"We Come From Different Countries, But We All Have One Earth": Enhancing Intercultural Competencies Through International and Domestic Student Service Learning

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ABSTRACT

Increasing international enrollments at U.S. universities and the benefits of cross-cultural interactions among domestic and international populations are well known and documented. Intentional, collaborative projects among diverse undergraduate students allow educators to examine intercultural competence and sensitivity development. This study explored two service-learning projects and related interactions among domestic and international undergraduate university students that addressed the global issues of food insecurity and environmental conservation as they relate to the community near the university. The study explored the impact on intercultural competency development through quantitative and qualitative data. The data were merged into overarching interpretations; the results were used to present tangible recommendations for change within the context of internationalization in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, missions of institutions of higher education have seen a shift of intercultural competency as a necessary skill among graduates in today's globalized world (Islam & Stamp, 2020; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff & Hunter, 2006). Developing intercultural competence among undergraduate students is one of the cornerstones of providing a transformative leadership experience in the world of higher education. More specifically, "connections between international students and domestic students are critical for [these] competencies from an interdisciplinary approach perspective" (pp. 74-75) as a foundation for career prospects in the global world (Islam & Stamp, 2020). Intercultural competence is thus foundational to the internationalization of the United States (U.S.) universities, especially at research institutions where missions often focus on solving complex, global problems in our interconnected world, including global food security and environmental conservation.

To do so, however, U.S. universities must engage in practices that maximize meaningful, intercultural interactions among diverse students. Research has shown that universities are failing to bring international education and intercultural diversity to their campuses at a time when it is more important than ever (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Culturally and linguistically diverse students – especially international students – can be a beneficial, accessible resource to bring a global perspective to the classroom and student experience. The development of intentional, collaborative projects among diverse undergraduate students has the capacity to move the needle on intercultural competence and sensitivity development, especially when employed in curricular and cocurricular practices for a sustained time (Killick, 2010; Hellmann & Miranda, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

As defined by the Department of Homeland Security (n.d.), international students in the U.S. are considered nonimmigrants or foreign nationals admitted into the country temporarily to complete a program of study at a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school. Increasing numbers of international students are studying in the U.S. institutions of higher education (Institute of International Education, 2018). The benefits and values of engaging with these students in intercultural experiences and leadership programming are countless and especially important in consideration of today's global world and interconnectedness. However, a

robust literature currently does not exist to better understand (1) the intercultural development of international students in the U.S. universities, and (2) the joint development and benefits of domestic and international student collaborative programming through service learning. It therefore becomes the responsibility of educators to take advantage of these trends by engaging both international and domestic students in developing essential intercultural competencies needed for successful work among diverse teams in a global environment. Educators thus have an opportunity to move the international community away from the deficit-based model and position themselves in curricular situations where they can have targeted, supportive, and sustained engagement so domestic and international students can get to know each other in a "respectful environment" (p. 1270) for intercultural engagement (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018).

International Student Partnerships in Higher Education

When engaging both domestic and international students in higher education, a perspective shift in pedagogy and delivery must be taken. The way university educators use formal and informal curricula has been proven to encourage and reward successful intercultural engagement between domestic and international students (Leask, 2009). Simply bringing both students together in a classroom does not necessarily result in meaningful, cross-cultural relationships or an increase in intercultural communication; instead, alterations to undergraduate curriculum must be made to increase the 'internationalization' of both formal and informal settings (Leask, 2009). Such changes to enhance the globalization of the curriculum must place value and emphasis on the inclusion of international students in the education process.

Significant benefits occur through the inclusion of international students. Cross-cultural interactions between U.S. and international students have been shown to promote acceptance of cultural pluralism, support of internationalism, a cosmopolitan world outlook, and worldmindedness (Sharma & Jung, 1986). Cross-cultural programming has also yielded students who better accepted diversity, developed a sense of importance and desire for traveling, felt a greater sense of responsibility for foreign visitors (Stohl, 1986), gained significant knowledge of differing cultures, and increased their global understanding (Wilson, 1993). Relational and experiential opportunities that engage both domestic and international students have the potential to increase participant understanding and valuing of intercultural relationships, adaptive and effective communication among international teams, and confidence in leading globally (Bletscher et al., 2017).

Developing Intercultural Competencies

Although most educators can attest to the importance of developing leaders for the demands of our increasingly globalized world, many are at a loss of how best to equip their students. Many times, educators address leadership across cultures in the content of the course itself but less frequently introduce it through application and hands-on experiential learning (Bennett & Salonen, 2007). Although experiential in nature, educators cannot rest on study abroad or international experiences alone to develop these essential competencies. The literature has shown that studying abroad is less beneficial for domestic students, with the potential to even reinforce stereotyping, ethnocentrism, and prejudice (Caruana & Hanstock, 2008; Coleman, 1999). In contrast, deep and sustained relationships with diverse students can make more of a shift toward intercultural competence and sensitivity development (Deardorff, 2004). Instead of allocating significant funds to study abroad programming that may or may not develop intercultural competencies, institutions of higher education should consider mutually beneficial, experiential intercultural collaborations with their international student population. A significant amount of literature validates and encourages the use of service learning within intercultural communication education to promote student citizenship, responsibility, and civic engagement. For instance, Rodriguez-Izquierdo (2021) found that service learning has been shown to increase intercultural sensitivity to the point of "transforming their [students'] cultural lenses" (p. 106). Kwennai and Yu's (2018) conclusions also aligned with these findings, showcasing that service-learning is impactful to the international community and discussing the need for further cross-cultural training to truly benefit from service-learning experiences. However, a limited amount of research exists to show the impact of service-learning projects with domestic and international students on intercultural competence development.

It becomes essential to provide opportunities for undergraduate students to examine different cultures and their perspectives on society, systems, politics, and relationships through experiential, hands-on opportunities. The service-learning projects outlined in this study present a pilot for institutions to adopt and implement their leadership and intercultural courses and/or programming. Built on a foundation of engagement and cocurricular learning, this project uniquely addresses the importance of intercultural competency through experiential service-learning projects that link issues of global food insecurity and environmental conservation in the local community to the global arena.

METHODOLOGY

The present research study brought together two diverse groups for sustained curricular and cocurricular programming at a U.S. public land grant university in the Pacific Northwest. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of service-learning and related interactions within experiential workshops among domestic and international undergraduate university students. The following objectives are outlined for this study:

1. Determination of base levels of intercultural competence among domestic and international students
2. Measure the change in levels of intercultural competence among domestic and international students upon completion of the service-learning project and corresponding workshops
3. Explore the impact of the service-learning and corresponding workshops among domestic and international students in terms of thematic trends across semistructured focus groups
4. Make pedagogical and/or practical recommendations within the context of internationalization in higher education based on changes in intercultural competence and thematic trends,

The most appropriate methodology for this study's exploratory research purpose and corresponding objectives was a case study research design with quantitative and qualitative strands, presenting both generalizable numeric data and individualized, nongeneralizable narrative data (Plowright, 2011). The quantitative and qualitative data were merged into overarching interpretations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010) to provide tangible recommendations and opportunities for institutional change within the internationalization of higher education. This study was approved by the university IRB.

Quantitative

The study's quantitative strand (Objectives 1 and 2) examined the impact of intercultural competence via the Assessing Intercultural Competence (AIC) (Fantini, 2007) and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) (Chen & Starosta, 2000) instruments. A Qualtrics version of the instruments was employed for the pre- and postassessments. The results highlight data from student participants ($n=7$) in fall 2017 and 2018 who completed both pre- and postassessments. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the quantitative data.

Fundamental issues of the skill sets needed for effective engagement across cultures seek to address the question: "What abilities are needed, in

addition to language, for successful intercultural contact and interaction? In other words, what exactly is *intercultural competence*?" (Fantini, 2009, p. 195, italics added). Conversations surrounding intercultural competence have been increasing recently as a result of large-scale globalization in human society (Altan, 2018). A wide range of terminology has been used among intercultural scholars to address these skill sets, such as biculturalism and multiculturalism; communicative or cross-cultural competence; cross-cultural adaptation, awareness, or communication; intercultural sensitivity, interaction, cooperation, citizenship, contact, hybridity, or rhetoric; interculturality; and global competitive intelligence or competences (Byram, 2012; Fantini, 2009; Kecskes, 2012; Kramsch & Uryu, 2012). Additionally, significant conversations arise among the division between conceptualizing intercultural competence *development* and its *assessment* (Almeidaa et al., 2013). Considering all differing semantics and interpretations of intercultural competence, it is essential to acknowledge that such knowledge and skill sets from individuals with differing cultures requires "the complex nature of interacting, engaging, and learning processes" (Rosenbusch, 2014, p. 3). Hence, a cocurricular program across cultures, built on a foundation of interaction, engagement, and learning through community service, provides an appropriate foundation to assess such development.

Intercultural communicative competence. Of these semantics, intercultural (communicative) competence (ICC) has been a common usage and has gained momentum within the field (Fantini, 2009). Fantini (2009) defines ICC as follows:

> "...a complex of abilities that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with other speakers who are from a language and cultural background that is different from one's own. Whereas *effective* suggests one's view of one's own performance in the second language culture (i.e., a cultural outsider's or etic view), appropriate suggests how one's performance is viewed by natives of the target culture (i.e., a cultural insider's or emic view). The task as foreign language learners, then, is to recognize (and clarify) one's own view, or perspective, while attempting to learn about the views of others. In the end, although we may not necessarily develop native-like proficiency, we may aspire to some degree of ability to communicate, behave, and interact in the style of the target culture members" (p. 196).

Considering the objectives of the present study, the AIC instrument (Fantini, 2007) therefore provides an appropriate conceptualization and assessment measure of ICC. The AIC was originally designed under the

context of service programs within international and intercultural environments, although it has been used in government-funded international development projects (Fantini, 2007; Rosenbusch, 2014). This survey seeks to learn about various outcomes of intercultural service experiences – the level of ICC developed by participants, effects on their lifestyle choices, and their impact, in turn, on their local communities (Fantini, 2009). The AIC instrument uses a Likert-type scale (ranked 0 to 5 – highest) to assess their perception of several ICC characteristics. Participants are first asked to rank how they perceived themselves (each characteristic) in their *own* culture, followed by being asked to rank each characteristic, as they believed others, from *other* cultures. One benefit of the instrument is that it thoroughly examines ICC; however, it tends to be long and tedious to administer (Rosenbusch, 2014).

      Intercultural sensitivity. A common model of intercultural competence among scholars is through three interdependent (although separate) dimensions: intercultural awareness (cognitive), intercultural sensitivity (affective), and intercultural effectiveness/adroitness (behavioral) (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Atlan, 2018). According to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural sensitivity is a prerequisite for ICC. Intercultural sensitivity has been used in scholarship to discuss cross-cultural adjustments, student experiences abroad, and the development and maintenance of cross-cultural interpersonal relationships (Kapoor et al., 2000). Although the definition and conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity is still being investigated through intercultural communication researchers, most can agree that it is an essential dimension for individuals where cultural differences occur in the workplace (Altan, 2018).

      Drawing from previous instruments of measuring intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; Hanvey, 1987), the ISS (Chen & Starosta, 2000) used in the present study adequately assesses the three aforementioned dimensions. Chen and Starosta (1998) define intercultural sensitivity as the subjects' "active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures" (p. 231). The developmental process (Altan, 2018) of this dimension is embedded in an individual's ability to receive and send positive emotional signals before, during, and after intercultural interaction (Chen & Starosta, 2000). One's intercultural sensitivity, therefore, is conceptualized through four personal attributes: self-concept (a positive outlook in intercultural interactions), open-mindedness (willingness to express oneself openly and accept others' explanations), nonjudgmental (not holding prejudices, allowing one to listen sincerely during intercultural interactions), and social relaxation (overcoming uncertain emotions during intercultural interactions) (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

Considering this definition and conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity, it is important to note the emotions and attitudes or mindset of the individual. Although one might focus on behavior, Altan (2018) notes that "it is clear that no behavior can exist without thought, emotion and attitude" (p. 4). A key underlying goal of the service-learning project was to not only address behavioral patterns, but also to address shifts in the cultural mindsets of students when working across different cultures.

Despite its widespread use across the globe with demonstrated satisfactory overall internal consistency levels, the application of the instrument among non-English speaking countries/participants posed questions of its validity, mostly due to a lack of base-level information about the performance of the scale before reporting correlations between each subscale and other variables (Wang & Zhou, 2016).

Qualitative

The study's qualitative strand (Objective 3) was explored via semistructured focus groups of domestic and international students, as well as an artifact analysis on prompted student reflections. The researchers recorded audio of the focus group responses and later transcribed the recordings to ensure triangulation of the data. The researchers then coded the data line by line to develop an effective, quality thematic analysis. The qualitative written reflection data were analyzed using Dedoose, a qualitative, web-based data analysis software, to code for themes (Saldana, 2009). From there, themes emerged across the domestic and international student groups as they related to individual and collective experiences.

Reflection is a key component in developing learners' intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2006). Reflections in pairs, large groups, and written words enabled the researchers to collect qualitative data on student learning. Using a set of semistructured questions for large-group reflection and for individual writing prompts provided a forum for assessing student learning. Through structured reflection, students were able to more deeply consider their own personal opinions, attitudes, and positions with broader sociocultural issues. When combined with the quantitative data from Objectives 1 and 2, this indirect evidence provides a richer narrative of the students' experiences.

Participants

Domestic undergraduate students were recruited via an interdisciplinary student cohort program. This cohort program develops leaders and empowers global citizens in agricultural, human, and natural

resource sciences who will successfully address the interconnected, global issues that currently face our world. Due to the university's proposed increase in international students on campus, the cohort sought to capitalize on this mutually beneficial opportunity by facilitating two service-learning projects with domestic and international students that addressed the local and global impacts of food insecurity and the environment in hopes of developing both domestic and international student intercultural competency.

At the same site, the Academic English (AE) program is a well-established, accredited Intensive English Program. The AE program's mission is to help facilitate the internationalization of the university and provide a platform for international student academic success by providing high-quality intensive English language instruction in a supportive, respectful atmosphere to help students meet their academic, personal, and professional goals. The AE program helps students ease their transition into the university by creating what Deardorff (2011) referred to as helping international and domestic students make connections in intentional, meaningful ways.

Domestic and international students ranged in age from 18-24. Domestic students resided in the Pacific Northwest of the United States and identified as white or Asian/Pacific Islander, while international students' home countries consisted of East Asia or the Middle East. The majority of domestic and international participants were in their first year of university study and were similar in age and ethnicity.

Quantitative sample. Of the thirty-two ($n=32$) total participants from fall 2017 and 2018, 29 students (91% response rate) completed the entire preassessment. Of all participants, seven students completed the entire pre- and postassessments (22% response rate). Of the respondents who answered both the pre- and postassessments, a majority (71%) were female; only one student was international, while most ($n=6$) were domestic students.

Qualitative sample. Considering the qualitative strand of the data collection for this study, five domestic American students and 11 international students ($n=16$) submitted written reflections and participated in the larger focus group reflection.

Service-Learning Case Study

Two service-learning projects took place during the fall of both 2017 and 2018, with a total of 32 (domestic [$n=10$] and international [$n=22$] undergraduate students) working alongside two local nonprofit organizations. They collected excess produce in the Pacific Northwest, addressing local issues of food waste and planting native plants in a local park (fall 2017), and

addressing local issues of conservation (fall 2018). Both projects were paired with three experiential workshops (two pre- and one postworkshop). Students then completed written reflections and engaged in focus group discussions after the project to think more deeply about their communication practices, relationships with one another, and connections to the local components of the project and how it all relates to global issues in their home countries or elsewhere.

Project leaders developed the following objectives, drawing from previously mentioned scholarly literature as well as the needs of student graduates vocalized by the university and employers: (1) enhance student knowledge surrounding issues of food insecurity and environmental conservation and (2) enhance student critical reflection and development of intercultural competency.

RESULTS

Objective 1: Determine base levels of intercultural competence among domestic and international students

Table 1 presents the mean preassessment rankings of AIC characteristics from two perspectives (self-perception and perceptions from other cultures) of both domestic and international student participants in fall 2017 and 2018 (n=7). These results show that prior to the service-learning project, participants ranked themselves highest in curiosity (M=4.15), adaptability (M=4.14), and motivation (M=4.10). Participants ranked themselves lowest in a lack of sense of humor (M=2.30) and intolerance (M=2.43) in their own culture. When considering how others from differing cultures might perceive them during the service-learning project, participants ranked themselves highest in empathy (M=3.95), self-reliance (M=3.90), and motivation (M=3.90) and lowest in a lack of sense of humor (M=2.87) and intolerance (M=2.6). In most (60.0%) characteristics, participants perceived themselves as ranking higher through the lens of their own culture versus the perception from others from other cultures.

Table 2 shows the results of the ISS (Chen & Starosta, 2000) of both domestic and international student participants from fall 2017 and 2018 (n=7), presenting the mean rankings of ISS subdomains with their pre- and postassessments. As outlined in Table 2, the results of the study showed that participants held the highest ranking of intercultural engagement (M=4.52) and the lowest ranking of interaction enjoyment (M=1.89) prior to the service-learning project.

Table 1: Intercultural Communicative Competence Preassessment Means (*N=7*)

Characteristics	Self-perception (*M*)	Perception from other cultures (*M*)
Intolerant	2.43	2.77
Flexible	3.85	3.41
Patient	3.41	3.65
Lacks sense of humor	2.30	2.87
Tolerates differences	3.99	3.85
Suspends judgment	3.50	3.61
Adaptable	4.14	3.78
Curious	4.15	3.87
Open-minded	4.00	3.67
Motivated	4.10	3.90
Self-reliant	3.94	3.90
Empathetic	3.80	3.95
Clear sense of self	3.67	3.68
Perceptive	3.88	3.57
Tolerates ambiguity	3.35	3.27
Mean	**3.63**	**3.84**

Note. M = Mean

Table 2: Intercultural Sensitivity (*N=7*)

Subdomain	Question #	*M* (Pre)	*M* (Post)	Delta between Pre/Post-
Interaction Engagement	1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24	4.52	4.25	-0.27
Respect for Cultural Differences	2, 7, 8, 16, 18, 20	2.86	3.14	0.28
Interaction Confidence	3, 4, 5, 6, 10	3.30	3.43	0.13
Interaction Enjoyment	9, 12, 15	1.89	2.66	0.77
Interaction Attentiveness	14, 17, 19	3.88	3.67	-0.21

Note. M = Mean

Objective 2: Measure the change in levels of intercultural competence among domestic and international students upon completion of the service-learning project and corresponding workshops

Mean scores of AIC characteristics (self-perception and perceptions from other cultures) showed that participants overall assessed themselves as having the same or lower rankings of characteristics in their postassessment than their preassessment.

In consideration of their own self-perceptions, participants dropped in levels from pre- to postassessments, aside from intolerance, patience, and perceptiveness. The difference between pre- and postassessment rankings remained the same in regard to lack of sense of humor and open-mindedness.

The greatest change among students in pre- and postassessments was in interaction enjoyment (0.77). The results show that approximately half of the means of all subdomains of intercultural sensitivity rose in the postassessment after completion of the service-learning project, aside from interaction engagement (-0.27) and interaction attentiveness (-0.21).

Objective 3: Explore the impact of the service-learning and corresponding workshops among domestic and international students in terms of thematic trends across semistructured focus groups

From the critical reflection data, drawing from the focus group and written reflections, three themes emerged from both domestic (*n*=5) and international students (*n*=11): communication and relationship development, unite for a common cause and finding purpose in service by solving problems, and connecting local experiences to the global and home country. The final theme emerged exclusively from the international student population.

Communication and relationship development. Students commented on developing new relationships through the service-learning projects and subsequent reflection periods. Both international and domestic students remarked on creating friendships as part of the experience. They commented on their social skills developed and relationships built through humor. Recognizing that humor is a significant milestone along the path to intercultural competence development and second language acquisition (Bell, 2007) is important to note. As an international student from the research noted, "Through this project, I learned that I have developed my social skills working with someone I've not talked to deeply before. I feel more at home in America. I even get their jokes!"

The dialog surrounding the service project itself helped the students go beyond surface-level 'small talk' to engage in more meaningful conversation. Going beyond small talk that is general and not deeply personal and reflective of values and culture may lead to the discovery of shared commonalities and, as a result, stronger relationships that transcend cultural boundaries. Another international student from the study said, "We are the same age, we like the same sports and we have similar majors, but we come from totally different places. We have a deep knowledge of each other since we... talk[ed] about things that were beyond a superficial level that matter to us both. I can tell we will be long-time friends."

Similarly, a domestic student from the study said,
"In general, we all can see the same problems, laugh at the same jokes and have stories that we can all relate to. Growing up in America versus China, Thailand, Taipei, or South Korea provides us with unique and culturally different experiences, beliefs, and views, but we can agree."

Unite for a common cause. Part of transcending boundaries as they relate to communication and relationships may be developed through the shared understanding that local problems can have global implications. Students who participated in the service-learning project came to the global understanding that their fates were tied together; they must work together.

One international student in the study said, "When we stop caring and don't take problems as a whole world problem like our plants, then our plants don't survive and then we all starve together." A domestic participant said, "The similarities I noticed between me and other students as it relates to this service is that we all want to make a difference.... No matter our background, we can come together for a common cause of keeping our environment healthy."

Stemming from this united understanding, researchers also saw the student perception that nothing would happen to address these issues or find tangible solutions until they began to consider their common interests and shared responsibility. As one international student noted, "We come from different countries, but we all have one earth." Domestic students generally agreed with one remarking, "We have to protect the environment. But we only do it when we help each other and work together."

Finding purpose in service by solving problems. The environment, specifically air and water pollution, was thematic in student reflections as local and global problems that need solutions. Experiences about solutions from other countries were widely shared in student reflections. An example of this can be seen when an international student reported, "Talking with my new friends, I told them about air pollution in my country. We tolerate the pollution, but we can learn from Americans about how to plant trees and make it better, to start to fix it."

Learning from each other and finding purpose in doing service to better protect the environment came up repeatedly. One domestic student talked about the responsibility this generation may have as it relates to environmental challenges.

> "If we don't work to solve problems here at [the university] and elsewhere … the earth will die and won't support our life. I see that if I have a better awareness of others and culture, then we can look at problems with water or other things together. Even though there are things happening outside my country, it still impacts me, and I still have to worry about it."

Overall, the need to find solutions stemmed from shared experiences with those from other cultures. The opportunity to share perspectives from different countries posited the students to solve local issues such as food insecurity and conservation and prompted conversations about global implications; this was especially true for international students.

International students connecting local experiences to global and home country. International students made strong connections between the local service project experience and their home countries and considered how to promote successful business and shared culture. Said one international

student participating in the study, "I can use this experience to help my hometown to collaborate with more of America's businesses or companies."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data, recommendations for best practices and successful domestic/international student programming at U.S. universities are presented below, addressing Objective 4 of the study.

1. *Develop domestic/international programming that intentionally develops intercultural competencies, especially patience, adaptability, and empathy.*

Considering the presented differences in perceived characteristics prior to the service-learning project, programming that engages international and domestic students should adjust its skill development and activities accordingly. Special attention should be placed on enhancing patience and adaptability to address the need to accept ambiguous intercultural experiences and situations. Additionally, when considering the contrast of rankings before and after the service-learning project, students generally decreased in many intercultural competency characteristics. Despite the initial concerns these results may suggest, the researchers concluded that these results are not too surprising, considering the nature of self-reported assessment. Once students were exposed to cross-cultural differences and the corresponding skills needed to ensure effective intercultural communication and interactions, they began to realize their necessity to grow such competencies. Additionally, the most significant change between pre- and postassessments came in a decrease of empathy (self-perceptions (-0.71) and those of other cultures (-0.92)). These results could be concerning, considering that students felt (after the project) that their cultural counterparts did not fully understand them. Future qualitative research should explore how empathy plays a role in the development of intercultural competency in service learning.

2. *To shift cultural mindsets, domestic/international curricular programming should embrace and implement opportunities for internal reflection.*

As mentioned earlier, a key underlying goal of the service-learning project was to address not only behavioral patterns, but also shifts in the cultural mindsets of students when working across different cultures (Altan, 2018). Additionally, as previously highlighted, reflection is a key component in developing learners' intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2006). Considering the present study, Interaction Enjoyment (IE) held the largest difference between pre- and postassessments and ranked lowest among all students prior to and upon completion of the service-learning project. The IE subdomain has three items in the instrument concerned with participant's

reaction to communication and interactions that are culturally different (Chen, 2010). To develop intercultural sensitivity in future service-learning projects among university students, educators should consider the internal reflection of understanding intercultural behavior and help students build reflexive practice to build upon interaction enjoyment, facilitating an environment to discuss unfamiliar culture.

3. *Domestic/international student programming should ensure ample time to develop intercultural competency skills beyond the service project itself.*

Drawing from the results of the study, educators should consider developing the Interaction Engagement (IE) and Interaction Attentiveness (IA) within service-learning programming, as these subdomains significantly decreased after the completion of the project. IE directly relates to the students' interest (or lack thereof) in engaging with other cultures in the project. These results are clearly concerning, suggesting to researchers that perhaps exploring an alternative project or environment might be more suited to further engage students in the process. Although researchers tried to combat engagement issues by developing relationships before and after the program through team- and community-building activities, the service-learning project was still mandatory for both domestic and international students. These requirements might have impacted participants' level of engagement. IA, on the other hand, reflects "participants' efforts to understand what is going on in intercultural communication" (Chen, 2010, p. 4). These results highlight the opportunity to explore and develop skills of intercultural communication prior to the service-learning project; additionally, there may be a need for a lengthier project.

4. *In alignment with the aforementioned literature (Bennett, 2009, Bletscher, et al., 2017; Leask, 2009; Sharma & Jung, 1986), successful and intentionally designed service-learning programming has the potential to establish meaningful cross-cultural relationships.*

The results showed that similar service-learning projects form meaningful relationships. Students' writing about uniting for a common cause and finding purpose in solving problems during their service-learning projects showed that the layers of linguistic and cultural difference can be used in their favor if the stage is appropriately set for communication to take place (Deardorff, 2011). One role the university can play is to support opportunities for such intercultural engagement to happen. In a culture of higher education where missions talk about internationalization and the importance of intercultural experiences, faculty must be rewarded for this type of work that may take place on top of other responsibilities. In fact, the role faculty play in internationalizing the curriculum both in the classroom and beyond promotes "national and political and economic competitiveness, preserving linguistic

and cultural heritage, and facilitating critical and comparative thinking for life" (Yershova et al., 2000, p. 67) as well as intercultural competency for "personal, professional and citizenship development" (Knight, 2004, p. 22). The development of global awareness through faculty work to internationalize the curriculum provides students with the global perspectives needed to succeed in a workforce that is socially and culturally constructed.

Opportunities for Future Research

In regard to intercultural competency, the results indicated that a majority of participants perceived themselves higher through their own lens versus the perception of others from differing cultures. Such tendencies could provide significant insights into the perceptions of the 'other' by students – considering the perception that unfamiliar cultures see themselves as holding lower levels of intercultural competencies at large. Future research should investigate why this difference in perspective exists while engaging in cross-cultural service learning. Overall, the quantitative results also showed that students ranked themselves higher in all characteristics, aside from patience, suspension of judgment, empathy, and clear sense of self. Future research should investigate these characteristics specifically in the process of building genuine relationships among domestic and international university students.

In alignment with previous literature (Bennett, 2009), results stemming from qualitative data made it clear that communication among international and domestic students can foster relationship development. Future research of a longitudinal nature should examine how such relationship development impacts intercultural competence development over time. It should also study cases of food security and environmental issues solved by diverse teams to more closely examine the cross-cultural dynamics and communication involved in solving problems in the workplace, outside of the academy.

Limitations

Due to the study's small sample size, the results cannot be generalized or transferred to similar populations. When addressing the quantitative data, due to the low response rate, future research would benefit from a larger sample size that assessed equal numbers of group sizes to maintain balanced responses. In this case, qualitative data were used to offset the limitations of the quantitative data to provide a richer narrative of the experiences of the students.

Additionally, although the authors collected some student demographic information (age, gender, year in school, residence/country of

origin), additional demographics could be requested to address the intersectionality of identities among participants. Variables such as travel experience and religion, among others, have the potential to impact students' intercultural competency development. The authors therefore strongly recommend addressing these complexities in future programming and assessment. Ultimately, however, considering both limitations, the results of this study should be viewed as a pilot study for future research among domestic and international student relationships at the university level.

IMPLICATIONS

It is important to contextualize this service-learning project within the framework that intercultural competence development is a lifelong, ongoing process (Bennett, 2009). Providing a service-learning platform for students to develop social relationships also allows them to know and understand each other on a personal level beyond superficial or previously held assumptions of other cultures. Many international students found connectivity between service and their home countries, thus drawing a connection between local issues with global implications. When only 1.6% of enrolled domestic students study abroad in the U.S. state in which this research was conducted, fostering intercultural relationships with international students is more critical now than ever before (NAFSA, 2016).

Additionally, due to the compounding impacts of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning modalities in higher education, alongside the emerging multiple crises abroad, the need for service-learning that addresses global issues is paramount. We need look no further than the evolving crisis in Ukraine and related human, financial, political, and social upheaval far beyond the Ukrainian borders to know that making connections between international and domestic students to deepen intercultural competency is already implicitly and explicitly at the forefront of international education.

In a world where global student mobility is on the rise and where higher education continues to shift and change to meet the needs of industry amidst a global workforce, connecting the faculty and student experience are critical aspects to this work. Drawing from the emerging themes of the present study, international students desired connection between these service-learning experiences at a U.S. university and their home countries; in some cases, this also included a connection to industry. This practical consideration of the role that intercultural competency development plays in global business and in the marketing and recruitment of international students to U.S. universities cannot be underscored enough.

As scholars within intercultural competence continue to wrestle with issues of development and assessment among undergraduate students, researchers join other scholars in the vocalization that more research is still needed (Altan, 2018). Service learning among domestic and international students opens the door to increased intercultural competency, to increased global peace and understanding and to start critically thinking through pathways to solve complex, interdependent global problems demanded by crisis or industry, even those that are as boggling and dynamic as global food insecurity and environmental sustainability.

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