

## Appendix 3.

# Interviews with Campus Assessment Leaders: Internationalization and Diversity as Student Learning Goals

Samantha Soma, Serap Emil, Hanna Jordan, Mehmet Verkak, and Meghan Dewey  
Portland State University Assessment Initiative

### *Introduction and statement of purpose*

During the 2004-05 academic year, the Assessment Initiative Graduate Assistants (AIGAs) developed and implemented a survey about the current state of student learning assessment at Portland State. This survey was conducted at the request of the Assessment Resource Network (ARN) to gather feedback about its developing ideas regarding student learning assessment at Portland State. Each AIGA interviewed several faculty or staff members who have been providing leadership in student learning assessment. The findings from this survey that were most central to the ARN's purposes are reported in the ARN's end-of-year report to President Bernstine (Assessment Resource Network, 2005).

The AIGAs, however, also wanted to take advantage of this survey as an opportunity to investigate the ways in which learning goals concerning diversity and concerning international and global perspectives are defined and actualized as learning goals on campus. Half of the AIGAs are international students, and the other half have become especially interested in this aspect of student learning, so the topic comes up quite frequently when we meet. Thus, we chose to hold a magnifying glass to these educational goals.

In the university environment, the international student is often required to learn two things at the same time—course material and the uniquely American context in which it is taught. Because there is so much diversity in international students' experience, and in the Portland State student body in general, addressing and appreciating the challenges and strengths of any particular segment of the student population is a complex undertaking. We recognize that Portland State faculty and staff aspire to address each of their students' needs and that this goal is achieved only with a great deal of hard work in the face of multiple responsibilities in and outside of the classroom. The challenges for the international student, however, remain. As one of us remarked in a recent discussion: *"Just because we speak English, we are assumed to be competent with regard to American culture."*

This comment reflects the unique but invisible obstacle that most international students must negotiate during their time in the United States. In the discussion that followed, we realized that we had many questions about the international experience at Portland State, and about the ways in which international and global perspectives are integrated into the classroom. In one of our Assessment Initiative meetings, one discussion was diverted when someone's casual use of the phrase "red herring" sparked a lengthy discussion on slang, culture, and the etymology of the phrase, and others like it in English and the six other languages we collectively speak. This demonstrated to all of us, more clearly than any theoretical discussion of the topic would, that there are phrases, issues, and concepts that are uniquely cultural, but are assumed to be universal. The richness of this realization sparked in us a desire to investigate further the learning goals of international and global perspectives and of diversity as they are addressed at Portland State.

Other questions that we had before embarking on this survey were: How are we educating students about other cultures? What is the purpose of doing so? How do we address the issues associated with the noble ideals of the Internationalization Action Council charter? Whose responsibility is it to educate Portland State students to be able to function as world citizens? These learning goals would seem to be part of a liberal arts education in general, but which departments are taking on the task of educating world citizens, which are not, and what is the main reason for this difference? Because of Portland State's mission of connection to the wider world, we felt that these questions needed to be asked and discussed.

Following are our findings about how the educational goals of diversity and of international and global perspectives are viewed in the various departments and programs at Portland State.

### ***Definitions: Diversity, Internationalization, Globalization***

Although we did not transmit these definitions to our interviewees, we felt it important to this report to define our own working understanding of internationalization, diversity, and globalization based upon our reading and research throughout the academic year.

**Diversity** refers to the presence in one population of a wide variety of cultures, opinions, ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and so on. Cornwell and Stoddard (1999) state that diversity can be understood and taught as the historical result of multiple overlapping Diasporas created by the evolving process of globalization. Consistent with their statement, we realized that diversity is seen as something that is a reality of living in the United States; specific issues of gender, socioeconomic status, and race also are present here. Diversity is a fact of life in the United States, although we still need to pay specific attention to the equity aspects of diversity and need to incorporate these concepts as a way of being. In this context, diversity seemed to be more of a national, rather than international, issue.

**Internationalization** is defined as the conscious act of integrating the international dimension into teaching, learning, research, and other services (Green & Olson, 2003). We concluded that internationalization concerns international students, exposure to international culture during travel to other countries, and the fact that the world is becoming an increasingly “small” place. Internationalization requires intention and action on the part of people or organizations in order to be experienced. Those of us who are international students see this definition of internationalization as very American, and as based in the notion that something that is “international” is somehow outside the typical college student’s experience, or somehow “exotic.” The international AIGAs also believe that people from outside the United States may be more inclined to see themselves as “world citizens,” or at least have a more immediate connection to the world outside of their own national borders. They believe that people who were born in the United States do not have that same self-concept, even when internationalization is introduced into the discussion. One international AIGA pointed out that since the United States is so geographically large, the regional diversity that is here would probably be considered internationalization in other countries.

**Globalization** While internationalization is based on conscious action, and as a response to the challenges of globalization (Green & Olson, 2003), globalization is described as a relatively uncontrollable process determined mainly by economic competition on a global scale and new innovations and advances in information and communication technology (Crowther et. al, in Green & Olson, 2003). As a result, globalization is identified as an unstoppable reality of the world that we live in (Cornwell & Stoddard, 1999; Green & Olson, 2003). In our post-interview discussions, we came to understand the term as relating to economic and political concerns--more macro in focus, dealing with nation to nation interactions, as well as the effects of economic policies on citizens of specific nations.

In addition to the intellectual exercise of teasing out the above definitions, we found it interesting to explore further the expectations for and experiences of the international student in the U.S. classroom. 1. How does one’s identity prior to coming to the United States affect one’s experience in the Portland State classroom? 2. What cultural accommodations might need to be made for individual students, and equally importantly, what can other students learn from this person’s experience as an international citizen, both about how American culture is perceived, and how things are different in that person’s homeland? 3. In what ways does the presence of international students (and thus international perspectives) enrich student learning in the classroom? 4. What is possible for higher education because of the presence of an international student (and thus, an international perspective) in the classroom? Obviously, these questions are beyond the scope of the report, but they do deserve further study.

Within the constraints of this study, our first question was whether diversity and international and global perspectives are understood to be part of the same student learning goal, or two different student learning goals. A second question concerned the degree to which the international diversity we have on campus is

being utilized for educational purposes, although the specific question was about the presence and importance of international and global perspectives in the respondent's program.

## **Process**

To answer the above questions, we solicited feedback on a list of six learning goals (see Appendix 3.1) that the ARN developed from their analysis of departmental websites. After presenting the list of learning goals to each interviewee for examination, we asked two questions which we hoped would answer our questions above without being obviously leading. These questions were:

*Some people see diversity and international and global perspectives as one goal.  
Others see them as separate. Which way do you like better?*

Respondents were asked to choose "one goal" or "two goals" and then were invited to elaborate on their answers if desired.

*Is 'international and global perspectives' an important learning goal in your program?  
[If yes] How are these perspectives expressed in your curriculum?  
[If no] Do you think it is an important general education goal?*

Respondents were asked to choose "yes" or "no" and had the option to elaborate on their answers.

It is important to recognize that this was a convenience sample of Portland State faculty known to the AIGAs as being active in student learning assessment work. Furthermore, the number of faculty interviewed (65) is but a small percentage of all campus faculty. Our findings should be understood in this context: they give us insight as to what direction we might take our assessment efforts in the future, but are not representative of the entire Portland State faculty or any departmental position.

## **Findings**

Forty-five (70%) of those surveyed indicated that "diversity" and "international and global perspectives" should be treated as two separate learning goals, compared to 16 (25%) respondents who indicated that they should be considered as part of the same learning goal, and 3 (5%) respondents who felt that the answer was too complex or depended upon a specific context. Some also came up with conflated or new definitions. Whether or not they favored one goal or two, the majority of our interviewees expressed concern that each goal be given enough coverage and attention – specifically that the two topics of diversity and international and global perspectives not be conflated, and that neither issue should be ignored or otherwise given short shrift in favor of the other.

Overall, 42 (66%) of those surveyed indicated that "international and global perspectives" is an important learning goal, compared to 22 (34%) respondents who indicated that while it might be an important learning goal in general, it was not applicable to their program. Only 1 respondent was unsure about the treatment of international and global perspectives in his or her program, although this respondent indicated that advisors in that program do encourage participation in study abroad programs and the like.

Although not a surprise, what was most striking was the fact that respondents answered the questions based on their discipline-specific involvement. Several common themes emerged, and they suggest that most academic units are in the process of thinking through what their international and global perspectives are and how they fit into the curriculum.

The following remarks are paraphrased, but serve to indicate the richness and diversity of the responses we received.

*“Having two goals leads to an artificial separation—they are integrated. We need more specific learning outcomes to operationalize each concept, but don’t necessarily need a separate goal to do so.”*

*“By collapsing diversity with international perspectives, we lose the opportunity to explore the richness, range, and scope of the distinctions. There is a lot of information that could be lost if they are not kept separate.”*

*“The quarter is not long enough to get into [internationalization] deeply but both the program and the department focus on other cultures and backgrounds to some extent.”*

*“Diversity in the U.S. is about race/ethnicity, ways of thinking, and social background of individuals of groups. Internationalization is more about the awareness of the world politically and educationally and relates to the ability to compete.”*

*“...the global perspective is very important, but not officially supported.”*

*“International and global perspectives are larger scope and more external to the U.S., while diversity is more internal to the U.S.”*

*“We are currently beginning to move towards internationalizing the curriculum and trying to fit in international content. However, it is still very new and not yet part of the program learning objectives.”*

*“... internationalization absolutely should be one of our departmental learning goals. To be a citizen is to be a world citizen.”*

*“This is not a major goal for my department. However, some of our faculty would say it is a preeminent goal in our field. Giving our students an understanding of the complexity of the world is important.”*

*“Due to time constraints and an emphasis on training graduates for life and work in the United States, we can only focus on diversity. But internationalization is an important objective for general education.”*

*“Our department doesn’t cover internationalization, but it is an important goal for general education.”*

*“We cover diversity issues. There is no need to set international and global perspectives as a separate learning goal.”*

## **Analysis**

Our reading of all survey responses suggests that in spite of how frequently the terms internationalization, international perspectives, global awareness, global perspectives, globalization, and diversity are used, most respondents are still in the process of working out their meanings and thinking about how they fit the curriculum. Whether diversity and international and global perspectives are seen as separable seems related to how they are taught. The majority of respondents do see them as two separate issues. This is true even for respondents who favor listing both of them in the same inclusive learning goal. Those who do say that both are part of the same student learning goal make explicit that the terms mean different things and should be understood separately. Conversely, respondents who define them as two goals say that they are overlapping. In general, respondents seem to need to articulate the differences between the goals, while at the same time acknowledging their similar roots.

Given the complex interaction of internationalization and diversity as student learning goals, we would like to offer a suggestion for reconciling these issues. While internationalization and diversity have separate

focal points, there are areas of close interaction between the two: international students, for example, can come from diverse backgrounds with respect to ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and the like. Similarly, the peoples of other nations thought to be homogeneous in comparison to the United States can, and often do, have wildly diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic origins. Hence diversity, while of great concern within the US, is also an international phenomenon.

Likewise, the campus climate in terms of the interpretation of internationalization as a learning objective is highly diversified. There are departments that consider internationalization as part of their core operating principles. There are other departments that believe it is not part of their mission to address these issues. And then there are many faculty members and departments who have said that while it should be an important learning goal in their program, it has not yet put into effect or in some cases, is declining in support and funding. Furthermore, there are faculty members who expressed a deep interest in internationalization on the part of themselves and some of their colleagues, while admitting that this is not part of departmental practice. It is possible that the variety of opinions reflects the variety of disciplines represented.

As we reflected on the survey results, we realized that both we and our respondents were using and responding to our question about “international and global perspectives” by using the terms “internationalization” and “globalization,” with the term “globalization” being used more frequently. We cannot speculate as to the meaning of this. We do believe, however, that international and global perspectives, internationalization, and globalization should each be understood to mean different things. In any case, it is manifestly clear that as Portland State moves towards establishing a stronger international presence, we all could be more explicit about the meanings of our terminology.

We believe there is a need to articulate the goals of internationalization (either as such, or as international and global perspectives) and diversity specifically, even though their treatment in the curriculum need not be mutually exclusive. The academic freedom of all faculty should be respected and honored in the context of whether or how internationalization is incorporated as a departmental learning goal. This report serves to reflect the varied attitudes, opinions and reasons which explain the positions that internationalization and diversity currently occupy in various departmental educational objectives at Portland State.

## **References**

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- Crowther, P., et al. (2000). “Internationalization at home: A position paper.” In M.F. Green & C. Olson, *Internationalizing the campus: A User’s Guide*. USA: American Council on Education.
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## **Appendix 3.1**

### ***What will Portland State graduates be able to do?***

#### **Inquiry and Critical Thinking**

They will possess the abilities to critically read, evaluate, and respond to intellectual material; understand a range of scholarly approaches, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary; select appropriate frameworks and methods for conceptualizing issues, defining problems, and developing responses; and be active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.

#### **Communication**

They will be able to communicate in various ways—through writing, graphics, numeracy, appropriate communication technologies, and other visual and oral means—to collaborate effectively with others.

#### **Appreciation of the Diversity of Human Experience**

They will appreciate and understand the rich complexity of the human experience through the study of differences in ethnic and cultural perspectives, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

#### **Ethical and Social Responsibility**

They will understand the impact and value of individuals and their choices on society; seek to apply knowledge to real-world problems; recognize their role as responsible citizens of the city, the state, the region, and the global community; and support actions, programs, and scholarship that will lead to a sustainable future.

#### **Internationalization and Global Awareness**

They will understand diverse cultures and understand cultures as diverse; develop intercultural skills; understand global processes; and be prepared for citizenship, both local and global.

#### **Disciplinary and Professional Expertise**

They will develop an in-depth understanding of the way of thinking and content knowledge specific to a particular discipline or recognized interdisciplinary area, and demonstrate the ability to integrate theory and practice or method as is appropriate to that area of academic and professional expertise.