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Global learning is shared learning: Interdisciplinary intercultural competence at a comprehensive regional university

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes a year-long, campus-wide initiative entitled Interdisciplinary Teaching and Assessment of Intercultural Competence (ITAIC).

The project emphasized professional development of faculty who prepared, piloted, and assessed 18 online ITAIC modules. Four workshops, focused on reviewing extant scholarship, applying best practices, sharing ITAIC modules, and conducting post-project analysis and reflection, guided the process. The ITAIC project included the process of identifying collectively shared ITAIC principles and replicable best practices, culminating in a set of descriptive categories, i.e. a list of twelve "ITAIC dimensions". The eighteen ITAIC modules were developed across disciplines, and each module was piloted in at least two courses. The modules were peer-reviewed, revised, archived (http://dga.kennesaw.edu/sig/itaic.php), and introduced in 23 academic departments. Altogether, approx. 100 faculty members from seven colleges and 1100 undergraduate students in 44 classes were reached during the 2014–2015 funding period.

Project impact was assessed using a variety of data sources, including module reports submitted by participating faculty developers and adopters, external reviews conducted by two interculturalists at mid-year and year-end points of the project, and focus group interviews with 47 undergraduate students.

Introduction

In a general academic climate that promotes intentional assessment of academic programs and student learning outcomes, this article summarizes a campus-wide initiative of exploring the theory and practice around intercultural competence, and the lessons learned from the year-long internal grant-funded project titled "Interdisciplinary Teaching and Assessment of Intercultural Competence" (ITAIC) in 2014–2015 at a regional state university in the Southeast. The ITAIC project was the direct result of sustained institutional efforts at campus internationalization that have supported discipline- and department-specific as well as interdisciplinary and campus-wide initiatives since the mid-1980s (Green & Olson, 2008; Olson, Green, & Hill, 2006; Terantino et al., 2013). The project generated ready-for use resources at the project's website and inaugurated a replicable infrastructure for faculty development and collaboration; and, formed the basis for two follow-on grant projects that have generated online curricula for global learning experiences.

ITAIC project description

The ITAIC project was awarded the inaugural 2014–2015 "Campus Internationalization Prize" of $ 45 K as part of the institution's

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Strategic Internationalization Grants (SIG). Project participants were to identify and examine best practices around interdisciplinary teaching and assessment of intercultural competence in order to connect extant practitioners across units, disciplines, and departments and to foster professional development and intellectual exchange. The project's goals were four-fold, namely to collaboratively (1) identify and develop appropriate teaching and assessment tools of intercultural competence; (2) pilot and assess such tools in the traditional classroom, online, and in experiential learning activities; (3) create an archival website for easy access and on-going use; and (4) advance the infrastructure for connecting resources and stakeholders on campus and beyond in support of interdisciplinary teaching and the assessment of intercultural competence.

The ITAIC project was also designed to support and advance the institution's 2014–2017 Strategic Plan for Internationalization (http://dga.kennesaw.edu/about/docs/ksu-strategic-plan-for-internationalization-2014-17.pdf). It connected with the strategic plan via seven metrics, and data in support of the metrics were collected over four quarters between July 2014 and June 2015. The project's mixed-method approach to gathering quantitative and qualitative data focused on (1) the ITAIC activities and modules created; (2) the colleges, departments, programs, and academic disciplines impacted; (3) the on-going use and facilitation of ITAIC resources, reference materials, the ITAIC website, internal and external reviews, and student feedback throughout the project.

Project participants

The ITAIC project engaged approx. 100 faculty-staff members from seven university colleges, 23 different departments, and ca. 1100 undergraduate students in 44 classes. It was directed by three co-PIs (faculty members at the university) and supported by two external expert reviewers (interculturalists Drs. Alvino Fantini and Darla Deardorff) as well as actively contributing module developers and adopters. A total of 39 project participants included 18 faculty and staff "Module Developers" and 21 "Departmental Designees," half of whom (51%) were faculty in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Notably, three graduate students/part-time instructors were among the module developers. Additionally, three instructional designers (i.e. faculty-staff affiliated with the university's distance learning units) lent conceptual and logistical support. Aside from the 1100 undergraduate students exposed to the project by module developers or peer adopters who piloted their work in the courses, 47 undergraduate students were interviewed in focus group interviews on the merits of the ITAIC initiative.

Project facilitation

Guided by current research and the principle of "global learning is shared learning," the ITAIC project encouraged collaboration across disciplines. In summer 2014, the campus-wide call for applications articulated selection criteria, timelines and deliverables as well as rewards. The project followed a tiered approach to accommodate participation at various levels of engagement and incentives: There were "Module Developers" (MDs), "Expert Multipliers" (EMs), and "Departmental Designees" (DDs).

MDs committed to the most comprehensive level of participation and to completing the following tasks: 1) attend two introductory ITAIC workshops (on theory and best practices) and monthly seminars (progress-reports and professional development) facilitated by the co-PIs; 2) develop and pilot an online ITAIC module for a course; 3) adopt a peer's module in one of their courses; 4) submit a written review of their own and their peer's modules. Twelve MDs joined the project in fall 2014, and six MDs participated in spring 2015. There was also a final workshop retreat to reflect on and analyze the overall impact of the project.

With both cohorts of MDs, the goals for the cohort participants were: 1) introduce theories and best practices in order to generate consensus about key principles among MDs; 2) share ready-for-use module examples already created by the institution's faculty; 3) support module development, assessment, and revisions with internal and external peer review; 4) highlight possible intersections between participants' work in the ITAIC initiative and performance review in order to augment participant buy-in and point up systemic and institutional opportunities. In monthly two-hour seminars, MDs met to discuss readings, best practices, and work in progress. Project participants took turns in presenting instructional materials and theoretical concepts. Each MD not only developed their own module but they also piloted one of their peers.

Additionally, MDs served as "Expert Multipliers" (EMs) and facilitated one-time workshops on the ITAIC project. The workshops were attended by 21 "Departmental Designees" (DDs) who had been selected by their supervisors to subsequently share take-aways from the workshop with their home department. As external expert reviewers, Drs. Fantini and Deardorff each led a seminar and workshop in early fall term to offer guidance and direction. Both assessed progress as well as strengths and weaknesses of the ITAIC project in comprehensive reports at the end of the grant-funding period.

Over a total of four quarters, ITAIC project participation was incentivized by stipends, book prizes, instructional support, and institutional in-kind contributions. Priority for incentivized participation was given to equitable representation of campus diversity and to participants' proposals with a clear connection to ITAIC's primary goals.

Why pursue ITAIC campus-wide at an institution?

A major challenge for universities has been how to create effective, articulated, and assessable learning experiences in environments that recognize, facilitate and support learning in intercultural contexts across disciplines. At our institution, the increasing and sustained commitment to global engagement and internationalization had led to a heightened awareness of the need for development of intercultural competence, not only in students, but also in faculty and staff. Conventionally, course content on intercultural competence has resided in different academic disciplines (such as communication, foreign languages, psychology, etc.) or units on campus (e.g. Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Division of Global Affairs, etc.). Unfortunately, educators in these fields are

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