, 109, 13–15. <https://doi.org/10.36197/IHE.2022.109.06>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I *not* use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360>

- Brunner, L. R. (2022). 'Edugration' as a wicked problem: The ethics of higher education-migration. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 13(5(S)), Article 5(S). <https://ojed.org/index.php/jcihe/article/view/4061>
- Carney, S. (2009). Negotiating policy in an age of globalization: Exploring educational "policyscapes" in Denmark, Nepal, and China. *Comparative Education Review*, 53(1), 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.1086/593152>
- Carnoy, M. (2021). The changing face of comparative education: A personal retrospective. In B. Lindsay (Ed.), *Comparative and international education* (pp. 25–42). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64290-7_2
- Castiello-Gutiérrez, S. (2020). *Purposeful internationalization: A common-good approach of global engagement* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 3747415). <https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v11iWinter.1539>
- Clarke, L. (2021). "To educate and liberate?": Moving from coloniality to postcoloniality in the international branch campus model. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 13(5), 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v13i5.3655>
- Deardorff, D. K., de Wit, H., Leask, B., Charles, H., & Marmolejo, F. (Eds.). (2021). *Handbook of international higher education* (2nd ed.). Stylus Publishing.
- Dei, G. J. S., O'Sullivan, E., Morrell, A., & O'Connor, M. (2016). Spiritual knowing and transformative learning. In *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning: Essays on theory and praxis* (pp. 121–133). Springer.
- Dexter, L. A. (2006). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. ECPR Press.
- Edwards, S. (2016). *Critical conversations about religion: Promises and pitfalls of a social justice approach to interfaith dialogue*. Information Age Publishing.
- Edwards, S. (2018). Distinguishing between belief and culture: A critical perspective on religious identity. *Journal of College and Character*, 19(3), 201–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2018.1481097>
- Geibel, W. R. (2020). A pedagogy of student mobility: Facilitating humanistic outcomes in internationalization and student mobility. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 12(Spring), 67–77.
- Godwin, K. A. (2013). *The global emergence of liberal education: A comparative and exploratory study* [Dissertation, Boston College]. <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:104384>
- Godwin, K. A. (2015a). The counter narrative: Critical analysis of liberal education in global context. *New Global Studies*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2015-0033>
- Godwin, K. A. (2015b). The worldwide emergence of liberal education. *International Higher Education*, 79, 2-4. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2015.79.5835>
- Green, C., & Hassim, E. (2022, March 2). *The CIS model for global citizenship and intercultural learning* [Blog]. CIS Perspectives. <https://www.cois.org/about-cis/news/post/~board/perspectives-blog/post/the-cis-model-for-global-citizenship-and-intercultural-learning>
- Hayhoe, R. (2021). Comparative education and the dialogue among civilizations. In B. Lindsay (Ed.), *Comparative and international education* (pp. 71–84). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64290-7_2
- Horii, M. (2019). Historicizing the category of "religion" in sociological theories: Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. *Critical Research on Religion*, 7(1), 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303218800369>
- Hunter, F., McAllister-Grande, B., Proctor, D., & de Wit, H. (2022). The evolving definitions of internationalization: A question of values. In H. Deardorff, H. de Wit, B. Leask, H. Charles, & F. Marmolejo (Eds.), *Handbook of international higher education* (2nd ed., pp. 53–74). Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Iliško, D. (2017). Worldview education as a viable perspective for educating global citizens. In M. de Souza & A. Halhoff's (Eds.), *Re-enchanting education and spiritual wellbeing: Fostering belonging and meaning-making for global citizens*. Routledge.
- Jung, I., Sanderson, S., & Fajardo, J. C. C. (2019). The core curriculum: An analysis of liberal arts colleges in Asia, North America, and Europe. In M. Nishimura & T. Sasao (Eds.), *Doing liberal arts education* (pp. 7–19).
- Lichtenstein, B., Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., Seers, A., Orton, J., & Schreiber, C. (2006). Complexity leadership theory: An interactive perspective on leading in complex adaptive systems. *Management Department Faculty Publications*. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/managementfacpub/8>
- Lin, J., Stoltz, A., Aruch, M., & Rapoport, A. (2021). Decolonization and transformation of higher education for sustainability: Integrating indigenous knowledge into policy, teaching, research, and practice. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 13(Summer), 134–156. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v13iSummer.3255>
- Long, K. A. (2018). Battle of the brand: Independent "American" universities abroad. *International Higher Education*, 95, 4–5. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10716>

- Marinoni, G. (2019). *Internationalization of higher education: An evolving landscape, locally and globally* (Executive Summary No. 5th; IAU Global Survey). International Association of Universities.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Correia, B. P., Crandall, R. E., Lo, M. A., & Associates. (2016). *Emerging interfaith trends: What college students are saying about religion in 2016*. Interfaith America. <https://www.interfaithamerica.org/research/emerging-interfaith-trends-report/>
- Moore, D. L. (2022). Diminishing religious literacy: Methodological assumptions and analytical frameworks for promoting the public understanding of religion. In A. Dinham & M. Francis (Eds.), *Religious literacy in policy and practice* (pp. 27–38). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447316671.003>
- Neal, J. W., & Neal, Z. P. (2013). Nested or networked? Future directions for ecological systems theory. *Social Development*, 22(4), 722–737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12018>
- Özturgut, O. (2017). Internationalization for diversity, equity, and inclusion. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice Vol. 17(6) 2017*, 17(6), 83–91.
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203867396>
- Shahjahan, R. A. (2010). Toward a spiritual praxis: The role of spirituality among faculty of color teaching for social justice. *The Review of Higher Education*, 33(4), 473–512. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.0.0166>
- Shahjahan, R. A., Estera, A. L., Surla, K. L., & Edwards, K. T. (2021). “Decolonizing” curriculum and pedagogy: A comparative review across disciplines and global higher education contexts. *Review of Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211042423>
- Sivasubramanian, M., & Hayhoe, R. (2018). *Religion and education: Comparative and international perspectives*. Symposium Books.
- Small, J. L. (2020). *Critical religious pluralism in higher education: A social justice framework to support religious diversity*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Snipes, J. T., & Manson, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Remixed and reimagined: Innovations in religion, spirituality, and (inter)faith in higher education*. Myers Education Press.
- Stein, S. (2021). Critical internationalization studies at an impasse: Making space for complexity, uncertainty, and complicity in a time of global challenges. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(9), 1771–1784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1704722>
- Stein, S., & de Oliveira Andreotti, V. (2017). Higher education and the modern/colonial global imaginary. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 17(3), 173–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616672673>
- Stein, S., & McCartney, D. M. (2021). Emerging conversations in critical internationalization studies. *Journal of International Students*, 11(S1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11iS1.3840>
- Stromquist, N. P. (2002). *Education in a globalized world: The connectivity of economic power, technology, and knowledge*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Marion, R. (2009). Complexity leadership in bureaucratic forms of organizing: A meso model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(4), 631–650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.04.007>
- Vavrus, F., & Bartlett, L. (Eds.). (2009). *Critical approaches to comparative education: Vertical case studies from Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas*. Springer.
- Vázquez, R. (2015). Decolonial practices of learning. In J. Friedman, V. Haverkate, B. Oomen, E. Park, & M. Sklad (Eds.), *Going glocal in higher education: The theory, teaching and measurement of global citizenship* (pp. 94–102). University College Roosevelt.
- Williams, D. A. (2013). *Strategic diversity leadership: Activating change and transformation in higher education*. Stylus Publishing.
- Yang, R. (2016). The east-west axis? Liberal arts education in East Asian universities. In I. Jung, M. Nishimura, & T. Sasao (Eds.), *Liberal arts education and colleges in East Asia* (pp. 27–37). Springer.
- Zhang, Y. (2020). Internationalization higher education for what? An analysis of national strategies of higher education internationalization in East Asia. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 12(6S1), Article 6S1. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v12i6S1.3077>
- Zine, J. (2004). Creating a critical faith-centered space for antiracist feminism: Reflections of a Muslim scholar-activist. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20(2), 167–187. <https://doi.org/10.2979/FSR.2004.20.2.167>

RENEE L. BOWLING is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University, USA. Her research interests include comparative international education, educational leadership, religious diversity and literacy, and education policy. For more information or to participate in the study: <https://u.osu.edu/bowling-187/>. bowling.187@osu.edu