CASE STUDY

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JUNIATA COLLEGE
Assessing Global Learning: Lessons from the Field
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Introduction
Juniata College, a small, science-focused liberal arts institution of 1600 undergraduate students in the Appalachian Mountains of central Pennsylvania seems an unlikely candidate for global engagement and assessment of global learning outcomes. Yet for some thirty years, Juniata has excelled in its international efforts, including international student enrollment growth, internationalization of the curriculum, cultures, and languages taught across the curriculum, and increasing study abroad numbers. Winner of the 2012 NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization, Juniata achieved 10 percent international student enrollment and 41 percent study abroad rates for its 2012 graduates, and is recognized by IIE’s Open Doors as among the highest numbers of participants in long-term study abroad in baccalaureate colleges, in spite of its small size.

Juniata’s focus on internationalization emerges from its mission to prepare students for “ethical leadership in the global community.” The core curriculum aims for student engagement in a number of global learning areas, including aesthetic appreciation of cultural production, understanding international perspectives, and exploration of social behavior, values, and the processes of the natural world, as well as interdisciplinary, international, and cultural analysis. Juniata students must take 6 credits (usually 2 courses) in each of the “FISHN” designations, which stand for fine arts, international, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, respectively. The “I” designation came about when the college initiated the integration of international elements in its core curriculum in the 1970s, and allows the presentation of global issues in one of three ways: “(1) The course introduces students to the history, art, literature, philosophy, or civic life of people of different nationalities. (2) The course requires students to think and express themselves in a language other than English. (3) The course examines international social, material, cultural, or intellectual exchange at a systemic level.”

In addition to the FISHN core courses, students must also take one of the courses found across campus designated as “CA,” or Cultural Analysis, that deal with human culture in its various forms (e.g., philosophic, literary, artistic, economic, social, political, scientific). Such courses focus on “the thoughts and behaviors of individuals and groups and how relationships between ideas and institutions have shaped societies. Approaches include examining the historical development of a given culture over time; analyzing encounters or conflicts between two cultures or societies; and studying the variety of interactions among individuals and sub-groups within a given culture or society.”

This identification of global learning in the mission and its presence in the core curriculum have led to the development of a wide variety of global student learning opportunities. However, as at many institutions, until fairly recently many of these learning opportunities were introduced unsystematically, without clearly drawing lines between specific outcomes and particular opportunities, and with little attention to measuring the direct effects of these efforts on student learning at the institutional level. Because the assessment
that was occurring was mostly at the classroom and program level, there was little understanding of how the institution as a whole fostered student learning. Moreover, the practice of assessing student learning primarily in the classroom meant that knowledge about—and to a certain extent, attitudes toward—the world have been the focus, rather than the development of skills and competencies students were developing, particularly through such experiential and global learning opportunities as study abroad.

Global Learning Opportunities
Students have many different ways to engage in global learning. In addition to the core curriculum, Juniata offers students the opportunity to undertake interdisciplinary study, through its “Program of Emphasis” (POE) alternative to majors and minors. The two-adviser system enables students to work with their advisers to craft a course of study that engages more holistically with the world, and enables the integration of courses taken abroad into their POE. Juniata’s study abroad opportunities are primarily through exchange agreements, and the institution encourages faculty members and departments to collaborate closely with specific international partners, and to compare curricula and course preparation to foster the greatest possible integration of study abroad courses into the POE as possible.

Before students go abroad and after they return, they can engage with experiential global learning opportunities on campus such as the award-winning Language in Motion program, which enables Juniata students to share their language expertise with students at local schools. The Global Village living and learning community provides an opportunity for students to consider their relationship to the world in a residential environment.

Assessment Culture
Juniata takes assessment seriously. The College uses a variety of assessment measures at the course, program, and institutional levels. NSSE has provided periodic institutional snapshots of student perceptions of their learning. Featured as a “data-rich college” in the NSSE 2011 Annual Results, senior administrators at Juniata are described as “firm believers in gathering as much data as possible to inform their planning efforts.”

The James J. Lakso Center for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) has been crucial in fostering Juniata’s culture of assessment. Established with support from the Teagle Foundation, SoTL “promotes professional development related to evidence-based practice in higher education.” Juniata’s SoTL Center has been recognized by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) for its faculty-driven, “evidence-based teaching” approach to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and many faculty and staff employ the “implement–measure–change–implement” loop to improve their offerings. Although the assessment of global learning outcomes is a relatively recent effort at Juniata, it has gained momentum in a short amount of time and builds on a solid foundation of assessment initiatives.

Global Learning Assessment
The need to identify and assess global learning outcomes more intentionally first became apparent after the 2002-2003 decennial accreditation review visit by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. As one of three focus areas selected by Juniata for the self-study (along with “The First Year” and “Student Engagement”), “Internationalization” was identified as a priority for evaluation and strategic growth. The International Education Committee (IEC), composed of faculty, staff, and students, was formed around this time, originally to advise the campus community generally on issues of international education and programs. It has since evolved to serve more practical functions, including setting study abroad policies and procedures, and voting on student petitions.

Because the self-study process resulted in a long list of action items to be undertaken with regard to internationalism, and because the visiting team recognized that the College needed “to work to improve actual support for internationalization to supplement structures and policies that are already in place,” it recommended that the Center for Internationalization (CIE) be among the first administrative units to be evaluated as part of the College’s assessment efforts. To implement the recommendation of the Middle States team, Juniata participated in the American Council on Education Internationalization Laboratory in 2005. While conducting the self-study for the ACE review, the IEC members began to realize that there was a lack of understanding
at the institutional level about what students were developing in terms of skills and competencies, compared to the knowledge and attitudes that were being assessed at the course and program level. As part of the campus-wide review process, the IEC identified intercultural competencies desirable for all Juniata graduates (see Appendix I). To understand the international office’s contribution to this specific set of institutional learning outcomes, these competencies were than mapped along the programs of the efforts of the CIE. This work was expanded in spring 2013, when the process of mapping intercultural competencies more broadly across the curriculum and campus began.

The 2008 Juniata institutional strategic plan identified a number of specific areas of development, including the establishment of living and learning world language residences. Additionally, a task force was established by the president to focus on diversity and international initiatives that would strengthen their combined contribution to global learning. That task force was convened partially in response to NSSE results that suggested Juniata was less successful in engaging students with difference than the national average. The task force called for the foundation of a Global Village Living and Learning Community that would integrate language houses into a larger intercultural living vision. It also called for a focus on assessing a specific realm of global learning (intercultural learning) through the formation of an Intercultural Learning Assessment Committee (ILAC).

ILAC began meeting in 2008-2009, with representation from the Center for International Education, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Institutional Research, International Studies, Psychology, and World Languages and Cultures. The committee came up with a plan to assess the extent to which Juniata students were acquiring the Desirable Intercultural Competencies articulated in 2005. It identified appropriate tools to assess the competencies, undertook an assessment process, and finally suggested how the College could best improve that learning. To identify appropriate tools, ILAC began by reviewing existing assessment resources and models for intercultural learning. At the same time, in order to get an initial, manageable snapshot of student attitudes, ILAC administered to students preparing to study abroad, and to a control group, a survey that had been developed years prior by Juniata psychology professor David Drews. The tool centered on attitude changes toward educational goals in students who studied abroad, and was considered to be a first step toward a broader institutional assessment of intercultural competencies in all graduates. Focusing on attitudinal differences between students who planned to go abroad and those who do not, the survey asked students from the two populations to rate the importance of 15 possible educational goals.

Because of staff changes in the international office over the next two years, the survey was not administered again; indeed, ILAC did not meet again until 2011-2012. In 2011, Juniata was invited by the Great Lakes College Association (GLCA) to use a Teagle-funded study abroad learning assessment tool they had developed to document the effects of study abroad on liberal arts educational objectives. Called the Student Learning Outcomes from Study Abroad Scale (SLOSAS), the pre- and post-questionnaires “…were developed over 18 months utilizing teams from GLCA, ACM, and ACS colleges, followed by the work of intercultural experts, and pilot testing with 270 students. The work began with an analysis of liberal arts mission statements from 42 colleges to identify central liberal arts goals. Consistent with writings about the philosophy of the liberal arts the dimensions to be measured fall into two, broad, conceptual categories…” including critical thinking (reasoning, reflecting) and engaged citizenship (acting). The alignment with Juniata’s Think-Evolve-Act tagline was unmistakable, and the Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes targeted in the GLCA instrument aligned well with the Juniata desirable intercultural competencies. Indeed, in the process of mapping where learning of desirable intercultural competencies happens across campus, ILAC has also mapped the competencies to the GLCA tool.

During fall 2011, the first group of 24 students preparing to study abroad took the pre-test; fall 2012, those same students took the posttest, while two other groups (spring 2012 and fall 2012) had taken the pre-test. The posttest results from the first group have not yet been received, but it is hoped that the comparative results over time may provide insight into which intercultural competencies are being developed through the experience of studying abroad at Juniata.
Most recently, ILAC has begun working with the SoTL Center and the Provost’s office in preparation for the Middle States accreditation visit, to apply its work to the Juniata core curriculum. Now, ten years after the initial focus on internationalization as a special topic, Juniata is again undergoing accreditation review, and the assessment of the core curriculum is stimulating the next, more coherent and intentional phase of the assessment of global learning outcomes.

ILAC began meeting again during 2011-2012, shifting its focus from assessing intercultural learning during study abroad to global learning outcomes in the general education curriculum. As a first step, and at the recommendation of consultant Dr. Darla Deardorff, ILAC first attempted to operationalize the list of Desirable Intercultural Competencies. Drawing from a number of resources in the field, ILAC utilized Bloom’s Taxonomy to draft a rubric (Appendix II).

ILAC shared its rubric in a SoTL presentation in fall 2012, and in January 2013 sponsored a faculty workshop facilitated by Darla Deardorff for instructors of classes carrying the Cultural Analysis (CA) and International (I) designations. In spring 2013, workshop participants will use the rubric to align desired student learning outcomes with course goals, and “fill in the blanks” as to what competence at different levels looks like. The College’s goal is to apply the rubric across multiple programs at Juniata, including the curriculum, study abroad (by cross-mapping the rubric to the GLCA tool), diversity office programming, and service-learning projects. It is anticipated that the process currently being followed for assessing intercultural competencies will be used for other global learning outcomes in the core curriculum and across campus.

Although institution-wide assessment of students’ intercultural competencies is still in progress, assessment of student learning in study abroad was the original focus of ILAC, and is currently in its second phase with the GLCA tool. A fairly recent opportunity, learning in the Global Village is only this year undergoing systematic evaluation. WLC faculty members have developed an assessment tool to administer to residents before and after their participation, and a SoTL presentation in April 2013 will present those efforts. Assessment of the impact on student learning of a much older learning opportunity, Language in Motion, began as a SoTL project in 2007. Through tracking participant logs since fall 2000, assessment reveals students self-report increases in understanding of global diversity and openness to learning, for example.

Lessons Learned
One of the most persistent obstacles to assessment at Juniata is the diversity and decentralization of efforts that contribute to student learning. Thus, obtaining an overview of the terrain is fraught with complications, and coordination and promotion of efforts can be tricky. So many good efforts are occurring across campus that it is hard to know how best to coordinate them, to bring them together into an assessable form. The Deardorff workshop in January 2013 revealed the need for instructors of general education courses with the same designations to have a forum to identify and develop common learning outcomes. As at many institutions, lack of time and resources are a major issue, given the other pressing daily duties staff face. Additionally, with so many different constituencies involved, there are challenges in bringing together all those who should have a voice, and in reaching anything close to consensus once those stakeholders are gathered together.

Nevertheless, assessment is worth the effort to overcome challenges. Since the first step in assessment is to identify desired outcomes, once campus stakeholders engage in an intentional review of current practices with attention to what students are learning and what they should be learning, understanding where the campus is and where it should be in terms of comprehensive internationalization becomes much more manageable. The assessment effort can result in a series of concrete steps, and a clear focus, for initiatives and priorities. It helps us know where we are, where we want to be, and how to realize it when we get there.

Endnotes
3. “Core Requirements,” Juniata College, accessed May 21, 2013. [Link]

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.


8. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


15. Including AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes [Link]; the ACE Guide to Assessing International Learning; The Forum on Education Abroad’s Guide to Outcomes Assessment in Education Abroad (Bolen 2007) [Link]; NAFSA's Assessment and Evaluation for International Educators [Link]; and SAGE publications by Darla Deardorff, especially The Handbook of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2009), [Link].


17. Ibid 2.

18. “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” personal webpage, Richard C. Overbaugh, Old Dominion University, accessed May 21, 2013. [Link] and [Link].