

# **Cultural Diversity Education: Response to a Flat World**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The expanding global marketplace provides opportunities for new forms of collaboration between individuals and organizations from around the world. And the shifting demographic changes in the United States offer students and workers the opportunity to more frequently come in contact with people from the minority population. Higher education institutions are feeling the effects of a global marketplace like businesses. Do college students perceive a benefit of cultural diversity education as they prepare to enter the workforce of a new global marketplace? Are there benefits to business and industry to have workers with enhanced cultural awareness?

This study investigated students' perceived benefit of a cultural diversity in business course as compared to those in other capstone courses at a Midwest university ( $N = 258$ ). A pre-test comparison of student's participation in cultural activities was also analyzed to assume that students were similar prior to taking the courses. The questionnaire, Survey of Intergroup Relations II, was given as a pre and posttest to both groups.

Overall, a significant pattern of responses was found based on the membership of the course regarding the perceived benefit of a cultural diversity in business course. Students in the cultural diversity course reported greater benefit. Furthermore, students indicated that such a course should be required of all students. Higher education should explore increasing courses in cultural diversity, including discipline-specific courses, to meet employers' needs and prepare students to work in a world that is flat - - one of an increasingly diverse workforce and global marketplace.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The globalization trend has influenced higher education and the workplace. In business the old hierarchies are being flattened with the help of technology and business opportunities to work with companies and people from around the world are available on a more level playing field (Friedman, 2005). To accommodate this globalization and changing demographic population, more and more universities are offering cultural diversity courses for their students and employers are providing diversity education for their employees. Specific professional disciplines also provide multicultural education for their members (Bucher, 2004). Gaining diversity skills and knowledge provides people, "those competencies that allow people to interact with others in a way that respects and values differences" (Bucher, 2004, p. 37).

The purpose of this research was to investigate to what degree students' perceived a benefit of taking a cultural diversity in business course (CDIB) and if such a course should be a requirement for all students. Student data was gathered prior to, and after, participation in a cultural diversity in business course. Furthermore, the research compared the outcome differences between those students taking the cultural diversity course and those registered in other undergraduate capstone public affairs courses (CAP). The research focused on an undergraduate public affairs capstone cultural diversity in business course offered at a Midwest university.

There are various models to incorporate cultural diversity education in higher education and business and industry. The review of literature falls into three main topic areas related to cultural diversity education: global trends, globalization and higher education, and globalization and other organizations. Figure I, depicts these concepts graphically.

**Figure I. Concept map to visually clarify the flow of the literature review and research**

**Globalization Trends**

Review of US History: Assimilation vs Pluralism

Moving to a Global Marketplace

Educational Approaches for Cultural Diversity Awareness

**Globalization and Higher Education**

**Globalization and Other Organizations**

Higher Ed's Response to Globalization

Cultural Diversity Education in the Workplace

Study Abroad      Higher Ed Courses

Discipline Specific      Organizational Specific

**GLOBIZATION TRENDS**

Global trends of cultural diversity included the concepts of assimilation and pluralism with regard to immigration in the United States. The changing terms used to describe cultural diversity in the United States reflected a change in attitude toward the acceptance of other cultures (Bucher, 2004; Schaefer, 2005). The literature related to global trends also explored an expanding global society for business, commerce and higher education institutions. Global influence was reflected in changes in international trade, immigration and more ethnic diversity on college campuses (*Association of American Colleges and Universities AAC&U*, 2001).

**Assimilation Versus Pluralism**

Immigration issues were an integral part of American history and a contributing factor to the growing diversity of the population. There were numerous metaphors used to describe the diversity of the United States population: a melting pot, salad bowl, rainbow, quilt, and kaleidoscope (Bucher, 2004; Schaefer, 2005). Each choice of terminology used throughout history reflected the way in which the immigration of new cultures was viewed as a part of the American culture.

The “melting pot” terminology was first used as the title of a play in 1908 (Schaefer, 2005). The play depicted the United States as a place where ethnic groups could dissolve into a new stock (Schaefer, 2005). The melting pot metaphor, like the play, referred to the assimilation of cultures into the American culture. With assimilation “people lose their cultural differences and blend into the wider society” (Bucher, 2004, p. 12). Immigrants to America tried to give up what made them different to become more like the majority population.

In the 1970's the term “salad bowl” and a pluralism approach of describing the growing diverse American demographic population was the trend (Bucher, 2004; Schaefer, 2005). The pluralism approach acknowledged and preserved cultural differences (Bucher, 2004). A salad bowl is a mixture of various ingredients that all maintain their own identity but compliment each other when mixed together. In more recent history, the rainbow and quilt metaphors also depicted the pluralism approach of viewing diversity (Bucher, 2004). A quilt can be described as a variety of different colors and textures of fabric pieces held together with a common thread.

The kaleidoscope analogy brought yet another way to describe the diverse American population. A kaleidoscope is a toy to look through to view an array of colors that change as you turn a set of mirrors. Schaefer (2005) described the analogy as “the changing images correspond to the often bewildering array of groups found in our country” (p. 182). The kaleidoscope shows a changing image much like the changing racial diversity in the United States.

Regardless of the terminology used to describe the diverse American community, the message of recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity has been an implied meaning. The analogies focused on the outward appearance of the population; however, the implied reference was people were interacting in a collective society through conversations and other social interactions.

### **Global Marketplace**

“Business, law, medicine, science, librarianship and education are now shaped by developments that occur beyond national borders” (*Institute of International Education*, 2002, p. 1). Business activities have expanded to encompass a global reach with international trade a prevalent activity. According to Dlabay (1998), “organizations are realizing that international business opportunities are borne out of the ability to adapt to and capitalize on the geographic, historic, economic, cultural and political-legal elements that influence the exchange of business across different cultures and levels of economic development” (p. 159).

An approach to explain the flat world concept and a global marketplace was offered by Friedman (2005) through a series of globalization trends. “Globalization 1.0 was countries globalizing, and the dynamic force in Globalization 2.0 was companies globalizing, the dynamic force in Globalization 3.0 - the thing that gives it its unique character – is the new found power for individuals to collaborate and compete globally” (Friedman, 2005, p. 10). Globalization 1.0 lasted from 1492 until 1800 (Friedman, 2005). During this time countries were exploring the world (Friedman, 2005). Globalization 2.0 lasted from 1800 to 2000 with the emergence of multinational companies going global for markets and labor (Friedman, 2005). Falling costs for transportation and communication were characteristics of this phase (Friedman, 2005). Globalization 3.0 followed from 2000 to the present (Friedman, 2005). Software was the key component empowering individuals to “plug and play” (Friedman, 2005, p. 11). Friedman (2005) offered, “it is the complementary convergence of the ten flatteners creating this new global playing field for multiple forms of collaboration” (p. 177).

According to Dlabay (1998), “every business employee works for an organization that either imports, exports, or competes against other companies that import or export” (p. 164). Access to foreign markets has changed the way organizations conduct business. New markets provide labor, goods, capital, technology and other needed resources for business expansion, innovation and trade (Dlabay, 1998). Knowledge regarding cultural implications in foreign markets is needed by managers to conduct business effectively. Without knowledge of cultural differences and customs, business personnel could mistakenly offend foreign business partners (Dlabay, 1998). The global business dealings have driven higher education to respond. White and Griffith (1998) cited two studies reviewing the importance of an international oriented educational system. “Both studies indicate that to remain a competitive force in the global economic arena, the educational focus of our business schools must change” (White and Griffith, 1998, p. 103).

Global influence also affected the ethnic diversity of students on college campuses. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2001) reported the expected increase of 2.6 million students qualified to attend colleges between 1995 and 2015, 80% would be from racial minorities. China, Japan and India were noted as the top three countries of origin for foreign students (AAC&U, 2001). A college students’ opportunity for exposure to students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds has changed significantly on college campuses in the last three decades (AAC&U, 2001; Van Note Chism, 2002).

Global influence also comes in the form of immigration to the United States. The United States offers political freedom and economic opportunities for many cultures from around the world (Wells, 2000). Immigration was cited by AAC&U (2001) as one of the top five contributing factors to the rising college enrollments. AAC&U (2001) estimated African- American, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students would account for 80% of the increase in the undergraduate population by 2015. The minority population was projected to increase their share of undergraduate population from 29.4% to 37.2% by 2015 (AAC&U, 2001). As the workforce reflects the global influence with a more diverse workforce so also the complexion of college campuses reflects a more diverse student population.

### **Globalization in Higher Education**

According to Hormats (1999), “barriers to the flow of trade and investment have fallen and deregulation has

spread throughout the world as ideological divisions have collapsed and the cost of communication and data transmission has plummeted” (p. 2). Institutions of higher learning, like businesses, are feeling the effects of a new global society. Classrooms include an increase in minority attendance and more exchange students from around the world.

The complexion of the student population in higher education is undergoing changes. Gollnick and Chinn (1998) predicted that the populations of African American, Latino, Asian American and Native American would comprise 40% of the population by 2020 and 50% of the population by 2050. Gaither (1999) stated, “the institutions of 2010, they say, will be a mixture of unprecedented demographic and technological transformation as today’s so-called minorities are becoming the new majority” (p. 115). The changing demographics of the United States population creates an increasing need for cultural diversity appreciation.

### **Higher Education’s Response to Globalization**

Higher education institutions have responded to globalization trends in many ways. Business departments in higher education have responded to global influence in the marketplace by including international trade and commerce courses in business curriculum (Sherer, Beaton, Ainina, and Meyer, 2002). Specialized Centers for International Business Education (CIBE’s also known as CIBERs) were formed around the United States to provide universities with international business resources (Sherer et al., 2002).

Higher education institutions have utilized various models to incorporate cultural diversity education in curriculum (Flannery and Vanterpool, 1990; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora, 2001). One method of curriculum development has been to infuse cultural diversity education across curriculum and include the topic in a variety of different disciplines (Flannery and Vanterpool, 1990). Or cultural diversity education has been isolated and offered as an individual course as part of the overall curriculum (Van Note Chism, 2002). Another option available for students to gain exposure to cultural diversity in higher education has been study abroad programs. Study abroad programs provide college students the opportunity to immerse themselves in another culture. With the growing popularity of study abroad programs, countries have come to appreciate both the financial and cultural benefits of students in these programs (Cummings, 2001). The economic implications of international education have contributed to the view of higher education as a global commodity (Blumentalh, Obst, Ranta, and Waters 2004). There are economic implications, challenges, and cultural adjustments for students in study abroad programs.

Study abroad students from developing countries seek out an education to gain intellectual capital and a competitive business advantage (Naidoo, 2003). However, it has been argued the cultural and social side of education should not be overlooked (Altbach, 2002, p. 14). The significant economic impact international students create has been an important factor in categorizing international education as a commodity (Blumentalh et al., 2004). The exchange of students can also be seen as an exchange of cultures and a way to provide increased exposure to diverse societies through conversations (Bruffee, 1999). Student exchange programs also have relevance with Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) social interaction for knowledge creation theory.

### **Globalization and Other Organizations**

Globalization and other organizations is another major area considered for cultural diversity education. Business and industry have responded to the changing United States demographic profile by offering employees cultural diversity training (Bucher, 2004). Training workshops have been designed to enhance cultural awareness and improve working relationships between diverse populations (Bucher, 2004). Organizations that offer cultural diversity education gained a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Allison, 1999; Carneval and Stone; 1994; Day, 1995). Cultural diversity training can also be found across the career specific disciplines of healthcare, social sciences and psychology. The need for business and career disciplines to offer cultural diversity training acknowledged a perceived skill gap found in workers related to cultural diversity awareness (Bucher, 2004).

Healthcare workers are affected by the changing demographic composition in the United States. “A diversity conscious healthcare provider must be sensitive to patient’s language preferences and religious beliefs, in addition to beliefs about sickness, death, and bereavement; the role of the family in healthcare; diet; and norms regarding modesty”

(Bucher, 2004, p. 59). Healthcare professionals are on the front line working directly with the increasingly diverse population. The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission worked toward setting criteria for cultural diversity in nursing education (Wells, 2000).

In the social sciences there are many examples of diversity education. One study for field instructors in social work implemented diversity education in an effort to increase the field instructors' ability to work with students with different cultural backgrounds than themselves (Armour, Bain, and Rubio, 2004). Armour et al., (2004) noted, "participants express that discoveries from the training increased self-knowledge and empowered them to take the initiative to address diversity issues with the agency, student, or client system" (p. 34). This study indicated, with the proper training, field instructors felt more comfortable dealing with multicultural issues.

Organizations that welcome diversity and maintain a receptive environment gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace and these results can be directly connected to bottom line profit (Allison, 1999; Carnevale and Stone, 1994; Day, 1995; Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000) Advantages related to creativity, improved adaptability to change and problem solving ability were also found in companies that valued a diverse workforce (Cox and Blake, 1991). A lack of appreciation for diversity can be costly to organizations in the form of lost productivity and even attrition (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000; Schaefer, 2005). Workplace discrimination and harassment can also result in costly lawsuits and penalties. Some organizations may take a proactive approach to diversity education. Unfortunately, many organizations wait until they are party to accusations of wrongdoing or forced into a multimillion-dollar legal settlement before conducting diversity-training programs (Schaefer, 2005). Ultimately, the objective of diversity education was to impact organizational culture to "create a safer and more productive working environment for all organizational members" (Karp and Sammour, 2000, p. 454).

In summary, the areas of cultural diversity reviewed included global trends, globalization and higher education, and globalization and other organizations. Global trends reflected the changing terminology in referring to immigration in America and the influence of global trends. There are various models to incorporate cultural diversity education in higher education and business and other organizations. This leads to the importance of this study and cultural diversity education in higher education for preparing students to enter the global workforce.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The study was a quasi-experimental design utilizing a convenience sample. The participants were not randomly selected. The students selected the classes they wanted to attend and the researcher selected the classes for the study. The questionnaire was administered as a pre and posttest to undergraduate students in both the cultural diversity in business (CDIB) and capstone public affair (CAP) courses during regularly scheduled class time at the beginning and end of a semester during the summer and fall terms. Six classes were selected to survey during two different semesters to provide a sample size of approximately 75 students in each group, or 150 students total. Populations for the study were comprised of: (a) three capstone classes with students enrolled in a course titled Cultural Diversity in Business (CDIB) or (b) three classes with students enrolled in other public affairs capstone courses not titled Cultural Diversity in Business (CAP).

### **Response Profile**

A total of 258 Surveys of Intergroup Relations II pre and posttest were collected. The data collected was equally divided between the cultural diversity in business courses, and the other capstone courses (53.5%, CDIB; 46.5% CAP). Participants' pre and posttests were matched and grouped according to the capstone courses they attended. These courses were identified as the CDIB course or other CAP course.

### **Perceived Benefit of Course**

The subscale measuring perceived benefit of the courses in the Survey of Intergroup Relations II contained two Likert item questions. Students received a score of 1 to 5 for each item depending on their responses (1= none, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot, 5 = significant). The scores from the two items were totaled to generate subscale scores.

To compare the students in Cultural Diversity in Business (CDIB) and in the other public affairs capstone courses not titled Cultural Diversity in Business (CAP) a chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of student's responses to the question about the perceived benefit of the course. A significant pattern of responses was found, ( $\chi^2(4) = 60.957, p < .001$ ) based on the membership in a course. The large majority of CDIB students agreed strongly or somewhat (93.6%) that the course provided new knowledge related to various cultures and groups, as compared with only half (53.8%) of CAP students (See Table 1).

**Table 1 Perceived Benefit of Course - Posttest**

Course	Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	Neutral	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly
CDIB	0	1	6	36	67
Percentage	.0%	.9%	5.5%	32.7%	60.9%
CAP	4	8	24	33	9
Percentage	5.1%	10.3%	30.8%	42.3%	11.5%

*Note.* Alpha = .05. N = number of questionnaires completed. CDIB  $N = 110$ , CAP  $N = 78$ .  $\chi^2(4) = 60.957, p < .001$

A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of student's responses to the question about the need to require multiculturalism courses for students. A significant pattern of responses was found ( $\chi^2(4) = 16.197, p = .003$ ) based on the membership in a course (See Table 2).

**Table 2 Requirement of Multicultural Courses - Posttest**

Course	Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	Neutral	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly
CDIB	2	3	12	36	57
Percentage	1.8%	2.7%	10.9%	32.7%	51.8%
CAP	8	6	22	25	19
Percentage	10%	7.5%	27.5%	31.3%	23.8%

*Note.* Alpha = .05. N = number of questionnaires completed. CDIB  $N = 110$ , CAP  $N = 80$ .  $\chi^2(4) = 16.197, p = .003$

The vast majority of students in the CDIB course were more supportive that a cultural diversity course should be required for all students. The students in the CDIB course agreed strongly or somewhat, 84.5% that a multicultural course should be required for all students, as compared with only about half, 55.1% of CAP students.

### Choice to Participate in Cultural Activities

In order to establish similarity of the CAP and CDIB students a pretest comparison of cultural participants was conducted. The participation subscale contained 12 behavioral yes/no questions on the Survey for Intergroup Relations II pretest. Students received one point for each yes response. This resulted in a score for the participation subscale that could range from 0 to 12.

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the pretest subscales scores of CAP and CDIB students revealed no significant difference (pretest,  $t(196) = .348, p = .728$ ; equal variance assumed). The mean behavioral subscale scores for choice to participate in cultural activities was similar for the CDIB and CAP pretest, (CDIB,  $M = 4.41$  (2.189); CAP,  $M = 4.30$  (2.009). The students were similar in their choices to participate in cultural activities regardless of the course they attended (See Table 3).

### Summary

The findings of the chi-square analysis for the perceived benefit of the course and desire to require a multicultural course found a significant pattern of responses based on the membership in a course. Students in the CDIB courses were

more favorable in their responses that the course did provide them new knowledge related to various cultures and groups. Also, the large majority of students in the CDIB courses were more supportive than CAP students that a multicultural course should be required for all students. This compared to a little over half of the CAP students who agreed that a multicultural course should be required for all students. The knowledge gained by the CDIB students may have influenced these students to recommend the course for others.

**Table 3 Choice to Participate in Cultural Activities - Pretest**

Course	Mean (sd)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> value	Mean difference
Pretest		.348	196	.728	.107
CDIB	4.41 (2.189)				
CAP	4.30 (2.009)				

*Note.* Alpha = .05; Equal variances assumed. N = number of questionnaires completed. CDIB *N* = 118, CAP *N* = 80.

The behavioral subscale scores for choice to participate in cultural activities revealed students were similar in their choices to participate in cultural activities regardless of the course they attended. Therefore, the pretest subscales scores revealed no significant difference. Establishing initial similarity of the groups strengthened the quasi-experimental research design.

As a result of this research the following implications may be useful for higher education, faculty and administrators that work with cultural diversity education courses. These research findings support the notion that a cultural diversity course produces positive outcomes in students as evident in students recommending others take the course.

### CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. workforce reflects the global influence of increased immigration and diversity (Wells, 2000). Students entering the workforce will need the knowledge to work effectively with the diverse workforce population. Providing cultural diversity education as part of the college curriculum better prepares college graduates to enter the workforce. The educational focus of colleges to include the global economic arena is needed for U.S graduates to remain competitive in the workforce (White and Griffith, 1998). The prevalence of cultural diversity education being provided by employers for their workers confirms the importance of this information (Allison, 1999; Bucher, 2004; Schaefer, 2005; Zhu and Kleiner, 2000). Cultural diversity courses offered by employers may also signal a skill gap employers have identified in workers.

Cultural diversity courses attempt to educate participants, be that students or working professionals, about appreciating multicultural differences. Study abroad programs also educate students on multicultural issues by immersing students in another culture. Courses or study abroad programs bring people together in conversation to facilitate learning (Bruffee, 1999). Social interaction adds to the learning process (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The findings of this research would suggest cultural diversity courses should be offered to meet employers' needs and prepare students to work in an increasingly global marketplace and diverse workforce. Students who took the CDIB course acknowledged the value of the content by recommending the course be required by other students. And over half of the CAP students recommended students should be required to take a cultural diversity awareness course. Increasing the number of cultural diversity courses offered should be considered in higher education. Adding other discipline specific cultural diversity courses may provide broader appeal to students with different academic majors.

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