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Discussion document on Global Learning

Harnessing internationalization to best serve our students

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Background

Preparing students to live, work, and thrive in a globalized world has become the key objective of higher education around the world. As Hovland asserts, over recent years “colleges and universities have adopted mission and vision statements that link their degrees to successful preparation for a complex, globally interconnected world.”¹ Stellenbosch University is no different in this regard. As Rector and Vice Chancellor Prof Wim De Villiers points out “we want to position SU as the leading research-intensive university on the African continent and a consequential university in the world”². The SU Vision says that SU will be ‘globally recognised’ and the SU Mission states that SU is “a place connected to the world, while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities”³. Furthermore, explicit in the articulation of *Core Strategic Theme 1: A Transformative Student Experience* is the notion that SU will “prepare graduates to lead and excel in a diverse world”⁴.

Most universities have sought to increase global readiness by ‘internationalizing’. While arguments for what exactly this means proliferate, general consensus has been that internationalization “is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”⁵ While Knight’s definition is one of the most widely used – it has come under some criticism for directing too much attention to the structural and/or organizational aspects of internationalization.⁶ Following this type of definition has led many practitioners in the field of international higher education to assume that mere exposure to international contexts necessarily equals a ‘global education’ or ‘global learning’. Unfortunately, as it regards student learning, we have strong evidence that more exposure does not necessarily result in the learning outcomes we expect.^{7 8} (Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige 2009).

¹ Hovland, K., 2014. *Global learning: Defining, designing, demonstrating*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.

² Stellenbosch University., 2018. *VISION 2040 AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2019–2024*. pp. 1

³ Ibid. pp. 14-15

⁴ Ibid. pp. 20

⁵ Knight, J., 2003. Updated definition of internationalization. *International higher education*, (33).

⁶ e.g. Sanderson 2008, Gobbo & Hoff *forthcoming*

⁷ Berg, V., 2009. The Georgetown consortium project: Interventions for student learning abroad. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad*, 18, pp.1-75.

⁸ Landorf, H., Doscher, S., and Hardrick, J., 2018. *Making Global Learning Universal: Promoting Inclusion and Success for All Students*. Stylus Publishing and NAFSA

In the recently approved SU Internationalisation Strategy document, SU defines 'internationalisation' as "an institutional commitment to intentionally and comprehensively integrate an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions and programmes for all SU students and staff in order to advance the quality and impact of learning and teaching, research and innovation, in meaningful service of society." The newly approved SU definition builds on the Knight definition, adds the notion of 'intentionality' and directs SU's internationalization to 'advance' institutional goals. The idea of 'intentional design' and contextually appropriate internationalization has been the matter of some debate recently⁹.

In the context of global education, the GEC acknowledges the need to foreground student learning in the design of student programs through intentional and contextually appropriate interventions that can be continually assessed and improved. For these reasons the GEC has aligned itself with the main tenets of global learning.

What is Global Learning?

There is an emergent body of literature around global learning. There are many definitions of what 'global learning' might mean. The Association of American Colleges & Universities define it as;

"... a critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability."¹⁰

The AAC&U definition locates higher education in a complex interwoven set of systems and argues that students' awareness of their position in, and ability to change, those systems, is paramount to successful global higher education. In this way, global learning aligns itself with the global imperatives of our time as, for example, framed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals¹¹. They go on to outline other key factors to global learning, three of which are most pertinent here:

- Effective and transformative global learning offers students *meaningful opportunities* to analyze and explore complex global challenges, collaborate respectfully with diverse others, apply learning to take responsible action in contemporary global contexts, and evaluate the goals, methods, and consequences of that action.
- Global learning should *enhance students' sense of identity, community, ethics, and perspective-taking*.
- *Global learning* cannot be achieved in a single course or a single experience but *is acquired cumulatively across students' entire college career through an institution's curricular and co-curricular programming*.

In short, global learning incorporates meaningful and intentionally designed opportunities throughout the university experience. This implies that a framework, competencies, and measures for success for student global learning would need to be collaboratively agreed upon at the institution.

⁹ <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190821145329703>

¹⁰ <https://www.aacu.org/global-learning/definitions>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

As Hovland¹² argues, it takes a collaborative approach to align senior management statements with actual educational processes, practices, and goals throughout the broader institution. This inclusive process would help to reach consensus and facilitate change management. At a bare minimum, the development of an institutional level statement on global learning would include stakeholders from senior management, faculty, the centre for teaching and learning, administrative staff, students, and local community members¹³.

Global Student Learning Outcomes

An important driver for global learning would be the creation and adoption of Global Student Learning Outcomes (GSLOs) at an institutional level – as part of the aforementioned ‘statement on global learning’. Several avenues to achieve this have been explored and are currently in process. For now, SUI has adopted a provisional set of GSLOs which have been created in a year long collaborative process. The GSLOs incorporate aspects of SU’s Graduate Attributes in synthesis with research on global learning.

SUI GSLOs:

1. Students will gain increased knowledge about global issues
2. Students will critically reflect on their own cultural background in order to understand how their perspective informs and limits their knowledge
3. Students will demonstrate respect for diversity by adopting multiple perspectives on complex issues
4. Students will understand that their actions impact communities locally and globally
5. Students will demonstrate a values-based approach to creating positive change
6. Students will develop their professional skills and competencies in cross cultural settings
7. Students will continuously develop and apply their global learning across multiple contexts

What do ‘meaningful opportunities’ look like?

Though there is no institutional level statement or shared global learning outcomes, one can nevertheless begin outlining which types of “educational experiences—curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular—” will allow students to “acquire the knowledge and practice the skills they need to participate in twenty-first century life.”¹⁴ It is important to note that the vast majority of SU students will not be able to go abroad and as such, emphasis should be placed on global learning that can happen locally. Given that SU has many more incoming international students than outgoing, particular emphasis should be placed on leveraging international students on SU campuses to engage local students (an aspect of internationalisation at home). Some examples include:

¹² Ibid. pp. 3

¹³ Case studies for this approach appear in Landorf *et. al.* 2018

¹⁴ Hovland 2014 pp. 8

Common intellectual experiences: Experiences on or near SU that require students to engage diversity and connect that with global concerns. (e.g. weekend visits to cultural communities different than what the students are used to.)

Common reading experiences: Prescribing a shared reading that touches on issues of local and global importance. Making space in the (co-) curriculum to discuss it. (e.g. Cluster group shared readings)

Seminars, modules, short courses, and workshops: On global issues, global citizenry, intercultural awareness, etc. (e.g. Short course on Global Citizenship)

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Courses: The formation of courses or programs that connect students with academics and fellow students around the world. (e.g. A module co-taught by SU and University of Bristol staff members on development economics)

Institutional level global learning outcomes: to be embedded in course design and to inform content and pedagogy decisions. (e.g. Re-orienting the science curriculum to include elements of 'science as science is done' to encourage students to understand how their contributions will affect populations and the world)

Shared Living and Learning spaces: Intentionally designed and guided spaces where important global issues are engaged. (e.g. A global scholars' house purposefully internationally representative that discusses key global issues)

Study abroad: Spending time living and learning in another country is the best known of the *high impact* global learning practices. (e.g. Spending a semester abroad at North Carolina State University)

Service Learning: Connecting course content and work in local communities with a reflective component to understand difference, perspective, and systems. (e.g. A Conservation Ecology program that works with a local NGO to have students do (and learn from) practical work.

None of these should be deployed instrumentally – they will require a great deal of careful design and facilitation to be successful. They should all be linked to learning outcomes and correct assessment for (and of) learning should occur.

Existing projects at SU

The following present a few of the current projects at SU that could be called 'global learning'.

Stellenbosch University – KU Leuven Think Tank: An annual programme for high achieving students. 15 students from each university spend 10 months tackling a theme of global importance. Students meet each other on both campuses (once in April, once In November) and continue the work from their home institutions via online platforms. At the culmination of the programme, students present the results of their work to the public.¹⁵

Global Service Learning: A service-learning program offered by the GEC that covers development education and sustainability while students work at iKaya Primary School to gain firsthand knowledge of development problems and participatory development principles. Has run for many years with just

¹⁵ <https://www0.sun.ac.za/international/current-students/international-opportunities-for-su-students/think-tank.html> and <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/international/thinktank/honours-programme>

international students but from 2nd Semester 2020 will incorporate local students to further internationalization at home. The learning outcomes are explicitly aligned with global learning and course material is a mixture of local and international comparative. Students are divided by nationality into small transdisciplinary groups for the semester.¹⁶

BCom (International Business): A degree programme offered by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. The programme aims to “deliver graduates that are equipped to be role-players in the international knowledge economy. The programme further provides students with an enriched student experience through the interaction with international students and the global marketplace.”¹⁷ Key global learning components of the programme are its mandatory exchange semester abroad, taking a foreign language in the first year, and a transdisciplinary approach to content.

Global Citizenship Short Course: Offered by Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert Institute and the GEC. This short course, taken predominantly by local students, covers key global issues and hosts a special session that integrates international students.¹⁸

BNursing: A degree programme offered by the Department of Nursing and Midwifery. The department and GEC representative are in the early stages of aligning the degree outcomes with global learning outcomes, looking at incorporating some international perspectives, incorporating a short-term visit to a SADC partner to compare health systems and notions of care. This programme already includes a module on “Global Health Care Sciences” in the fourth year and current work aims to build from that module and connect it to other parts of the curriculum in a more integrated manner.

GEC Work: The GEC spent several months of 2019 aligning its functions with SU Vision 2040. The key area of contribution was found to be under CST: Transformative Student Experience. It was found that a global education is one of the key ways in which one might create a transformative student experience for SU students. The GEC resolved to use the AAC&U Global Learning Outcomes provisionally until SU has approved its own. These outcomes are now being incorporated into all aspects of the Centre’s functions from providing global self-awareness training for their Matie Buddies and Driver Ambassadors, rethinking the design of their incoming short term programs, a redesign of their support module for SU students abroad (Maties Abroad 102), to embedding learning outcomes into their International Student Organisation activities and tours.

A key area for future expansion in the GEC is the Global Education Programmes (GEP). The GEP has traditionally been used to supplement the mainstream course offerings at SU for international students. However the GEC is now committed to using those programmes to work collaboratively with faculties to present modules aligned with global learning principles. More specifically, the GEC will be seeking to develop experiential learning programs that align with (and are framed in) the SDGs and/or South African specific issues. The first example of this is a “World Views, Ethics and Belief Systems” module. This module is offered by the School for Public Leadership and will be co-offered by the GEC as a means to increase international student numbers in the course. The content of the course is ideally suited to

¹⁶ <https://www0.sun.ac.za/international/current-students/voluntary-community-engagement/global-service-learning-gls.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/faculty/economy/Documents/New%20degree%20in%20IntBuss.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/learning-teaching/student-affairs/student-leadership/fvzs/fvzs-global-citizenship>

global learning. The pedagogy of the course will intentionally encourage collaborative work between international and local students to maximise global learning.

The re-alignment for GEC has confirmed the view of Hovland that;

“Ultimately, institutions [ought to] rethink how the curriculum and the cocurriculum work together as a whole to help all students achieve the prioritized outcomes. Such a comprehensive approach to global learning raises questions about disciplinary and interdisciplinary work as well as the relationship between general education and the major, academic affairs and student affairs, classroom work and experiential learning.”

This call for a ‘comprehensive approach’ is the next step on SU’s global learning journey.

A way forward

The pilot project of the GEC, development of SUI Global Student Learning Outcomes, engagement with the literature, and visits by the author to several relevant conferences, and engagements at some US university campuses, has highlighted the following important ideas:

1. Global learning should be clearly defined in a collaborative, multi-stakeholder manner.
2. Global learning should be tied to clearly defined student learning outcomes.
3. Although there should be institution wide agreement, there should be reasonable latitude to allow for context specific application across the different university environments.
4. Global learning should provide a framework for renewal of current international programmes.

As such the author recommends the following steps:

1. The establishment of a Working Group for Global Learning (WGGL). Some proposed members (or another representative from the division or faculty):
 - a. Melanie Skead (Director: Centre for Teaching & Learning)
 - b. Ruth Andrews (Co-Curriculum Office)
 - c. Janet Bell (Senior Lecturer: Department of Nursing and Midwifery)
 - d. Pierre Erasmus (Professor: Investment Management, Financial Management)
 - e. Manne Bylund (Director: MultiCog Laboratory, General Linguistics)
 - f. Jaco Brink (Head: Equality Unit)
 - g. Representative (Frederik van Zyl Slabbert Institute)
 - h. Heidi October (Division for Student Affairs)
 - i. Representative (Division for Social Impact)
 - j. Joe Warren (Programme Coordinator: Global Learning)
2. Define ‘global learning’ in alignment with SU Institutional Strategy, Internationalisation Strategy, and stated graduate attributes¹⁹.
3. Development of institutional level global student learning outcomes.
4. Inclusion of outcomes into various programs throughout the university.
5. Extension of high impact global learning practices into the curriculum.

¹⁹ This has happened at the GEC departmental level but needs to happen more broadly.