A survey to assess the level of internationalisation of the student experience

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Abstract

This research project aims to develop a robust survey instrument for assessing the level of internationalisation of the student experience. The survey seeks to assess the current levels of internationalisation of the staff and student bodies and the level of internationalisation in the current curriculum. The survey forms the first stage of a project aiming to strengthen the internationalisation component of the student experience in the FCA.

There is a substantial international literature on the problems faced by international students and interventions to help them integrate into host countries. In contrast, few studies have looked at how to develop the international experience for both domestic and international students. The latter is a very important area to address, with graduates needing to be able to operate in an increasingly interconnected global environment, and business school accreditation agencies encouraging, or requiring even, such developments. The project will contribute to knowledge in this area and facilitate an evidence-based approach to enhancing the FCA’s provision of global/multi-cultural perspectives for its stakeholders.

1. Overview

The world’s borders and physical barriers are disappearing due to the rapid development of advanced communication technologies and free trade agreements. Hence an understanding of this globalisation trend is increasingly important in business schools around the world. On the other hand, the ability to work with people from other countries and cultures is also increasingly important, in order to facilitate such interactions. This is driving both the internationalisation/ multi-cultural strands in curriculum developments. (Johnstone, 2010). Both these factors are underdeveloped and poorly understood in our curricula as a whole, even though there are pockets of good practice throughout the faculty’s programmes.

Business schools are now expected to be able to demonstrate that they provide students with an ‘international experience’. Clearly the type of international experience that might be provided in the context of a New Zealand business school could be markedly different from the international experience offered by European or American schools, due to the cost and feasibility of sending students abroad. Nevertheless, there are many other channels for developing such attributes, and we need to demonstrate that we are cognisant of the issues and that we are developing this capability in our students.

From discussions around the Faculty to date, it would appear that there are already numerous activities occurring within and beyond classrooms that contribute to
global/multi-cultural experiences. However there is no reliable evidence on which to base decisions. It would therefore be prudent to perform a stock-take of existing activity before launching new activities. This project seeks to ascertain the current level and nature of activities relating to global/multi-cultural/internationalisation. As it would be beneficial to be able to repeat the stock-take in future years, to determine if there has been an improvement, we are developing a survey that can be used this year and in future years. The construction, administration and analysis of the survey will be carried out for the PHELT project, UTDC 502.

The relationship between the survey project and the wider FCA project can be summed up as follows:

**Research questions for the wider project**
How well is FCA developing the international/global/multi-cultural perspectives in its graduates? And how might it enhance this ‘international experience’.

**Research question for the PHELT project**
Where and how is the FCA providing its students with opportunities to develop a substantive international/global/multi-cultural student experience? This will establish a baseline of the global/multi-cultural student experience in terms of both quantity and variety of experiences. Subsequent phases of the wider project will seek to develop and test a strategy/model of/for enhancing the international experience of our FCA graduates.

2. **Motivation - The VUW context**

The design of an educational programme should be founded on a conscious decision regarding the desired student learning outcomes (Ramsden, 2003). In this vein, Victoria University has defined a set of generic Graduate Attributes, namely Critical and Creative Thinking, Communications skills, and Leadership skills, that it wishes all graduates of VUW to acquire (VUW Strategic Plan, 2008).

In turn, the FCA has as its mission: “The Faculty of Commerce and Administration pursues and shares knowledge of business, economics and management, to develop capability and provide our stakeholders with a global perspective.” The FCA mission expresses the intent, not simply to equip our graduates with generic skills and discipline knowledge, as in the VUW graduate attributes, but also to ensure that all BCA graduates develop a global/multicultural perspective (hereinafter referred to as GMCP). Such commitment to ensure that our graduates are equipped to work effectively in the global environment is evident in the learning goals laid down for all FCA programmes. For example, the FCA’s main undergraduate degree, the BCA, has five Learning Goals:

**Learning Goal 1:**
Our graduates will demonstrate application of critical and creative thinking skills to practical and theoretical problems (“Critical and Creative Thinking”)

**Learning Goal 2:**
Our graduates will be effective communicators (“Communication”)
Learning Goal 3:
Our graduates will have a global and multicultural perspective ("Global and Multicultural Perspective")

Learning Goal 4:
Our graduates will recognise, support and display leadership ("Leadership")

Learning Goal 5:
Our graduates will develop specific knowledge and skills in at least one business, economics or public policy discipline area ("Major attributes")

The focus of this project is on the learning goal aimed at ensuring that our graduates will have a global/multicultural perspective (hereinafter called GMCP).

In order to meet the requirements for AACSB accreditation, we need to regularly assess students’ work to evaluate how well our students are meeting each of these goals. In our Assurance of Learning processes to date, we have been working our way through the learning goals, focusing on one at a time, rather than attempting to master all learning goals at once. The FCA started with communications skills in 2008/9, developing rubrics and performing several trial assessments. A Written Communications Skills Action Plan was adopted in June 2009, covering a range of necessary actions, from tutor training through to regular use of the rubric. In 2009, we started addressing Critical and creative thinking skills, developing rubrics to assess that learning goal and conducting trial assessments. Follow-up actions from these assessments are in progress. A small number of trial assessments of Global/Multicultural perspectives were also conducted, but it proved to be harder than expected to define suitable rubrics for the learning objectives drafted in 2008. The development of revised learning objectives and rubrics for this learning goal were to be a focus for 2010.

An additional impetus for this task comes from the FCA’s decision to seek EQUIS accreditation. To achieve this accreditation, we need to convince the accrediting body, EFMD, that we provide our students with a ‘substantive international experience’. While universities in European countries are able to achieve such an objective by sending their students to a neighbouring country, overseas exchanges and practica are impractical for the majority of students here. Given this impediment, we will need to provide strong evidence that we are developing global multi-cultural perspectives (GMCP) in other ways. Just how we might best achieve this aim is unclear. A number of questions come to mind:

1. How well we are developing this attribute already?
2. Is this sufficient?
3. How/where is this attribute being developed presently?
4. How can we do more/better?
5. Can we leverage off the learning experiences we currently provide?

We do have some indicative data on some of these questions. Our curriculum maps, in which schools have indicated in which courses the various learning objectives are being delivered, provide some indication that this topic is being covered, but as staff have different interpretations of what is meant by a global/multi-cultural perspective, it is likely that this data is not very reliable.
We also have some data based on graduates’ perceptions. The Graduate Destinations Survey data (2008-2009) indicates that graduates perceive they are already getting a significant global and multi-cultural experience. For example, students were asked firstly how significant various attributes were in getting a job, and secondly how satisfied they were with their education at VUW in developing this attribute. The data below indicates that students felt that these were important attributes, but they also felt satisfied that their education at VUW had developed these attributes to a comparable level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global perspective</th>
<th>Multi-cultural Perspective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>22.07</td>
<td>28.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>45.54</td>
<td>44.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>26.06</td>
<td>21.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>5.39</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.82</td>
<td>23.36</td>
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<td>43.29</td>
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<td>25.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td>7.71</td>
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Source: Graduate Destinations Survey 2008-2009, All commerce; 429 responses; VUW Career Services.

While these statistics could be taken to imply that FCA is already equipping its graduates with sufficient skills in these areas, it must be remembered that generally these graduates will be taking jobs at a new-graduate level, probably with a local focus, and they are unlikely to involve international dealings initially. However, as graduates move up through their organisations, one might expect the international/global dimension to increase. Furthermore, VUW is looking to increase international student numbers, and it is likely that the importance of a global/multi-cultural perspective will increase over time and spread to other faculties. For all these reasons, the FCA is committed to developing these perspectives more strongly in its graduates, and is actively exploring ways of doing so effectively.

3 The international context

3.1 The Challenges

Victoria University is not alone in this desire to increase international student numbers. Elsewhere universities are increasingly looking to international students as a source of income to offset reductions in real funding provided by governments. A search of Australian and New Zealand university contributions published in last 5 years has identified a number of studies in Australia and New Zealand, and an increasing level of interest in the topic, particularly on the challenges faced.

For example, Simon Marginson, (2007) in his Inaugural address, “The global positioning of Australian higher education: Where to from here?” spoke of the push for increasing international students numbers as a cash cow, but pointed to numerous issues with this policy.

“The record in the classroom is more mixed. There are brilliant and dedicated teachers who ‘go the extra mile’ and there are others for whom it is a point of principle to treat all international students as native speaking locals. We have made little progress on the long-standing problem of under-mixing of local and international students. Despite its scale, international education contributes little to broadening domestic education.
Despite the rhetoric about international education as a ‘cultural exchange’ we have not generalised cross-cultural approaches to learning that would give real dignity to the prior learning of international students. But pedagogical innovations are cost heavy until they can be developed at scale. They need small student groups and time for staff development. They are public goods in the economic sense and must be subsidised. Here the problem is that the business model does not fund externalities; and while it sustains the reflexive logic of continuous improvement, the objectives are market share, managing costs and customer satisfaction, not academic excellence, student learning or education innovation. When in doubt we take the low cost route. Thus Australian universities use IELTS tests as a selector because this is meant to guarantee preparation in academic English, though we all know it does not. Continuing language problems are tackled with deficit models long been out of favour in domestic education.”

These last comments have particular relevance for our goal of ensuring all FCA graduates have satisfactory written communications skills in the FCA, and the ongoing debates around how to achieve it!

As stated by Marginson, the problem of intermixing domestic and international students is still an unsolved problem internationally. Interestingly, the majority of research on internationalisation focuses on international students coming to the host country, rather than developing the global multi-cultural perspectives in all students, both international and domestic. Emphasis seems to be on integrating international students into local culture and educational norms, rather than developing a cross-cultural two-way interchange between domestic and international students. As Marginson asserts with regard to language problems, the wider issue of ‘dealing with international students’ seems to be tackled in the main using deficit focused approaches. Few papers are about curriculum development, and very few seemed to be aimed at both domestic and international students.

3.2 Approaches taken by other universities

One promising programme is the EXCELL programme, which started as a programme to assist international students in their host countries, and is applied at VUW to assist international students adapt to the ‘kiwi’ way of life. According to the developers (Prof Anita Mak and colleagues at Canberra University) it is “an innovative skills-based, practice-focused program … to help international students develop culturally effective social skills for quick adjustment to the foreign university campus. The EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) Training Program is a theory-driven and evidence-based social effectiveness program designed to enhance international students' confidence and skills in academic and other interpersonal contexts. The increased behavioural competence is expected to lessen perceptions of cross-cultural encounters as stressful, and to encourage social contact with rather than avoidance from host nationals. This way, the EXCELL program can strengthen the coping resources available to international students, bring out an adaptive pattern of problem-focussed coping responses, facilitate students' psychosocial adjustment, and enhance their opportunities for educational and social
successes in a foreign country. The EXCELL program can thus enable students to derive additional benefits from an international education." Mak (2000)

It has since been adapted for broader use and in one application of this method at the University of Canberra, an EXCELL program was provided to train teachers in alliance building and cultural mapping. The teachers then adapted these 1 or 2 tools to initiate change in curricula and/or assessment practices. (Mak and Kennedy 2010), (Mak, DePercy et al. 2008). The programmes put in place by these teachers embed skills for students’ professional development, and include quarterly meetings / network/support. One training programme has been run at VUW through the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research (CACR), and another may be run later this year which could be open to FCA staff wanting to develop skills.

Another project that appears to be relevant is underway in Australia. This is funded by the Australian L&T Council project, involving Uni of Melbourne, RMIT, and Victoria University (Melbourne) – it appears to be a current project,(University of Melbourne and Unit), and an update is likely to made available in July 2010. This project looks at increasing student-student interactions in the classroom, rather than just staff-student interactions, as most prior studies have done.

Lastly, another project aimed at fostering international experience on the domestic campus was at Baruch College of the City University of New York, where the majority of students could not afford to go on study abroad. Hence they developed an integrated co-curricular programme of cultural events, seminars, workshops, interwoven with academic rigour via reflective portfolios. Events included cultural, political, language and other events, on and off campus, which was directed at students gaining a variety of inter-cultural experiences. Students received a certificate as well as an annotation on their transcript (Waldron, 2010). The programme sounds not dissimilar to our Victoria International Leadership Programme.

Other possibly relevant research includes:
1. Colleen Ward, James Liu, VUW Psychology dept: Prof Ward’s research interests include attitude/intercultural/social cohesion. CACR organises the EXCELL programme at VUW, though the Canberra academics as noted above, come over to run the workshops.

2. Victoria University in Melbourne have taken a curriculum focus: for example a module called “Professional development 1” develops critical thinking and problem solving. Though it is aimed at their Chinese students, my interpretation is that the student learning focus adopted may well be able to transcend cultural boundaries.

3. Melbourne University have a useful tutorials guide, with online advice, though again the emphasis is on dealing with international students. Strong reliance on Hofstede, 1896: 4-D model of cultural differences, which has been roundly criticised by several authors.

4. University of South Australia has a mentoring model.
5. Macquarie University again emphasises overseas students, but they included some T&L ideas.

Other papers reviewed, describing interventions at Otago, La Trobe, Wollongong, Auckland Uni and Melbourne, all aimed at making international students feel welcome, and helped them adjust to the way of life in their host country, and adjust their study methods. However they do not appear to build the internationalisation of the curriculum. These include:
- Otago: Social groups for international and local women;
- La Trobe: weekend break programme aimed at international students to get the ‘Aussy experience’;
- Wollongong: also aimed at making international students feel welcome in the community;
- Auckland Uni: helping international students academically, adjusting to non-traditional’ learning styles, learning advising and student development emphasis for international students;
- Melbourne: focus on Chinese students, reduce the cultural stress and enhance connections locally.

Other resources:
Harris, Moran et al (Harris, Moran et al. 2004), in its 6th edition, appears to provide ample advice on working with cultural differences. Prescott and Hellsten (2005) are quoted in Melbourne University Teaching and Learning Unit (2010) as indicating that all is not well in the international student experience.

3.3 International Best Practice – a meta-analysis of approaches

While the above literature review describes how individual universities are approaching the issue of enhancing internationalisation, they provide little comment on how they went about the process. Carlin (2010) reviews best practice across many institutions in their approaches to ascertaining and increasing the level of internationalisation in the curriculum. Interestingly, her findings corroborate our planned approach:

1. Mission statement: include a statement on internationalisation
2. Conduct a survey
3. Hold a summit/workshop
4. Organise site visits, conferences, inter-campus collaborations
5. Prepare future faculty
6. Visiting scholars
7. Public relations basics
8. Incentives

The first three points are in our plan, and the later ones are expected to emerge from the first three. The last point is one that needs heeding: do not expect changes to happen if incentives for staff are strongly oriented towards other activities such as research.
4. Summary of proposed project:

4.1 Project Aims

This project aims to:
1. Establish the degree of internationalisation represented in the staff and student bodies
2. Identify a broad range of activities by which students can be exposed to GMCP
3. Ascertain the extent to which these are currently used in our classes
4. Assess relative effectiveness of these activities/mechanisms in developing GMCP
5. Develop a strategy, from the range of activities, for maximising the effective development of GMCP
6. Testing the effectiveness of this strategy. This would ideally be done via direct assessment. However, an indirect assessment, such as a ‘projective exercise’ in the capstone course, or the writing of a CV somehow demonstrating that all learning goals have been developed, may be more practicable.

At this stage, we are looking to develop internationalisation of the curriculum (both global and multi-cultural perspectives) across the whole of FCA, but an open question is whether GMCP is relative to each discipline, or whether an FCA standard can be established.

4.2 Proposed Method
1. Review literature in area
2. Generate list of activities
3. Develop a survey instrument
4. Survey staff and students to determine the extent of usage of each method
5. Hold a summit/workshop to collectively explore the results of the survey and identify exemplars or ideas that look promising
6. Interviews to follow up those exemplars and ideas
7. Rating of ideas and develop recommended strategy for FCA
8. Development of teaching materials, such as workshop/practical materials/resources and rubrics for assessing achievement
9. Encourage and reward staff for adoption.

The PHELT project will cover the development of the survey instrument, and the initial survey (collection and analysis of data). Later developments, while part of the planned project for FCA, are beyond the scope of the PHELT project.

4.3 Publication outlets

Publication for the survey is most likely as a business education conference paper, The results of the full project would be available primarily for other FCA teachers, and to make a case to the accreditation bodies, especially EFMD for EQUIS accreditation. However it is likely that the material obtained and experience gained would also lead to a conference paper: an Australian Business Deans Council Associate Deans meeting would be a first outlet, followed by DSI Innovative
Education or similar conference. Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education is a possible journal to aim at for a quantitatively based project such as this.

4.4 Anticipated results

The UTDC 501 research project aims to establish a robust survey instrument for assessing the level of internationalisation of the student experience. I am hopeful that the survey will work sufficiently well for us to repeat it every one or two years. I hope the results of the survey will indicate that we are more internationally connected and active than is currently apparent. I hope the results will indicate that our students are gaining a surprisingly rich international experience. This may seem odd given our remote geographical location, but distance may well be a motivating factor rather than an inhibitor. I hope that the survey will provide sufficient evidence of successful strategies for us to enhance our curriculum to provide students with an even richer international, global, multi-cultural experience in the future. I expect that the top-rated strategies will appeal similarly to staff and students, though the level of current use will probably be rated higher by staff than by students.

5. References


University of Melbourne and Teaching and Learning Unit. (2010). Enhancing domestic and international student engagement: Strategies for influencing
attitudes and behaviours.


Appendix:

**Development of rubrics for measuring development of GMCP**

These are usually developed for a particular task: eg traits for two sample tasks are outlined below:

1. Compare/contrast functional or disciplinary activity in two or more countries
   - Identify key differences
   - Identify key similarities
   - Comment on significance of differences and similarities
   - Identify ways of overcoming cultural differences

2. Design/adapt a strategy to suit another country
   - Identify key differences /sources of problems in new country
   - Identify key leverage points for success in new country
   - Provide recommendations