



## SOCIAL INTERACTIONS WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Introduction and Purpose

The world is becoming increasingly, interconnected, whereby the youth of today need to engage with individuals of diverse cultures. Historically, universities have provided multiple opportunities to fulfill this need from formal global awareness programs that are observational in nature to active learning experiences, whereby the students are immersed into cultures different from their own. A report by Global Teacher Education Inc.<sup>1</sup> indicated that the majority of the studied universities and colleges have provided study abroad programs (82.1%), international field experience (61.5%), and presentations by international visitors (58.6%). Only 15.4 % had elective courses that focused on fostering a global perspective and 2.6% had required courses with a global perspective.<sup>1</sup> A major deterrent to study aboard, international field experiences, and visiting professors is the costs associated with these learning experiences. Infusion of a global perspective into the classroom is one cost-effective alternative for global awareness education. The purpose of this study is to describe

teaching strategies used to promote global awareness through nonverbal communication and its outcomes with a group of honors students.

Most commonly, universities have provided study abroad programs, international field experiences, and presentations by international guest speakers.<sup>1</sup> The study abroad programs involve long periods of time, whereby the student has structured academic programs within country, not of their origin. The intent of such programs is to expose students to new diverse cultures and languages with the inclusion of academic content to enhance the learning experience with the ultimate outcome of changing the students' global perspective of the world.<sup>2</sup> According to Kurt, Olitsky, and Geis, drawbacks include greater time commitments for one course; difficulty for on-time completion of degrees; greater costs with travel, room, and board; and inability to maintain employment.<sup>2</sup> Even though there is controversy on the length of time, which is most effective for study abroad programs, there is consensus with the positive outcomes of increased knowledge of international issues, personal growth as an individual, appreciation for global interdependence, and capability to function in diverse environments.<sup>3</sup>

International field experience is any means of exposure to a country not of the individual's home country and may be either credit-granting or non-credit granting.<sup>4</sup> The main difference from study abroad programs is the lack of more formal instruction and may be intended for either the development of the instructor and or the students.<sup>5</sup> Through the international field experience, the instructors

may develop an appreciation for different perspectives, alternative solutions to problems, and create new approaches to teaching.<sup>5</sup> These benefits, in turn, may lead to an enrichment of the teaching experience that the instructors may



provide their students. Students may also benefit directly from such an experience similar to study abroad programs. However, the depth of learning may not be as great without the guidance of instruction as the study abroad programs require.

The third most common way universities promote globalization with their students is the use of presentations by international guest speakers.<sup>1</sup> This type of a learning experience may be a single presentation or a series of presentations for a relatively short-term learning experience. Instructors use guest speakers in their classrooms to enrich the learning experience by providing current, real-life information that may not be available from the textbook.<sup>6</sup> The cost of a guest speaker is much less than study abroad programs or international field experiences, but are typically short in duration and are dependent on the capabilities of the individual speaker.

In comparison to presentations by guest speakers, global perspective courses provide longer learning experiences and may include a greater variety of teaching strategies. These courses are typically less costly in comparison to study abroad programs, as well as international field experiences. They may be required or elective; degree granting or non-degree granting; and include a variety of teaching strategies that may reach students with different learning styles. For example, the studied honors course (*Scholarship of Diversity - The Impact of Nonverbal Communication across a Diverse Society*) utilized the following strategies: panel discussion with international students; field research on campus, but with diverse populations; video dissections of diverse populations; individual literature review of cultural diversity; and journaling of real-life experiences and published evidence.

## Methods

This pilot study utilized a non-experimental, descriptive design and collected data from all students enrolled in an elective course for an honors program at a liberal arts university, located in the Midwest. Data were collected with a survey before and after the global learning experiences. Measures were taken to protect the integrity of the data and ensure the privacy of the participants.

## Participants

All eight honors students, enrolled an honors course during the spring term of 2018, were given the same opportunity to participate in the study. The honors course, entitled *Scholarship of Diversity - The Impact of Nonverbal Communication across a Diverse Society*, included three main goals related to global awareness, which were: 1. to investigate the effect of nonverbal communication (NVC), across a diverse society, 2. to develop an awareness and personal responsibility with situations or cases of diversity, and 3. to demonstrate an appreciation for the effects of NVC, across a diverse society.

## Instrumentation

The *Social Interaction Survey* included three parts, which were:

Part A. Demographics (i.e., academic level, gender, age, and major);  
Part B. Fourteen statements modified from the *International Volunteer Impacts Survey*<sup>7</sup> and  
Part C. Three open-ended questions related to global health.

The fourteen statements utilized a Likert scale, whereby strongly agree = 4; agree = 3; disagree = 2; and strongly disagree = 1.



## Procedure

After receiving consent, students were given the *Social Interaction Survey*, part A & B as a pre-test. Next, the students experienced diverse populations through multiple teaching strategies, such as: 1. panel discussions, 2. literature review, 3. field research, and 4. journaling. The content of the course was centered on NVC, which was broken down to eye contact, facial expression, physical distance, body language or posturing, gestures, touch, and nonverbal elements of speech. The common theme of each class was the process of discovery and reflection on the individual's own biases and prejudices to ultimately, develop an awareness and acceptance of diverse populations.

The panel discussions with international students were initially, organized by the honors students with the development of questions related to NVC and differences/similarities between countries. The developed questions were shared with the group of international students from five countries (i.e., China, India, Japan, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia). After the discussion, all students interacted informally with refreshments. The students were expected to journal their experiences and then share at the following class.

After reflecting on the panel discussion, the honors students were expected to find one article related to NVC, across diverse populations and post it on blackboard to share with classmates. The literature review was, also utilized with the final paper and presentation on a specific topic of choice.

The honors students conducted eight mini field research studies, concerning various aspects of NVC. One of those experiences was related to

cultural diversity. For example, one mini

group determined whether there was a difference between international and non-international students' response to the gesture of a high-five. The following week, students shared their findings and discussed the limitations of the mini-study, as well as future study. The sharing of the mini-study led to a lecture from the instructor, sharing the evidence concerning similarities and differences of NVC amongst countries.

In order for learning to take place, reflection needs to take place.<sup>9</sup> Journaling was utilized to encourage reflection. A nonverbal communication topic was assigned for discovery the week before the class that focuses on that particular topic. A template for the journal was created to stimulate reflection on cultural influences. For example, questions included the following:

1. Generate research questions concerning the cultural influences on nonverbal communication.
2. What did I do/observe this week, concerning cultural influences on nonverbal communication?
3. Find one document of evidence related to cultural influences on nonverbal communication. Cite the chosen reference and summarize.
4. Explain something new I learned this week about cultural influences on nonverbal communication.
5. Enumerate NEW questions that I now have about cultural influences on nonverbal communication.

On the last day of the course, the consenting students were given the *Social Interaction Survey*, part A, B, & C as post-test and the instructor left the room. The students were reminded to not put any identifiers on the survey and turned it in as a group of completed



surveys. The completion of the survey took approximately 10 minutes each time for a total time of 20 minutes.

### Statistical analysis

After the instructor completed course grading, the analyses were conducted. The demographic data (i.e., Part A) were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Data analysis of the *Social Interaction Survey* (i.e., Part B) used frequencies and percentages, as appropriate. Paired t- test of the pre-test/post-test means was used to determine differences between the survey results. The open-ended questions (i.e., Part C) used identification & coding of themes.

### Results

Out of the eight honors students, 25% were male and 75% female. The average age was 19.6 years  $\pm$  1.04 years and the range was from 21.4 to 18.5 years. Majority of the participants were at the freshman level (i.e., 40%), however, there were also three participants at the junior level and one at the sophomore level. Four majors were represented, including animal science/pre-vet, biology, pharmacy, and strength & conditioning. See Table 1 for specific data concerning demographics.

**Table 1. Demographics of Participants**

		Frequency (f <sup>a</sup> )	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
	Female	6	75.00
	Male	2	25.00
	Total	8	100.00
<b>Age (years)</b>			
	21.01-21.50	1	12.50
	20.51-21.00	1	12.50
	20.01-20.50	0	0.00
	19.51-20.00	1	12.50
	19.01-19.50	2	25.00
	18.51-19.00	3	37.50
	To	8	100.0
<b>Undergraduate Level</b>			
	Senior	0	0.00
		3	37.50
	Junior		
	Sophomore	1	12.50
	Freshman	4	50.00
	Total	8	100.00
<b>Major</b>			
	Animal Science/Pre-vet	4	50.00
	Biology	2	25.00
	Pharmacy	1	12.50
	Strength & Conditioning	1	12.50
	Total	8	100.00

<sup>a</sup>n=8 total



## Social Interactions across Diverse Populations

Prior to the introduction of the course, the participants, on average, disagreed with having no opportunity for social interactions; not being interested in other cultures; having values and beliefs different from other cultures; having negative interactions, being uncomfortable, and not being interested in other cultures. They strongly disagreed with the idea of not being necessary to understand other cultures, as well as fear of isolation and loss of own cultural identity by being close with other cultures. They agreed about the importance of sharing their culture with other cultures, which in turn were interested in positive relationships. In short, they indicated that they were not prejudiced against other

whereby the t-test = 2.1603, p = 0.0486.

cultures. After the completion of the course, there were no significant changes found in the participants attitudes concerning social interactions across diverse populations. See Table 2 for individual mean scores, concerning social interactions across diverse populations.

All students agreed to strongly agreed that the NVC course lead to an appreciation of other cultures, as well as a greater understanding of NVC in a global sense. No significant change was found with their level of appreciation. However, a significant positive change was found with their understanding of nonverbal communication in a global sense,

strong global perspective on nonverbal communication. Out of the provided teaching strategies, all identified the panel discussion with international students and reflection periods were most beneficial. Post-test, one

**Table 2. Social Interactions**

	Pre-test (n=7)	Post-test (n=8)
No opportunity for social interactions	2.50±0.71	2.50±0.83
Americans not interested in other cultures	2.00±0.58	2.50±0.76
Own values and beliefs are different from other cultures	2.14±0.95	2.37±0.94
Negative interactions other cultures	2.14±0.88	2.37±0.94
Not comfortable with other cultures	2.14±0.88	2.37±0.94
Not interested in other cultures	2.14±0.88	2.37±0.94
Not necessary to understand other cultures	1.25±0.55	1.25±0.55
Fear of isolation from my friends, if close with other cultures	2.00±0.58	2.50±0.83
Fear of loss of cultural identity, if close with other cultures	2.00±0.58	2.50±0.83
Share my culture with other cultures	2.87±0.35	3.00±0.79
Not prejudiced against other cultures	3.75±0.46	3.75±0.46
Other cultures are interested in positive relationships	2.75±0.46	3.00±0.79
Course lead to meaningful relationships with other cultures	2.87±0.35	3.00±0.79
Course lead to understanding NVC in a global sense	2.50±0.83	3.75±0.46

a<sup>n</sup>=8 total; SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1.

## Teaching Strategies of NVC Course

In response to the open-ended questions, all eight participants reported that the honor's nonverbal communication course provided a

student explained the panel discussion with international students helped me by being able to ask specific questions in a comfortable setting with people who wanted to share other things shared, "it made me more aware of differences in nonverbal communication between cultures". Several participants indicated that reflection was also helpful for a more complete understanding. One student specified, "...it helped me learn and understand more about people who are different from myself. It could help create better relationships and hopefully be successful". 3.750±0.46

When asked what could be improved, majority (62.5%) responded with the need for more time and additional countries represented with the panel discussions. Two participants (25%) could not think of any changes and one participant (12.5%) specified the need for more





socialization with the international students.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The honors course entitled, *Scholarship of Diversity - The Impact of Nonverbal Communication across a Diverse Society* demonstrated positive outcomes, as reported by the participants. Even though significance could not be established with participants' attitudes concerning social interactions across diverse populations, a difference was found with their knowledge of nonverbal communication in a global sense. It may be that the use of multiple teaching strategies may have reached students with varied learning styles.

The length of the course, as well as the strategies that promoted reflection may have promoted the students' level of understanding. Reflection allows one to make sense of current experiences through connecting with own past experiences, preferences, and beliefs.<sup>8</sup> It facilitates deeper learning by reframing problems, questioning assumptions, and analyzing own experiences.<sup>8</sup> In order for reflection to occur, it requires time as the studied course allowed over an academic term.

The instructor employed teaching strategies to allow reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. According to Schön, reflection-for-action promotes an anticipation of the learning experience, occurring before the event; reflection-in-action allows immediate consideration of the experience, occurring during the event; and

reflection-on-action further explores the outcomes of the event, after it has occurred.<sup>9</sup> The instructor of the studied course organized the students to construct questions for the

panel discussion, promoting an anticipation of the learning experience. The questions were, also shared ahead of time with the

international students so that they could reflect on their answers.

During the panel discussion, each student was assigned a time-period to be in charge of questions and follow-up questions. When they were not acting as the leader, they were expected to take notes and make observations about the experience, allowing greater depth of understanding of the experience.

After the panel discussion with the international students, the honors students discussed their impressions with the instructor. The students also took the week after this event to record their thoughts in a journal. Finally, a formal lecture was provided, concerning nonverbal communication amongst diverse cultures, allowing an even greater depth of knowledge.

The actual teaching strategies responsible for the positive outcomes of this course are not known. In addition, the study's limitations need to be considered. First, the small sample size of eight participants limits the generalizability of the results. Continued study of this course over time with a pooling of data would allow improved data analysis. Another way to improve the analysis would be to compare the differences between the individual pre-test and post-test scores and then do the paired wilcoxon sign-rank test. In order to compare individual scores, data from each individual would need an assigned identification number.

Secondly, the instructor was the primary investigator, which could have an influence on the students' responses. An attempt to minimize this effect was made by leaving the room when the students completed the surveys and none



were analyzed until after grades were submitted. A secondary investigator, not associated with the teaching of the course could be utilized with a future study.

Finally, the instrument itself may need to be revised to further distinguish the specific teaching strategy that makes the greatest difference with the students' knowledge and attitudes. An additional open-ended question could be added to the post-test. Another alternative would be to change the method of data collection. A focus group interview could be used to obtain greater depth of knowledge concerning the favored teaching strategies.

The use of an academic course with a global perspective may be a cost-effective alternative to study-abroad or international experiences. The investigator questions whether a particular teaching strategy made a greater impact on with the participants' knowledge of nonverbal communication in a global sense. In addition, the students' attitudes may have been affected; however, the sample size was too small to demonstrate significance. Further exploration of specific teaching strategies on knowledge and attitudes of students through a focus group is recommended.

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