



Internationalizing Apparel Design Curriculum to Develop Interculturally Competent Students

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Background and Purpose: Apparel professionals operate within a global industry and need the necessary skills to interact with individuals from various cultures. In response to this need, higher education often offers various global educational opportunities such as study abroad and international internships. However, study abroad or immersive experiences are not always a physical or financial reality for all students. As a result, it is necessary for instructors to create more globally focused curriculum on campus. Course internationalization is a process where international, global, and intercultural components are integrated into course content, teaching methods, assignments, and assessment (Khan, n.d.). Course internationalization offers equal conditions for all students to graduate with the skills needed to tackle global challenges regardless of their capability.

One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts at postsecondary institutions is the development of interculturally competent students (Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competency as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. Darla Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model was used to design a course project for third- and fourth-year apparel design students and assess their competence at the end of the project. However, Deardorff's research shows that intercultural competence cannot be acquired in a short space of time or in one module. It is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but a lifelong process that will develop through continued education and experience. It cannot be mastered in one project or even one course. In accordance, this study serves as an introduction to students and focuses largely on assessing the students' attitudes toward and knowledge of other cultures.

Students were asked to select one global issue to research and use as a source of influence to design a wearable art piece. Each design is meant to bring awareness to the chosen issue and further educate viewers about the topic and culture associated. Before the project began, the instructor led the class in discussion to help students understand core concepts related to culture and cultural competence. Students participated in activities designed by Barnardo and Deardorff (2012) to help understand differences, explore cultural values, and navigate identity. Next, students selected their topics and began research. Once information was collected about their chosen issue and associated culture(s), the instructor led students in brainstorming activities aimed to guide the designers in translating abstract ideas into a visual product. Activities for this process were adapted from Jennings' (2011) inspiration workbook to allow students to make connections between their lived experiences and aspects of researched cultures. Students then moved through the design process beginning with sketching and proceeding to materials sourcing, prototype creation, fit assessment, and finally creation of their final wearable art piece. After completing garments, students reflected on their global issue research and design process through a written analysis and presentation of their work.

This study aims to examine 1) the impact of course internationalization on students' intercultural competence and 2) determinants of success of the project. Two sub-dimensions categorized intercultural competence following existing literature (Deardorff, 2006): 1) knowledge and

comprehension – including deep understanding and knowledge of other cultures, and cultural self-awareness, 2) open attitudes towards differences and diversity. The third sub-dimension identified in research, 3) intercultural communication skills, would need to be assessed in future projects when students can interact with people from various cultures. The success of the project was measured by students' self-report at the end of the project, papers and presentations, and instructor evaluations. The findings contribute to global education literature by providing information on the value of course internationalization and future improvement.

Method: Data were collected from the class after completion of the project. Research shows that a multimethod, multiperspective assessment approach must be used to assess students' intercultural competence (Deardorff & Jones, 2009). As a result, three assessment methods were utilized in this study: self-report survey, student papers and presentation, and instructor evaluations. At the end of the semester, students completed a survey to measure their attitude, knowledge, and skills related to cultural differences. All questions were developed based on existing literature and measured on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Questions focused on the three elements identified by Deardorff (2006) as critical to intercultural competence: 1) Attitudes – respect, openness, and curiosity, 2) Knowledge - cultural self-awareness, culture specific knowledge, grasp of global issues and trends, and 3) Skills – analyzing, interpreting, relating, and critical thinking. Students' competency was also assessed through a research paper and presentation to the class and faculty within the department. After presentations, faculty members evaluated each student's level of competency using the knowledge and attitudes sections of the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric released by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.). A total of 10 students were assessed. The majority of students were female (90% female, 10% male).

Outcomes and Discussion: The Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric assigns a value to the level of performance in each category based on a 4-point scale: benchmark (1), milestones (2-3), and capstone (4). In the category of cultural self-awareness, the majority of students scored between a 2 and 3. The majority of students scored between 1-2 points when their knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks was assessed. These two categories indicated students' lack of awareness about their own cultural biases and understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture. However, these results are indicative of the students being novice to intercultural competence and this being many students' first experience with international curriculum. In contrast, the majority of students scored 2-3 points when curiosity and openness to other cultures was assessed. These scores aligned with responses from the self-report measure, showing students' desire to learn and understand other cultures.

Deardorff's (2006) Intercultural Competence Model categorizes outcomes into internal and external. Internal outcomes refer to individuals who "learn to be flexible, adaptable, empathetic and adopt an ethno-relative perspective", while external outcomes refer to the observable behavior and communication styles of the individuals". This study utilized the self-response survey to assess students' internal outcomes. Responses showed students' felt they possessed high levels of empathy and flexibility but are still developing an adaptable nature and ethno-relative perspective.

External outcomes were not measured in this study. Future iterations of this project could include interviews or collaborations with individuals from another culture to allow for assessing external

outcomes. For future improvements, a pre- and post-test survey should be given to assess how the project influenced students' intercultural competence and produce quantitative data for comparison.

References

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