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## A Case Among Cases

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# A Case Among Cases

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Clifford Geertz ends his Introduction to *Local Knowledge*, the 1983 collection of his lectures, with an admonition:

To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. (16)

Carolyn Haynes, in “Overcoming the Study Abroad Hype,” reminds us that American higher education has come to expect that “study abroad” will do for our students what we have not accomplished through courses designed to open minds, enrich imaginations, and polish world citizens. She also reminds us that global understanding is far from a guaranteed outcome of foreign study. Often, routine perceptions, stereotypes, and long-standing assumptions about people and places are resistant to change—particularly when they are only implied rather than articulated or challenged—and prevent us from achieving the “largeness of mind” that Geertz advocates.

At its most recent annual conference on “Global Positioning: **Essential Learning, Student Success, and the Currency of U.S. Degrees**” (January 2011), the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) focused on “globalizing” undergraduate education. The presentations addressed international experiences, but sending students abroad was not, as such, a dominant issue addressed. Rather, presenters concentrated on courses and co-curricular experiences that help students develop ways of seeing and knowing that promote perspectival flexibility, arguing that without appropriate and pertinent ‘mindsets’ students were unlikely to derive the maximum benefit from study abroad.

The focus on mindsets led in turn to an emphasis on what we mean by “global,” on an examination of what—beyond passing through other people’s territories—we can imagine might be catalysts of understanding in any situation, familiar or not. The role of undergraduate learning in preparing

students to see with multiple lenses was one inevitable motif of many sessions, a motif that leads us now to address some important implications of Haynes's essay on globalizing and to recommend yet another role that honors might play in its campus context to further the kinds of thinking required for deeper global understanding.

From years of programming a wide array of immersion experiences, we know the variable impact they can have even on strong academic performers, those who are presumably primed by virtue of their curiosity and motivation to probe and pursue new knowledge. We have seen some of the lackluster results that Haynes cites: even honors students often gain little except self-esteem (important, but not all that is hoped for from study abroad) from an essentially unexamined experience. Haynes's essay cites some of the pitfalls of an experience not grounded in the institution's or program's mission. Without the "curricular integration" that leads students to feel "meaningfully engaged," travel study will certainly be just a nice field trip, and, from an educational standpoint, it is a lost opportunity. An experience that is not grounded in meaningful coursework and does not create an opportunity for students to examine the connection between coursework and experience is essentially an unexamined experience that has little educational merit. The reflective component (critical reflection), when students identify discomfort, analyze its possible sources, and consider their own part in generating it, stands out, David A. Kolb argues, as a powerful engine of insight and change. Catherine Twomey Fosnot outlines the conditions for an individual to construct knowledge as ". . . the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate" (*ix*). Fosnot's description is reminiscent of Paulo Freire's "dialogical man," who seeks to "create and transform" (79).

Efforts to design courses, whether on campus or off, that are well-grounded in intentional learning and have a self-reflective dimension produce powerful results. Seminars accompanied by field laboratories can be offered in all disciplines, and when they expect students to use their own social setting as though they were "abroad," introduce provocative self-reflection, as all the NCHC Honors Semesters have shown. Campus-based curricula can equally help students develop the antennae required for deep understanding of others' points of view and the capacity to arrive at "intellectual understanding," both of which Haynes desires as outcomes of study abroad. Honors programs feature courses illustrative of the best and most imaginative curricula designed to produce the same outcomes as study abroad, and such

courses can be offered with stunning outcomes to other students, as well. If students subsequently study abroad, preparation in such courses will have prepared them to benefit from their travels, and in any context students will be better prepared for deep learning.

For example, excellent laboratories to engage students in open-ended inquiry can be found in general education courses designed to be interdisciplinary or in thematically organized seminars that raise questions about complex issues or problems that cannot be considered without serious readings from multiple disciplines. Such courses are excellent courses to engage students in open-ended inquiry. Examining topics in such a framework pushes students to acquire skills of integrative thinking and hones both analysis and self-reflection. Honors programs already offering such courses are in a key position to model for their entire campus community the principles of design and the intellectual benefits of a practice that engages students in exactly the mental and emotional activity needed to pave the way for study-away experiences.

If international study is marketed now as widely as Haynes suggests, then perhaps honors programs have an obligation to help disseminate as widely as possible what they have come to do best: link scholarly depth with perspectival breadth in solid cross-disciplinary inquiry that prepares students to be observant, creative, analytical, conscious of nuance, aware of context, and alert to themselves in interaction with others different from them. Perspective is what is needed, and what is elusive.

NCHC models that expand depth and breadth include the organization's Place as Text field component that can prepare for or serve as part of research courses. NCHC members have, at their home institutions, evolved many examples of domestic and international courses of study that might serve as models for site-specific and immersion learning. Studies by the Institute of International Education cited in Haynes's essay alert us to the danger that overseas study, even at its best, is not necessarily accomplishing what it can or might; one possible reason is that the kinds of preparation most students undertake prior to travel are incomplete or non-existent. We are suggesting that what might be called "global skills" need to be developed before overseas study and can be honed, both on campus and off, if shaped deliberately to move students from collectors of information to investigators who pose fresh questions.

Further, we support the notion that study abroad experiences should consciously incorporate Haynes's "six ingredients for quality study abroad programs." Ultimately, the goals for a study abroad program or any program that seeks to prepare students to become part of the global community need to be grounded in elements that a global citizen might require. Howard Gardner

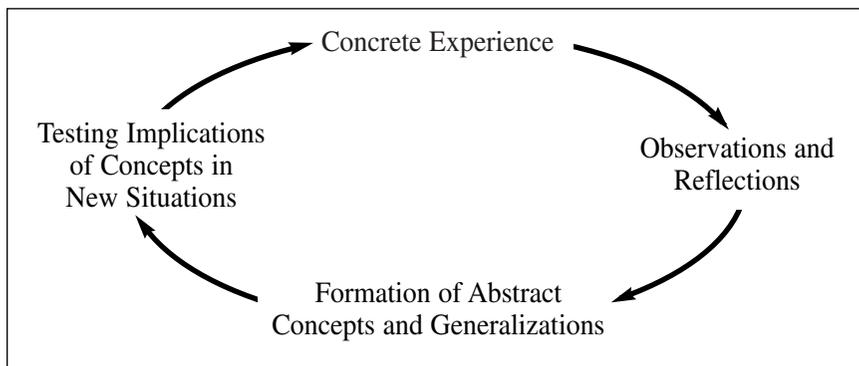
outlined these elements in his book *Five Minds for the Future* and in his later essay by the same name. In both, he describes five qualities that need to be considered if a true global perspective is to be achieved: (1) The Disciplined Mind, (2) The Synthesizing Mind, (3) The Creating Mind, (4) The Respectful Mind, and (5) The Ethical Mind.

One example from personal experience that we can offer to support Gardner's premise is the writing-intensive Core Seminar required of undergraduates at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University. The course is based in its structure and multiple learning components on the freshman sequence of LIU University Honors Program courses on this campus and has taken the broadest theme possible: "The Idea of the Human." It incorporates self-guided explorations in the City as Text™ mode, cross-disciplinary sessions that are extended laboratories or workshops, and pairs of instructors from different disciplines who design and facilitate the labs and explorations.

Readings for the course are drawn deliberately from scientific inquiry, social commentary, and artistic expression. The entire experience is organized around questions that have no single answer and sometimes have none, thus helping the course push both inquiry and creativity. A pattern of self-reflection, reiterated throughout the course both in discussion and in lab journals, emphasizes the need to develop perspective on self and other, and the course encourages students to synthesize material from multiple disciplines and from unmediated experience. For two years now, the course has made use of rubrics from AAC&U's VALUE project (Reading, Writing, and Integrative Learning so far), and results suggest that freshmen and sophomores are developing impressive skills of integrative thinking at significant rates in just one semester.

The construction of the learning experience closely models Kolb's continuum of learning in the cycle of course experiences and seeks to create a learning environment where students move from concrete concepts to participatory experiences, from which they begin to abstract and conceptualize complex and conflicting ideas. Honors programs often create intellectual communities that reflect this cycle, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Kolb 235).

When transplanted into general education offerings like Core Seminar, this learning model incorporates direct experience into the cycle of learning and pushes students to become aware of how they design their investigations. The learning model can benefit as well from Gardner's concept of global perspectives to achieve curricular integration and critical reflection, outcomes that Haynes asserts to be essential in building an effective skill set for study abroad. We argue that this learning model is also essential for twenty-first-century students whether they travel abroad or not.

**Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Model (Kolb)**

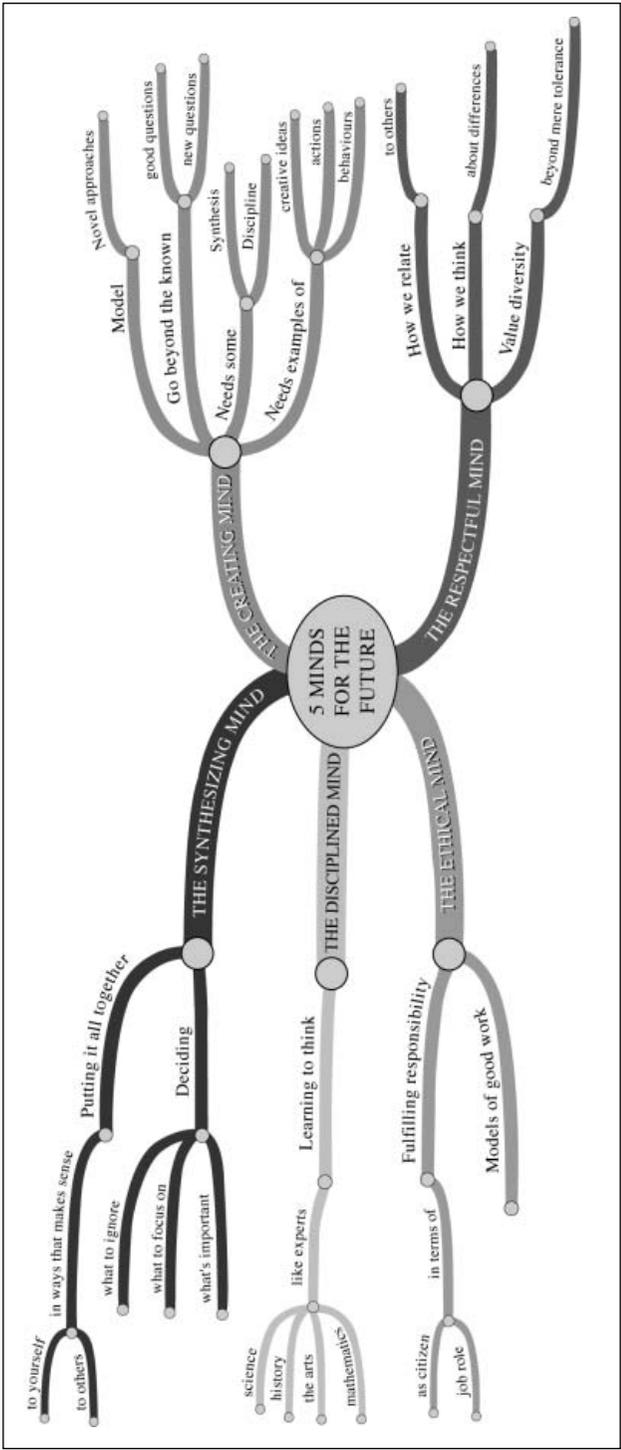
Gardner's argument is that individuals need not travel abroad to acquire global perspective. The five understandings necessary to a global thinker can be developed through early experiences in students' coursework. His five modes of thinking are aptly illustrated in his Figure 2 diagram from the 2008 essay where he illustrates his understanding that there is "... no strict hierarchy among the minds, such that one should be cultivated before the other" (23).

Like Kolb's learning model, Gardner's disciplined mind is more than the construction of knowledge. He posits pathways that carry thinkers from reflecting and conceptualizing to understanding how one might conceive and understand knowledge, and he adds human empathy. He challenges educators and business leaders to include a humane dimension in the pursuit of understanding. Two of his intelligences that deal specifically with how human beings might understand and interact with each other represent the ethical and respectful mind.

When we speak of affording students the opportunity to learn from and experience other cultures, we must move beyond what Carl Grant calls "Heroes and Holidays," wherein educators add foreign culture through a study abroad experience the way they add an author to a course simply to expand the mix; Grant refers to this as "add and stir" (171). Without its being integrated meaningfully into course content or establishing a cross-disciplinary context for study abroad, the overseas experience becomes, as Haynes sees it, a study in ethnocentricity.

For the experience to be grounded, it must be rooted in how disciplines see, think, and analyze. Gardner believes that science, math, history, and art forms are "gateways" and, therefore, underpinnings of a good undergraduate general education. He urges faculty to be models of the empathic and integrative thinking outlined in *Five Minds for the Future*: "The task for

Figure 2. Five Minds for the Future



educators becomes clear: if we are to fashion persons who respect differences, we need to provide models and offer lessons that encourage such a sympathetic stance” (110). As Parker J. Palmer argues in “Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing,” “. . . the way we know has powerful implications for the way we live. . . every epistemology tends to become an ethic, and . . . every way of knowing tends to become a way of living” (22). If global thinking, implicit in study abroad imperatives, matters, it does so precisely for shaping how students learn and live.

Beyond preparing students to think about how they see the world and try to understand others, honors curricula and the willingness to experiment in honors programs have a great deal to offer everyone in higher education. In the framework of this specific discussion, evidence suggests that some of what honors already does should be re-examined for use elsewhere. On our own campus, the goals of the LIU University Honors Program are embedded in the general education course, Core Seminar, and are thereby inextricably linked to the campus’s mission. This linkage not only has helped us think about what kinds of competencies we all need for a world more obviously in flux than ever but also to do more with the imperative to “study abroad” than is often achieved. By assessing our progress and thereafter implementing corrective strategies, as Carolyn Haynes suggests, we could begin to make more of a difference than we dreamed.

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