

Trends & Insights

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Global Citizenship: What Are We Talking About and Why Does It Matter?

By Madeleine F. Green

During the past decade higher education's interest in internationalization has intensified, and the concept of civic education or engagement has broadened from a national focus to a more global one, thus expanding the concept that civic responsibility extends beyond national borders.

As Schattle (2009) points out, the concept of global citizenship is not a new one; it can be traced back to ancient Greece. But the concept and the term seem to have new currency and are now widely used in higher education. Many institutions cite global citizenship in their mission statements and/or as an outcome of liberal education and internationalization efforts. Many have "centers for global citizenship" or programs with this label.

Additionally, national and international organizations and networks have devoted themselves to helping institutions promote global citizenship, although they do not necessarily use that term. For example, the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](#) sponsors a series of programs concerned with civic learning, a broad concept that includes several goals for undergraduate education: strengthening U.S. democracy, preparing globally responsible citizenry, developing personal and social responsibility, and promoting global learning and diversity. The [Salzburg Seminar's International Study Program](#) provides week-long workshops for faculty to consider the concepts of global citizenship and their integration into undergraduate education. It also provides college students with programs on global issues. The

[Talloires Network](#) is an international alliance formed in 2005 that includes 202 institutions in 58 countries "devoted to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education." The [Talloires declaration](#) refers specifically to "preparing students to contribute positively to local, national, and global communities." Founded in 1985, the oldest of these networks, [Campus Compact](#), retains its predominant, but not exclusive, focus on the United States.

Defining Global Citizenship

A foray into the literature or a look at the many ways colleges and universities talk about global citizenship reveals how broad a concept it is and how different the emphasis can be depending on who uses the term. This essay can only outline a few important elements of global citizenship, but a brief overview of the many meanings should help institutions formulate or clarify their own definition of it, identify those elements that are central to their educational vision, and add other dimensions. The following are among the most salient features of global citizenship (this section draws from a variety of sources but primarily relies on Schattle (2007)).

Global citizenship as a choice and a way of thinking.

National citizenship is an accident of birth; global citizenship is different. It is a voluntary association with a concept that signifies "ways of thinking and living within multiple cross-cutting communities—cities, regions, states, nations, and international

collectives...” (Schattle 2007, 9). People come to consider themselves as global citizens through different formative life experiences and have different interpretations of what it means to them. The practice of global citizenship is, for many, exercised primarily at home, through engagement in global issues or with different cultures in a local setting. For others, global citizenship means firsthand experience with different countries, peoples, and cultures. For most, there exists a connection between the global and the local. Whatever an individual’s particular “take” on global citizenship may be, that person makes a choice in whether or how to practice it.

Global citizenship as self-awareness and awareness of others. As one international educator put it, it is difficult to teach intercultural understanding to students who are unaware they, too, live in a culture that colors their perceptions. Thus, awareness of the world around each student begins with self-awareness. Self-awareness also enables students to identify with the universalities of the human experience, thus increasing their identification with fellow human beings and their sense of responsibility toward them.

Global citizenship as they practice cultural empathy. Cultural empathy or intercultural competence is commonly articulated as a goal of global education, and there is significant literature on these topics. Intercultural competence occupies a central position in higher education’s thinking about global citizenship and is seen as an important skill in the workplace. There are more than 30 instruments or inventories to assess intercultural competence. Cultural empathy helps people see questions from multiple perspectives and move deftly among cultures—sometimes navigating their own multiple cultural identities, sometimes moving out to experience unfamiliar cultures.

Global citizenship as the cultivation of principled decisionmaking. Global citizenship entails an awareness of the interdependence of individuals and systems and a sense of responsibility that follows from it. Navigating “the treacherous waters of our epic interdependence (Altinay 2010, 4) requires a set of guiding principles that will shape ethical and fair responses. Although the goal of undergraduate

education should not be to impose a “correct” set of answers, critical thinking, cultural empathy, and ethical systems and choices are an essential foundation to principled decisionmaking.

Global citizenship as participation in the social and political life of one’s community. There are many different types of communities, from the local to the global, from religious to political groups. Global citizens feel a connection to their communities (however they define them) and translate that sense of connection into participation. Participation can take the form of making responsible personal choices (such as limiting fossil fuel consumption), voting, volunteering, advocacy, and political activism. The issues may include the environment, poverty, trade, health, and human rights. Participation is the action dimension of global citizenship.

Why Does Global Citizenship Matter?

The preceding list could be much longer and more detailed; global citizenship covers a lot of ground. Thus, it is useful to consider the term *global citizenship* as shorthand for the habits of mind and complex learning associated with global education. The concept is useful and important in several respects.

First, a focus on global citizenship puts the spotlight on why internationalization is central to a quality education and emphasizes that internationalization is a means, not an end. Serious consideration of the goals of internationalization makes student learning the key concern rather than counting inputs.

Second, the benefits of encouraging students to consider their responsibilities to their communities and to the world redound to them, institutions, and society. As Altinay (2010, 1) put it, “a university education which does not provide effective tools and forums for students to think through their responsibilities and rights as one of the several billions on planet Earth, and along the way develop their moral compass, would be a failure.” Strengthening institutional commitment to serving society enriches the institution, affirms its relevance and contributions to society, and benefits communities (however expan-

sive the definition) and the lives of their members.

Third, the concept of global citizenship creates conceptual and practical connections rather than cleavages. The commonalities between what happens at home and “over there” become visible. The characteristics that human beings share are balanced against the differences that are so conspicuous. On a practical level, global citizenship provides a concept that can create bridges between the work of internationalization and multicultural education. Although these efforts have different histories and trajectories, they also share important goals of cultural empathy and intercultural competence (Olson et al. 2007).

No concept or term is trouble-free; no idea goes uncontested by some faculty member or group. For better or for worse, global citizenship will undoubtedly provoke disagreements that reflect larger academic and philosophical debates. There is plenty of skepticism about global citizenship. Some object to any concept that suggests a diminished role for the nation and allegiance to it or the ascendancy of global governance systems. The idea of developing students’ moral compasses can raise questions about whose values and morals and how institutions undertake this delicate task. Some students will choose not to accept responsibility for the fate of others far away, or may see inequality as an irredeemable fact of life. Some faculty will stand by the efficacy and wisdom of the market; others will see redressing inequality as the key issue for the future of humankind. And so on.

Such debates, sometimes civil or acrimonious, are, for better or worse, the stuff of academe. Implementing new ideas—even if they have been around for a

very long time as in the case of global citizenship—can be slow and painful. However, if colleges and universities can produce graduates with the knowledge and the disposition to be global citizens, the world would certainly be a better place.

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References

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A Question of Purpose

What was once simply called “international education” is now a field awash with varied terminology, different conceptual frameworks, goals, and underlying assumptions.¹

Although “internationalization” is widely used, many use globalization—with all its different definitions and connotations—in its stead. Rather than take on the job of sorting out the terminology, let me point out two significant conceptual divides in the conversation. Both center on the purpose of internationalization.

In the first divide, we see one face of internationalization as referring to a series of activities closely associated with institutional prestige, profile, and revenue. These activities are generally quantifiable, lend themselves to institutional comparisons and benchmarking, and provide metrics for internationalization performance that resonate with trustees and presidents. Examples include hosting international students, sending students abroad, developing international agreements, and delivering programs abroad.

The other face of internationalization—student learning—is much more difficult to capture and assess, but it provides an important answer to the “so what?” question. Why does internationalization matter? What impact do internationalization activities have on student learning? How do they contribute to preparing students to live and work in a globalized and culturally diverse world?

Different terms with overlapping meanings are used to describe the student learning dimension of internationalization. [Global learning](#), [global education](#), and [global competence](#) are familiar terms; they, too, are often used synonymously. The global in all three terms often includes the concepts of [international](#) (between and among nations), [global](#) (transcending national borders), and

[intercultural](#) (referring often to cultural differences at home and around the world).

Also prevalent in the student learning discussion is another cluster of terms that focus specifically on deepening students’ understanding of global issues and interdependence, and encouraging them to engage socially and politically to address societal issues. These terms include *global citizenship*, *world citizenship* ([Nussbaum 1997](#)), *civic learning*, *civic engagement*, and *global civics* ([Altinay 2010](#)). These terms, too, share several key concepts, and are often used interchangeably.

The second divide focuses on the divergent, but not incompatible goals of workforce development (developing workers to compete in the global marketplace) or as a means of social development (developing globally competent citizens.) Global competitiveness is primarily associated with mastery of math, science, technology, and occasionally language competence, whereas “global competence” (a broad term, to be sure), puts greater emphasis on intercultural understanding and knowledge of global systems and issues, culture, and language.

As the field grows increasingly complex and the instrumental goals of internationalization become more prominent, it is important that campus discussions and planning efforts sort out their language, underlying concepts, and implied or explicit values. Otherwise, people run the risk of talking past each other and developing strategies that may not match their goals.

*It is important for U.S. readers to note that the goals of and assumptions about internationalization vary widely around the world. [The Third Global Survey of Internationalization](#) conducted by the International Association of Universities found that there are divergent views among institutions in different regions of the risks and benefits of internationalizations. Based on their findings, IAU has launched an initiative to take a fresh look at internationalization from a global perspective.