



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A GLOBAL ECONOMY

According to an ancient Chinese tale, once there was a frog that lived at the bottom of a shallow well. The extent of the frog's world was defined by what he could see by looking up at the sky. This frog's world was a small circle or slice of life; he had no awareness or knowledge of what lay beyond the scope of his vision. How many of our students are "frogs in the well?" And what are we doing as educators to push them up and out of their wells? Finally, are we providing them with the toolbox of skills they absolutely need to excel in a multicultural, global environment?

Recently, I heard a statistic that spoke to the demographics that continue to shape our local and global identities, relationships, and perspectives. In the U.S., 2010 could be a demographic "tipping point." This year, the number of babies born to racial and ethnic minorities is likely to outnumber babies born to Whites. What is emerging is a cultural generation gap, in which the young are becoming much more racially and ethnically diverse than the old. This points to a cultural landscape that seems foreign to many, yet is becoming the norm in our classrooms and communities. For example, data from the Census Bureau show that some of the most common names in the U.S. are Garcia, Rodriguez, and Martinez, along with Smith, Johnson, and Wilson. Buying power for racial and ethnic minorities is increasing much faster than that of whites. And these trends cannot be analyzed apart from our growing global interdependence.

Earlier this year, a survey by the American Association of Colleges and Universities asked employers to identify "essential learning outcomes" that are *not* getting the attention they deserve in higher education. At the top of their list were knowledge and skills related to cultural diversity and global issues. Moreover, employers emphasized that they need employees who can work together and problem-solve on diverse teams.

The glaring gap between the cultural intelligence of our students and the global, rapidly changing cultural

landscape they encounter in the workplace is a growing concern. Increasingly, employers, including businesses, government agencies, healthcare institutions, and the military, are placing more and more emphasis on the potential challenges and benefits of diversity. Why is diversity such a priority when organizations evaluate their marketing strategies, suppliers, training programs, hires, and core values? Simply put, it is because they understand the connection between diversity and their bottom line. Moreover, they realize that diversity, in and of itself, will not allow them to be more creative, productive, customer-oriented, and marketable automatically. Rather, cultural differences represent potential that can only be developed and leveraged if their employees have the requisite cultural intelligence.

In *Building Cultural Intelligence (CQ): Nine Megaskills*, the author expounds on a skill-set that employers regard as a necessity, regardless of one's major or chosen career. In addition to technical competence, the following megaskills are no longer an "extra" or nice thing to have; rather, they have become a necessity.

1. *Understanding My Cultural Identity*—understanding how we think about ourselves as well as the people and ways of life with which we identify
2. *Checking Cultural Lenses*—recognizing the ways in which cultural backgrounds differ and how they influence thinking, behavior, and assumptions
3. *Global Consciousness*—moving comfortably across boundaries and seeing the world from multiple perspectives and world views
4. *Shifting Perspectives*—putting ourselves in the circumstances, cultures, and histories of others
5. *Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict*—dealing with conflict among people from differing cultural backgrounds in a productive and constructive manner
6. *Dealing with Bias*—recognizing bias in all its forms and responding to it effectively
7. *Understanding the Dynamics of Power*—grasping how power and culture interrelate and the effect of power on how we see the world and relate to others



8. *Intercultural Communication*—respectfully and effectively exchanging ideas and feelings across cultural boundaries
9. *Multicultural Teaming*—working with others from diverse backgrounds to accomplish common goals for which *team members hold themselves accountable*

How do we make it possible for students to develop this skill set? First, we need to target *all* students in *all* fields of study throughout their college experience. We can accomplish this in a variety of ways. Infusing relevant CQ megaskills across the curriculum is an excellent place to start. As an example, students in hospitality management must learn to collaborate and communicate cross-culturally in highly diverse settings. Servicing people with disabilities, managing people who are English language learners, and accommodating the needs of customers with diverse religious backgrounds are critical skills that need to be seamlessly integrated into this curriculum.

At many colleges, learning communities organize around themes such as linguistic diversity, cross-cultural leadership, and global consciousness. By offering a wide range of learning communities, online and face-to-face, in residential settings, classrooms and beyond, colleges provide the “authentic space” students need to dialogue openly and honestly with each other and, in the process, learn more about their differences and commonalities. Such dialogues can teach students invaluable lessons about their upbringing and the cultural lens through which they view the world. More specifically, learning communities can heighten students’ awareness of bias and other socially constructed barriers that make leadership, interpersonal interaction, and global consciousness more difficult. Furthermore, diverse learning communities can make it possible for students to experience what it is like being a minority or a cultural outsider for a prolonged period of time. In so doing, they emerge from their “wells,” question cultural truths, and become more comfortable outside of their cultural comfort zone.

By offering service learning, along with cultural immersion programs and study abroad, we provide students with invaluable opportunities to apply CQ megaskills in real-world settings. For instance, nursing students at one mid-western college learn to shift perspectives and think globally as they complete service-learning projects with international communities. Moreover, pre- and post-test assessments measure their personal growth.

Increasingly, requirements are in place at many institutions, ensuring exposure of all students to U.S. and/or global diversity, including scholarship on minorities, women, and world cultures. Equally

important are faculty development programs that focus on integrative studies, new curricular models, and the cultural inclusiveness of what is taught and how it is taught.

The success of initiatives to promote cultural intelligence hinges largely on the diversity and inclusiveness of the college community. The recruitment and retention of a culturally diverse population of faculty, staff, and students must be institutionalized and ongoing, along with the nurturing of partnerships with local and global communities. Strong institutional commitment and leadership are pivotal, moving far beyond food, festivals, flags, and public relations. Initiatives must be integrated and college-wide, and include learning outcomes and assessment, developmental education and first-year programs, faculty and staff development, student activities, and organizational partnerships.

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