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Re-centering Global Civic Engagement through a Critical Lens: A Collaborative Center Approach

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In higher education, global civic engagement (GCE) is often discussed as an educational activity designed to enhance students' educational experiences. Many programs, despite the benefit for students, are developed with minimal inclusion of the perspectives, context, and voices of communities, creating an incomplete context of and limited perspective of the community. In response to the limitations this type of GCE environment creates, the author provides approaches towards developing global civic engagement experiences for college students that are more transformative in nature. Through a university partnership center based in Western Africa, this chapter explores a more inclusive model for GCE focusing on the community's unique perspectives, histories, and narratives to enhance critical teaching and learning. The author constructs a narrative that explains how intentionality in program design builds a framework for teaching and learning that cultivates global civic engagement within the African context and concludes with resources to support teaching from this framework.

KEYWORDS: Global Civic Engagement; West Africa; Burkina Faso; Community-Based Learning; Performative Engagement; Critical Learning; Historical Acknowledgment; Decolonization; Community Voice.

Introduction

Global civic engagement (GCE) in higher education subscribes, for the most part, to a script that follows a Western narrative, one in which the initial development of ideas, the inclusion of students and faculty, and program logistics are developed and framed through a US lens. This is not to say that overseas counterparts have no role in establishing civic engagement programs or that global community partners never co-design such programs. But it can be argued that global civic engagement programs, by and large, are designed to meet students' educational portfolios with little regard to the communities that provide the central landscape for students' learning. Moreover, far too often, these programs operate from a lens of *performative engagement*. Civic actions, conversations, and behaviors are situated in surface layer interactions and feel-good moments, which do little to discomfort students, administrators, and educators to elicit a shift in thinking toward more in-depth learning and living.

This chapter aims to examine approaches towards developing global civic engagement experiences for college students that are more transformative and less situational. Taking an approach of

retheorizing civic engagement theory, the author forms a central argument that civic engagement is an ideal teaching instrument to develop a more informed citizenry. Critical theory scholars, and global engagement scholars, and others concerned with the field's limitations, realize that GCE not positioned from a place of inclusivity, respect, and historical acknowledgment leaves a gap in the civic engagement ecosystem. Universities often position civic engagement as a beneficial experience with inadequate consideration of communities' equitable inclusion in the development of these global occurrences. Questions raised by academics critical of GCE tend to focus on the impact on communities whose resources, time, and knowledge are not valued nor incorporated in designing the GCE experience. They explore how this myopic attitude impacts the civic engagement ecosystem. What message does it send to students when community voices are absent from the onset or when the community is portrayed as a passive 'place' with no knowledge or expertise to contribute? Global civic engagement, which includes representation, is critical to creating a more diverse democracy and opportunities for civic participation.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the context of GCE experiences within higher education institutions, and the framework of how these experiences are often developed—the central focus being on the narrow preparation of participants for global service-learning experiences. In particular, the framing of global concepts excludes these international communities' voices, knowledge, and experiences. The author grounds this argument in universities' role in setting the initial tone for civic ideology and the crucial groundwork that is necessary to help students translate a singular experience to civic actions and attitudes that go beyond the global occurrence. To move this narrative forward, the author details a more inclusive civic engagement model that can better capture the community's voices, histories, and narratives through a university partnership in West Africa. She illustrates this through a collaboration between Penn State University and the *ziE* Water and Engineering University in Burkina Faso, West Africa. The *ziE*-PSU Collaborative Engagement Center, located on the campus of *ziE* in Ouagadougou, West Africa, was designed for the 'institution' to move beyond these performative actions and behaviors too often found within the academy. A GCE paradigm centered on community needs and voice was the driver for this engaged scholarship. The Center is designed to exemplify what engagement should look like in order to facilitate change and civic stewardship. Central to this partnership is the university's role in preparing and supporting students to become active and engaged citizens. The paper will highlight the successes, challenges, and overall benefits of this type of community-university partnership between Penn State and *ziE* and the impact it has had in developing a more inclusive and engaged approach to civic engagement. Penn State's mission to enhance students' learning experiences by providing them with field experiences with and for the community serves as the impetus for exploring these outcomes. As a note, civic engagement within the University is broadly defined as the actions, behaviors, and attitudes of an individual that enhance or improve a community or institution. This lens has helped to understand students' civic engagement experiences in the global south, specifically within African diaspora communities, and the impact on student learning outcomes. Understanding civic participation through the eyes of students and scholars engaged in communities across the African diaspora can help contribute towards an institutional culture of inclusion through knowledge building. Focusing on student engagement in these particular locales shows how important it is to establish a culture of scholarship for student success that is responsive and inclusive of other ways of knowing. Ultimately, such an approach encourages the development of curriculum and policies that are responsive to the precise needs of communities, as well as helping to prepare critically minded civic stewards.

This chapter provides a deeper examination of GCE's development that helps shift the narrative from Eurocentric university values to the communities in which these experiences occur.¹ A critical feature of this manuscript is the re-centering of civic engagement curriculum to include voices who have been marginalized and unrecognized in these spaces.² This recentering acknowledges the importance of viewing community partners as equals rather than a placement site for students. A move such as this requires that educators understand and value the needs of partners, be proactive in the co-construction of activities that speaks to the community's needs, and

inclusion of their expertise within these spaces.³ Communities provide unique perspectives on place-based understandings and knowledge that are often overlooked or undervalued within international contexts.⁴ The questions of whose voices are heard and valued within civic engagement experiences matter in the political science field because they contribute to building frameworks that prepare students to be responsible citizens in a more inclusive democracy.

Universities as a Place of Civic Development And Ideologies

In the current socio-cultural context, the university provides an ideal learning space that extends beyond the professional and cultural credentials usually attributed to higher education to include the realm of forming human character. The university plays a vital role in shaping idealistic minds and responding to societal concerns supported through curriculum and research. Essentially, the university's role is to serve as a space for students to examine their surroundings to contribute towards an equitable, moral, and democratic society. Although this is a desired goal, it is not always attained within university settings. Citizenship development generally lacks an inclusive community context and critical examinations of social and political issues that affect global and domestic communities. These subjects are often presented as distinct problems that are only experienced by specific communities or groups of people in either the US or another nation. Only rarely do students gain the perspective of transglobal experiences of communities such as those within the African diaspora within classes or cocurricular activities.

Globalized GCE experiences encourage students to examine their place in an increasingly global and interconnected world.⁵ By promoting 'global citizenship,' universities can help students to define their participation in civic life. In essence, global citizenship is a way of living that recognizes the interconnectedness of the environment and people's lives. Most salient to this concept is the social justice, meaning creating equity in the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Creating a global citizen mindset such as this has the ability to teach students to appreciate differences and center knowledge beyond a US or Eurocentric view. It encourages individuals to think deeply and critically about policies and systems that impact our social and political environments. Additionally, it makes learners feel more confident regarding ethical issues due to their ability to recognize and assess their own civic actions. A global citizenry curriculum within a university prepares students for the 21st century, developing proactive citizens who are attuned to complex problems, able to think critically, communicate ideas effectively, and work collaboratively in diverse settings. However, this is more difficult to put into practice than it sounds.

A current dilemma for higher education institutions (HEI) is the development of experiences and platforms to prepare students for their civic responsibilities within a highly globalized and interconnected world. Frequently overlooked is how students can recognize that social, physical, and economic shocks exist beyond their immediate community or locale. More responsive GCE education teaches and grounds students with the factors that necessitate significant social action while setting the stage for more impactful relationships within communities. Collectively these goals ensure that students can address challenges within a global context. Because of this, education is at a turning point in preparing students to address global challenges from an engagement point of view, especially now that important issues such as racial inequality, systemic poverty, and sustainability dominate much of the worldwide agenda. These are the types of problems that we must address through public problem-solving in a healthy democracy.⁶ According to Rittel and Webber (1973), such problems cannot be defined precisely and are continually changing, requiring adjustments in selecting the appropriate response or solution.⁷ Every problem is unique and is often a symptom of a more extensive, more complex set of challenges. For this reason, some academics and universities have responded by creating critical interdisciplinary learning areas to address wicked challenges.⁸

The critical framing and reflection of wicked issues from an international perspective allows students to realize that the dilemmas they see or experience overseas are not unique to that locale but are often encountered in the United States. Students' critical reflection of their GCE ex-

periences sets a tone beyond immersion in an international setting. It offers an opportunity to explore “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, or gender inequality and the continuing struggles worldwide for human rights, freedom, and power. A cosmopolitan perspective also frames the global location, providing a backdrop to deconstruct and construct concepts central to the communities and citizens in which students are engaged. Creating a critical-thinking environment for students enhances higher education’s role in creating critically thinking global citizens and enables students to draw connections between theory and practice. Developing an active and responsible citizen capable of critically understanding others’ development and social wellbeing is fundamental to the university’s central purpose.

Moreover, this framework permits students to develop skills that lead to active citizenship, promoting social cohesion, and valuing the diversity of human beings.⁹ These ideals are the cornerstones of GCE’s global perspective and critical to students’ civic development. These values serve as a starting point for defining essential engagement, especially in the African diaspora context.

Critical Global Civic Engagement Within West Africa

At the core of Penn State’s strategy for building global citizens is an engaged global network (GEN) of strategic partnerships with peer institutions around the world who share Penn State’s commitment to solving the world’s most pressing challenges through a multi-layered engagement of research, faculty, and student collaboration. Global Penn State has three distinct, but interwoven, elements in 1) building global competency by sending students, faculty, and staff abroad, 2) internationalizing the university community by bringing international students and scholars to campus, and 3) building a global network of regional partnerships that enable the University to pursue its tripartite mission of teaching, research, and service on the global stage.

This strategic partner network provides access to regional networks of intellectual capital, resources, and funding while capitalizing on the strengths, benefits, and opportunities that arise from a multidisciplinary and multicultural approach to problem-solving. The initiative combines intellectual resources with other major research universities around the world. The program integrates research into Penn State’s educational programs, and it provides opportunities for student engagement that build global citizenship and leadership. Furthermore, the strategic partnerships increase opportunities to broaden Penn State students opportunities for studying abroad in diverse contexts. What follows is the discussion of the Global Engagement Network in Africa, located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and its contribution to developing a new approach towards global civic engagement.

2iE-PSU Engagement Center

Penn State has a longstanding relationship with the International Institute of Water and Environmental Engineering in Ouagadougou due to collaborative partnerships in engineering and STEM in West Africa. The two institutions expanded this collaboration to include pertinent sustainable development other areas, related to the water, food, and energy nexus in Africa. As a result of these programmatic areas and the GEN structure, the 2iE-Penn State Engagement Centre was formed. It is a platform for long-term collaborative multidisciplinary research and educational exchanges in West Africa and improving the wellbeing of people and communities in the African diaspora. Additionally, it illustrates the viewpoints and needs of communities racially, ethnically, and culturally different from Penn State and from the communities in which most Penn State students were born and raised. Partnering with a university in Africa also provides opportunities for academic, governmental, non-government, and private sector entities to work together around specific projects or themes in West Africa that are often critical to other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The 2iE-PSU partnership and the Center mainly take advantage of the University’s prior and ongoing investments in interdisciplinary research to address community health, education, and sustainability in the global south. The place-based location provides opportunities for student en-

agement, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving and multicultural skills necessary for student success and promotes academic excellence. The 2iE-PSU Center encourages partners to leverage and steward their resources to tackle complex societal problems at all levels, from local to global. Based on the interdisciplinary framework of the Center, activities are anchored by core principles which foster:

- Partnerships, collaboration, and mutual leveraging of institutional/intellectual capital
- A multidisciplinary/multicultural approach to knowledge creation
- Transformative actions within and across communities

Complementing these core principles are activities designed to set the tone before students depart for Africa while also developing more culturally aware students who will be working and living in communities within Burkina Faso. These activities include:

1. Virtual weekly meetings with the 2iE faculty and staff to assist in situating their work and engagement within their communities.
2. Readings focused on the history, culture, and contemporary issues within Burkina Faso written by Burkinabe authors.¹⁰
3. Readings on the history of West Africa to help contextualize the history of Burkina Faso within the region written by West African authors.
4. Roundtable discussions with African scholars and students enrolled in the program on issues related to colonization, power, and privilege.
5. Listening sessions with PSU faculty and staff who have worked in the West African region or with particular organizations/communities similar to those of the students.¹¹
6. Self-guided reflection journaling (questions provided weekly).¹²

While in country, students engage in a set of activities which include:

1. Weekly meetings with community partners labeled as “learn and share sessions” (sessions meant to help students learn from, and share with community members on contemporary issues) once they arrive in Burkina.
2. Daily debriefings with 2iE scholars and students on cross-cultural issues concerning colonization, power, and privilege within the US and Africa.
3. Weekly journal reflection questions with prompts.
4. Participation and storytelling: In order to hear the stories of community members, the storytelling takes place once a week and is arranged by our staff at the 2iE Center, with the help of community members. The logistics, such as timing and location, can vary depending on the individuals involved.

Learning within the 2iE Center

Combined, these activities aim to foster a more profound experience for Penn State students and center the learning and perspectives about Burkinabe communities and its citizens. The importance of this type of framework is supported by the critical issues impacting communities

in Burkina Faso and was seen as an integral to the plan of work of the Center. Since the inception of the Center, the work has largely been driven by two overarching themes: sustainability and community and youth development. In response to a growing youth population and chronic food, energy, and water scarcity, student projects have been designed in consultation with PSU and zIE faculty and the field-based staff at the Center to offer a network of support to rural and urban communities. Burkinabe staff provide students with the opportunity to connect deeply with communities because of longstanding partnerships and daily interactions. Students used these connections to engage in intensive discussions with local government agencies or non-governmental organizations to understand how their ideas will come to life within Burkinabe districts and communities quite different from their own. For instance, many students find that their viewpoints about the extended family and nuclear family change after they encounter family members from several communities who are vital to the success of each project.

On several occasions, students have remarked that the Center served as an area to critically explore complex themes such as colonization and its effect on African development. Students felt the Center provided a safe space for meaningful and needed reflections and discussions with peers and local staff. Generally speaking, the Center facilitated interdisciplinary collaborations between students and community partners. Students who have worked with the Center had the opportunity to experience information sharing and knowledge building between themselves and local experts and stakeholders, which further enhanced learning and engagement. One example of this was with a solar project that focused on increasing entrepreneurship in Burkina Faso.

Critical efforts to guide entrepreneurs and local communities

Renewable energy entrepreneurs are at the forefront of efforts to extend access to modern energy services in West Africa. Often, their business expertise serves as an excellent way to identify local needs and provide tailored solutions. Some West African entrepreneurs, however, face challenges. In most countries, the business environment is not conducive to private investment, particularly in the power sector. To respond to these issues, governments must work to establish appropriate institutional and regulatory frameworks, implement enabling policies, and advocate for sustainable financing and business models for renewable energy. In spite of such challenges, global and regional institutions, as well as entrepreneurs, are moving to address energy needs in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This particular intersection of energy access and equity created an opportunity for Penn State students and scholars to work towards solutions. Penn State students along with a solar professor from Penn State worked with members from the ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) and zIE on establishing a facility to offer assistance to small and medium-sized renewable energy enterprises, especially those focused on solar photovoltaics (PV). Gradually, students realized that there were hierarchical structures within and between local businesses, NGOs, and other community-based organizations that would impact the integrity of their work. This helped them realize how complexities can arise when working with local businesses to enhance their operations and with entrepreneurs seeking to bring innovative ideas to fruition.

Students found a deeper connection with the local community due to the cultural and political nuances, though this led to frustration. For example, after some conversations with the community, students attended local community meetings organized by youth about current political injustices and how these longstanding issues were connected to colonial histories. Prior to these conversations they noted in their journals they did not understand about the political tensions between community and government and how deep the impact and effects of colonialism still prevailed in the local context. During my observation and discussion with students who were working on the project, I saw some students taking the initiative to work with community organizations they viewed as “out of reach” due to them not understanding how these particular organizations worked to enhance the welfare of the local community. Tensions between community partners and students sometimes arose due to a lack of understanding of cultural norms. In these times of noted tensions caused by students’ framing of development from a Western perspective, the professor,

who invited me to the discussions to listen and provide context as needed, included more time for open reflection during their group processing time to make deeper meaning of what students felt and observed during their time within the community. Questions or open prompts such as how are the current realities you are seeing supported by what you were taught about or read about prior to traveling? Or who are the actors that have shaped the context of inequities within Africa, particularly within Burkina Faso? The Penn State professor also used dialogues and open discussions with community partners for creating opportunities for deconstructing ways of knowing and being. Their frustration resulted from what they called at times a limited view of the riches and knowledge produced by communities. By virtue of its location and atmosphere, the 2iE-PSU Center enabled the development of a new model for civic awareness in a global setting.

Centering Critical Civic Engagement in Higher Education Discourse

The literature on civic engagement makes it clear that there is a struggle amongst scholars when considering how to define the term “civic engagement.” A traditional approach arguably considers the *actions* without regard to structural inequalities, while a critical approach examines the efforts while exploring structural injustices. The term *critical civic engagement* offers an understanding of the distribution of structural and political powers within societies, avoids hierarchies, promotes authentic relationships, and works from a cultural perspective. This definition also influences the role of power systems in understanding inequalities and social injustices.

Critical civic engagement can be seen as an answer to other forms of civic engagement, which may emphasize actions that reinforce misconceptions and stereotypes. Civic engagement activities constructed in an academic setting can unwittingly become an exercise in patronization if not conducted with great care and consciousness. If civic experiences are designed in ways that fail to be cognizant of the university’s hierarchical structures or patriarchal philosophies, and do not include the voices or perspectives of locals, then civic engagement activities risk doing more harm than good.

Critical civic engagement allows students to act on social inequalities while also recognizing their privilege as students. As educators, we cannot presume all students are from privileged backgrounds but must be cognizant of how their student status might be perceived by others. For example, in many contexts and communities within the global south, students from universities are considered privileged because of their ability to attend tertiary school, despite their socioeconomic background in the US. The concept of privilege must also be counterpointed by the idea of *othering*, which students must understand in order to engage with others in a critically informed manner. Aram Ziai describes othering as “the construction of a [...] group as” different, “which serves to delimit the identity of a we-group and so on to constitute and thus to justify political claims and exclusions.”¹³ Students involved in civic engagement activities should reflect not only on their actions but also on the causes of social problems and how to use their privilege to address the social injustices which they are passionate addressing. According to critical race scholars, students will be motivated to take action to affect positive change in their communities once they realize how their actions and behaviors impact others and generate social change.¹⁴

Civic engagement experiences conducted with a critical lens goes beyond actions such as posting to Facebook or interacting with others on social media. It extends to critically examining systemic problems that lead to public acts and situating this learning beyond the classroom and the walls of the university. A framework of critical civic engagement teaches students how to identify the root causes of systemic problems and learn how to tackle the symptoms and engage with context. This type of learning happens when educators are deliberate with conversations regarding the positioning of issues such as power and privilege to guide student learning and actions. An important benefit of this intentional knowledge building is that it helps students understand the impact of their privilege while also assisting them in understanding the power of privilege when used for the common good. Student learning must focus on the reality that privilege must be acknowledged

and used responsibly and in partnership with the community to bring about positive change, and not regarded as a veil for saving individuals. Educators are responsible for ensuring students understand and utilize the role of power and privilege in the communities in which they work. Our positions provide us the space to explore and interrogate concepts like reciprocity, shared visions, and community building with students—all of which are integral to recognizing the strengths and assets that each community brings to their vision of development. By addressing these sometimes delicate topics, we help students realize the importance of critical engagement and re-orient the project’s focus towards the partner and not on themselves.

The ultimate solution or glorification of social inequality

Critical civic engagement emphasizes the why of *actions* and reduces reliance on student-centered engagement. Often, civic engagement activities are conducted by students for social justice, but are void of language or context which highlights the role and importance of social justice and related actions. Students should be challenged to think about social injustices and how they as students/citizens can contribute to social and civic change after the study abroad experience. The preparation of students should include support and opportunities to ask difficult questions. For example: Why are there significant economic and social differences in our society that contribute to social inequalities? What has led to certain social groups’ educational disparities, and how has the public and private sectors of society responded to these inequities? And how do these concepts possibly tie into a global context? (See table 1).

Table 1. A Framework of Understanding Critical Global Service-Learning Experiences

How learning is framed	How learning is operationalized	How learning is contextualized	Translation to critical service learning in a global context
Develop a program that allows for students to investigate and engage with terms and concepts that can also be explored or discussed in the US context	Terms salient to both the global context and US context are introduced and discussed and are not treated as an <i>us/them</i> dichotomy	Strengthens the learning for students to see the connections between terms, occurrences, and histories that impact communities both domestically and internationally	Deeper connection to and understanding of terms such as race, decolonization, historical trauma/legacies that are centrally tied to the formation and resilience of both <i>global and domestic communities</i> and stresses the importance of why these terms should be examined through an international and domestic lens
Curriculum inclusive of decolonial/non-Western perspectives	Includes readings, videos, and scholarship developed by individuals from the host country	Emphasizes the importance of non-Western knowledge and ways of being in understanding communities and global spaces	Situates a tone that acknowledges and values the voices, lens, and knowledge of non-US scholars/culture/communities as a source of information crucial to student’s learning
Create spaces for self-reflection and group reflection and discussions	During weekly reflections, questions are posed to students to address as an individual (separate from the group), while other questions may be posed for group discussions	Reinforces the role of individuality in students being able to make meaning of their experiences while also allowing for group discussion for greater processing and questioning	Embraces the role and need for multiple spaces of reflection to help students move from “an experience” to critical understanding and consideration of their ability to contribute towards civic change

Table 1. A Framework of Understanding Critical Global Service-Learning Experiences

Incorporate time for explicit conversations about how learning translates into critical and social justice action	Before departure and in-country conversations reinforce connections between concepts investigated in the global context	Provides structured time for students to discover how they can take action upon return from the host site	Operationalizes the global experience into a learning experience that leads to a critical understanding of civic actions and attitudes in the US and abroad
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A critical approach to civic engagement can be more challenging to execute in a global context than in the US because you must acknowledge inequalities both in the US and globally. This requires students to realize their privilege as US citizens and begin to understand and reflect on their privilege. A critical civic engagement experience includes students reflecting on their positionality within society.¹⁵ Along with addressing their positionality, students should critically assess power as a construct within communities and examine its manifestation at the individual and group levels. Additionally, they must examine diversity from the standpoint of advantages, possibilities, and resources, including access to power. Examining these points will help students be better equipped to identify existing inequalities and injustices in society. Because of these meaningful reflections, the student is provided with more in-depth experience and has a better understanding of how to transform simple acts of engagement into meaningful actions linked to critical knowledge.

Universities may struggle to find ways to integrate civic engagement critically even though they seek to engage students in society's civic fabric. The goal of a university is ultimately to put civic engagement principles into practice through activities that promote public involvement in local governance, address pressing issues, and explore public problems. In order for universities to achieve this integration goal, they must design GCE experiences that guide students through critical experiences to transform their thinking, develop creative approaches to problems, and build connections for deeper involvement in society. As a result of the critical approach, students learn how to work with others, designing policies or advocating for equitable reallocation of public resources (see table 1). Critical engagement can help students contribute to communities and advocate for transparency and accountability. Furthermore, it can strengthen the voice of communities to strive toward meaningful community dialogue and actions. For example, the youth development projects in Burkina Faso led to conversations between Penn State students and primary and secondary school principals, as well as NGO's engaged in educating youth about how these challenges could be addressed and sustained once those students returned to the US. In some cases, these initial conversations sparked student-led initiatives to help resist youth recruitment into terrorist groups. In this case, the connection from learning to action was facilitated by conversations held between stakeholders and students, and the willingness for the educator to embrace challenging topics which stimulated more questions than answers among students. During their journaling and informal conversations, students noted that the opportunity to work in the community and learn through dialogues and discussions upended their learned assumptions about African culture, development, and its societies. The conversations helped them to understand development from the standpoint of the community members and institutional partners. Community partners noted the opportunity to speak with students in a conversational manner provided a new norm in two specific ways. The first was them being able to view the students as partners in the process and not just individuals seeking to complete a project. Furthermore, greater respect was shown between community members and students due to the meaningful conversations about their African past which helped contextualize the process and significance of the projects—changing the view of how partnerships can be genuinely beneficial for both the African partner/community and the US institution.

Practical Implications for Educators

Most of the time, GCE in universities seeks to teach students how to effect change in community

settings. However, the current reality is that the ability to foster situations that connect historical legacies of racism and injustice with the policies and laws that perpetuate these inequalities gets lost once we move from theory to practice. Critically engaged pedagogies allow educators to move beyond recognizing racial and other historical injustices toward creating inclusionary spaces and sustainable opportunities for action.

A critically engaged global curriculum enables students to initiate meaningful civic actions, which is essential to any service-learning program. However, contextualizing students' learning becomes more important for global programs given that the experience is overseas, and leads to the question of how you situate the overseas experience at home. Educators must help students translate their global experiences to their domestic contexts, resulting in a change in the ways universities develop, orient, and implement programs. In general, a paradigm shift is needed to provide students with a variety of learning opportunities and opportunities for interaction, such as those offered in the 2iE-PSU Engagement Center. Critical lenses give students and educators ways to think about, question, negotiate, and act in order to transform the understanding of knowledge, institutional structures, and relationships. Students often come to appreciate the deeper issues of social-cultural-political nexus when they engage with problem-posing questions and other strategies to analyze, deconstruct, and question what they are experiencing in communities and diverse contexts. The results from these activities range from critical awareness of one's role as a possible change agent to questions about their ability to make change.

The critical lens recognizes the importance of cultural context and the student's ability to challenge oppression and work towards transformational social change even if the learning context is global. When students are encouraged to perceive themselves as part of oppressive systems, they can begin to see their potential roles in challenging and transforming these systems. Additionally, a critical approach calls on educators to conceptualize the contexts within which oppression operates and understand the ways in which social identities shape communities and access to opportunities. A critical lens of engagement requires educators to recognize how context can offer oppressive structures and spaces as well as potential opportunities to raise students' awareness. In other words, a critical perspective of engagement calls for educators to shift from an individualistic point of view to one of citizenship as a communal responsibility.

Educators who engage in meaningful critical engagement should demonstrate an understanding of critical ethics if they expect this type of environment to thrive and be successful. Educators should display a willingness to engage in ongoing critical reflection as part of the collective process of action with students. Additionally, steps need to be taken in order to create a trusting and bi-directional learning environment, where instructors are encouraged to be learners and students are encouraged to be instructors partnering with community leaders. An educational system that utilizes a critical frame of reference for GCE challenges the system of power present in educational institutions—recognizing issues such as power and equity points to the value of a critical approach to civic engagement. A global civic engagement experience, viewed through a critical lens, aids crucial conversations that deepen students' understanding of civic responsibility, including its purpose, value, and significance in a global society.

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