

# **International Education and Teacher Preparation in the U.S.**

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## **Global Dominance/Global Ignorance**

It is one of the cruel ironies of history that the United States today occupies a uniquely dominant global role while its citizens remain dangerously ignorant of the new global dynamics driving the events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The lamentable state of public knowledge about the world – even the most basic understanding of its geography and history – is not new. For most of its history, the U.S. enjoyed open and unguarded borders to the north and south. The dominance of its economic and cultural power to the north and its political and military power to the south meant that America was essentially a big, largely self-sufficient island.

Concerns about America’s myopic vision of the world peaked once before in the post-Vietnam era with the publication of a report by the President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1979). This report, commissioned by President Jimmy Carter, detailed the deficiencies of our educational system with regard to international studies, geography and foreign languages and warned of the consequences of inaction. The commission was “profoundly alarmed” by their findings—“a serious deterioration in this country’s language and research capacity, at a time when an increasingly hazardous international military, political and economic environment is making unprecedented demands on America’s resources, intellectual capacity and public sensitivity.” Nearly 25 years later, most of its recommendations remain unfulfilled.

In 2003, world events again remind us of how little we know about the world and how ill-equipped the average citizen is to assess the implications of these events, much less how to respond. How can the citizenry acquire the necessary tools to understand a rapidly changing global scene – including the emergence of global terrorism - and evaluate with confidence the implications of one policy choice over another? U.S. higher education must do more than develop high levels of expertise in languages and area studies to help protect American security. It must also provide each generation with the skills and knowledge necessary to make informed national policy choices that will have profound global implications.

Such a complex undertaking clearly requires a comprehensive evaluation of the current state of education in the U.S. and ultimately a collaboration among federal officials, governors, state

departments of education, school administrators, district officials, parents, institutions of higher education, the business community, textbook publishers, the media, museums, cultural institutions and libraries, as well as non profit and philanthropic organizations.

What do college students know about the world? Various polls provide continuing evidence that we haven't made much progress since the 1981 Educational Testing Service survey entitled "College students' knowledge and beliefs: A survey of global understanding." The answer both then and now is: Not much.

A critical point of leverage for higher education in changing this situation is the training of future teachers in K-12 education. Colleges and universities have no choice but to build their efforts to internationalize faculty, students and curricula on the foundation of K-12 education. Before we look specifically at data on the internationalization of teacher preparation and the tentative conclusions they suggest, we should review the efforts in recent decades to introduce global elements into teacher education and the K-12 curriculum.

### **The Teaching Reform Movement and International Education (1980-2000)**

The teacher education reform movement of the 1980's sought to align teacher preparation with the demands of an emerging information society and an increasingly interdependent world at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. One concern focused on the quality of students who planned to enter the K-12 teaching profession. A second issue was teacher education program reform, which led to (1) the overall reduction of the education coursework in many licensure programs; (2) the development of standards of teacher preparation in various fields, beginning in science and mathematics; (3) the eventual development of a diversity standard for "multicultural and global perspectives" (NCATE Standard 4) in teacher preparation; and (4) changes in the K-12 curriculum itself (foreign languages, geography, world history, Magnet/IB schools).

### **Research Design**

Our analysis focuses on those students (so-called "completers") who have been licensed by their state to teach in K-12 education. Our research strategy was to identify a large cohort of such completers and to examine their undergraduate experience to determine its international dimension. For purposes of this preliminary study we wanted to develop baseline data that will help answer the following question: How does the international study of teacher preparation students compare across several states and with other relevant groups of students? This initial study could answer that question only in a preliminary and partial way and fully only along one dimension, namely study abroad. But a strategy has been developed for collecting the data relevant to the main research question. Perhaps equally important, key issues in this research have surfaced that can inform future research.

In an effort to identify a baseline for the international educational experiences of teachers, this paper examines the actual curricula that pre-service teachers take in college. Clearly, college courses (including foreign language study and study abroad) are not the only way that teachers learn about the world. But if colleges and universities have a responsibility to assure that

America's new teachers have the knowledge to teach about an interdependent and complex world, then this must be reflected in the courses that pre-service teachers take.

This initial study undertook an undergraduate transcript analysis of a 2001 cohort of 690 licensed teachers at three teacher preparation programs in three different states – Old Dominion University in Virginia (ODU), the University of South Florida (USF), and St. Cloud State University in Minnesota (SCSU). The final cohort was comprised as follows for the three institutions: ODU – 81 (15 male (18.5%); 66 female (81.5%)); USF – 379 (42 male (11.1%); 337 female (88.9%)); SCSU – 231 (64 male (28%); 166 female (72%)). The distribution by gender reflects the predominance of elementary education licensure in all three sub-cohorts and the predominance of females in this field. A coding template of nine questions was developed to identify the key international components of undergraduate coursework as a percentage of overall coursework (see Appendix). Whereas such elements as foreign language study and study abroad were relatively easy to identify, the number of “international” courses taken as part of general education, a major or electives, was more difficult. A comparison of long lists of “international” courses taken by teacher preparation students at the participating institutions, however, assured a high level of consistency in these data.

## Research Results

1. **Teacher preparation students and their undergraduate course of study:** The students in our cohort were very frequently transfer students from community colleges: about 59% of the ODU cohort, 81% of the USF cohort and 73% of the SCSU cohort. This is relevant to the internationalization of teacher preparation students because the general education program at community colleges, despite significant change in the past decade, is less likely to have an international dimension than at four-year institutions. Likewise, because of the need to “count” every course at the upper-division level toward meeting licensure and graduation requirements, study abroad is much less likely among students who transfer from community colleges. Foreign language study, too, if sufficient to gain admission to a community college, can often meet general education requirements at universities through articulation agreements.
2. **Teacher preparation students and their majors.** Depending on the state, teacher preparation students may be required to major in an education field (Florida); they may be required to major in an arts and science discipline, frequently completing a minor field in education (Virginia); or they may have no restrictions on the choice of major (Minnesota).

Of course, the major selected by teacher preparation students also determines the potential for internationalization in about one-quarter of their overall undergraduate curriculum. At ODU, the prevalence of “interdisciplinary studies” (52%) means that the major program is less focused on a disciplinary methodology than is the case with other arts and science majors. But the IDS major also offers more room for international coursework, especially in the social sciences. At USF, the sole choice (100%) of the education major means that a substantial portion of their curriculum is focused on pedagogy and less likely to have an international dimension. At SCSU, students may

major in any field so long as they complete teacher education requirements; most students (67%) chose to major in an education field.

3. **Teacher preparation students and foreign language study.** Teacher preparation students rarely pursued foreign language study at the college level. About 16% of the students studied Spanish, 5% studied French and 2% studied German. The only other languages studied by the overall cohort were Japanese (<1%), Latin (<1%) and Russian (<1%). Fully 76% did no foreign language study at all at the college level. The most common level of study of foreign language was 1-2 semesters; 5% studied for 3-4 semesters; only 1% studied a foreign language for five semesters or more.
3. **Teacher preparation students and study abroad.** The prevalence of transfer students among the overall cohort helps explain why such a small number of teacher preparation students had studied abroad. At ODU, 1% had studied abroad; at USF, 2.9%; at SCSU, 6.5%. Most who studied abroad participated in short-term programs, and 3.5% fulfilled all or part of their student teaching requirement abroad.

For ODU, it is possible to compare the total Arts and Letters graduates in May 2001 with this cohort of “completers” for teaching licensure. All Arts and Letters graduates studied abroad at the rate of 4.6%, which is more than four times more frequently than teacher prep students. The relatively high rate of study abroad at SCSU is explained by the annual availability of two student teaching programs in Costa Rica and the UK, which are strongly promoted within SCSU’s College of Education. Overall, the sub-cohorts that were relatively more successful at study abroad participation (USF and SCSU) focused on clinical programs.

5. **Teacher preparation students and the “international” curriculum.** Defining the “international” curriculum very broadly to include courses in all the major fields of study (and including foreign language and study abroad), our cohort sampled this curriculum at roughly the same percentage at the three institutions. At ODU, this international curriculum represented about 26% of the total credits taken as an undergraduate. At USF, this percentage was 11%. At SCSU, the percentage was 8%. We speculate that the prevalence of transfer students and education majors at USF and SCSU explains the smaller role that the international curriculum plays in these sub-cohorts.

A follow-up study will include additional institutions in order to expand the student cohort to approximately 5,000 teacher preparation students. An analysis of state standards of licensure, statewide student assessment standards, campus general education requirements and local programs providing international experiences will accompany the transcript analyses of the various student cohorts in order to explain differences in rates of “internationalization” among the participating institutions/states. Additional comparisons with broader cohorts of non-teacher prep students will also lend greater significance to these data.

## **Implications**

As the primary source of trained teachers in the U.S., higher education must provide graduates with the knowledge and experiences necessary to help them incorporate global perspectives in their K-12 classrooms. This is also true for in-service teachers who must lead the way in reforming the content and delivery of the K-12 curriculum. Colleges of Education are the indispensable pivot points for enhanced communication with their own Colleges of Arts and Sciences, with Title VI NRC's and LRC's, with Title II programs, community colleges, pre-service students and in-service teachers. Two critical barriers to this communication are identified: (1) the institutional divide between the main trainers of teachers (regional, public (AASCU) institutions) and the hosts of area and language expertise (public and private research intensive (AAU and NASULGC) institutions with large graduate programs); and (2) the institutional divide between community colleges, where many future teachers begin their study, and four-year/graduate institutions, where all must complete their study. Bridging these two barriers is critical to making progress in this area.

Title VI programs can have a significant impact on the education of prospective teachers. Title VI-A UFLIS programs can augment the international dimensions of general education courses in colleges and universities. Teacher education faculty and curricula can be the focus of a Title VI-A project; unfortunately, few proposals specifically geared to this population have been submitted over the past 40 years. NRC's and LRC's can reach out to K-12 teachers through consultations, workshops and other special programs. Unfortunately, such outreach is frequently viewed as peripheral to the core functions of Title VI centers and not as important as the training of advanced language speakers and other scholarly activities.

## **Recommendations**

Specific recommendations are presented regarding the role of the following groups with a stake in internationalizing teacher education: state governments (6), professional organizations (3) and institutions of higher education (11).

## **Conclusion**

Until there is a coordinated effort at all levels of teacher preparation and in-service professional development to enhance the nation's teachers' ability to teach about the world, U.S. students will continue to exhibit a profoundly discouraging lack of knowledge about the world. Global citizenship in the 21st Century requires a different set of knowledge, skills and attitudes than what was required of previous generations. In today's highly interdependent and interactive world, every city, town and state in the U.S. is impacted by global events, whether political, economic, environmental, socio-cultural or military. The "basics" of education have evolved considerably over the years. Those who long for the simplicity of "going back to basics" must reassess what constitutes the "basics" in a global age. Moving forward to a redefined set of basics more suitable to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the task that lies before us. Recent surveys make it quite clear that young adults in the U.S. do not have the necessary global perspectives they need; they lack fundamental geographic and cultural knowledge; and they increasingly assume that monolingualism and ignorance of world affairs are no barriers to success in their future. Changing this mindset will require a massive national effort, spearheaded by strong federal leadership and innovative state initiatives. U.S. institutions of higher education

should be more than cheerleaders in this process. Colleges and universities (and colleges of education and the liberal arts in particular), need to exert leadership and become eager partners with school districts and state boards of education to prepare students to navigate this new global age.