

The Global Citizen Scholar Program at Allegheny College

By Laura Reeck and Dave Roncolato

The challenge for higher education to integrate crucial twenty-first-century areas of inquiry and experience is not new and is a salient finding in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future* (2012), a report commissioned by the US Department of Education. The publication calls for efforts within higher education to “contribute significantly to college students’ preparation as informed, engaged, and globally knowledgeable citizens” (vii). One of the report authors, Caryn McTighe Musil, former AAC&U senior scholar and director of civic learning and democracy initiatives, has emphasized the importance of integrating civic engagement, global learning, and US diversity, which she explained as the “three streams of educational reform movements” that need to be present in programs and curricula: “Any learning goals for civic engagement diminish these movements’ intellectual scope and capacity to seriously address social justice issues in diverse democracies if isolated from the powerful critical lens of the other two [...] Similarly, US diversity and global learning, devoid of an exploration of their responsibilities to a larger public good, reduce their power as education for democratic citizenship” (McTigue Musil 2009, 52). We are particularly indebted to McTighe Musil and her endorsement of the Global Citizen Scholars (GCS) Program.

The vision of Allegheny College’s GCS Program resides in defining global citizenship as extending beyond the “global” to encompass both local and global communities and commitments. The program’s design and learning objectives are built on the premises of liberal education, high-impact practices, and experiential learning. Here, we will share takeaways as part of the conversation on global citizenship education. While our purpose is not to engage in what is sometimes a fraught discussion on global citizenship—“an attractive and contested concept” (Akkari and Maleq)—we do recognize the range of viewpoints on the concept and corresponding global citizenship education. While not dismissing the range of critiques, we are interested in a critical and inclusive definition of global citizenship—a global citizenship from below that encompasses and relates the local and the global.

With the GCS Program, our approach has made clear that global citizenship education (GCE) is best realized through the combination of engagement and study in civic engagement, global

learning, and US diversity. Equally foundational to our approach to GCE is Eboo Patel's "interfaith triangle." Patel believes that understanding, cooperation, and shared achievements are possible in a world of interfaith pluralism as people engage along the three sides of a triangle—appreciative attitudes, appreciative knowledge, and close relationships (Patel, 102). While Patel's focus is on interfaith work, the same "triangle" can be seen in relation to all pluralistic communities. Taken together, the McTighe Musil and Patel triangles define the design of the GCS Program. Both integrate learning into the affective and cognitive realms. Such integration is essential for fostering lifelong commitments as global citizens.

GCS Learning Objectives

1. Identify and examine a significant issue in the natural or human world in reference to one's identity and academic work.
2. Develop knowledge of diverse cultures and how location within and outside these cultures creates diverse perspectives, and even conflicting positions, on complex issues within natural or human systems.
3. Evaluate multiple worldviews in relation to power structures, sustainability, social justice, and ethics while interacting with others to address a significant global problem.
4. Utilize communication skills and intercultural competencies in applied work in civic engagement and global engagement for outcomes that are collaborative and demonstrate understanding of the impacted community.

Program Design

A total of five cohorts participated in Allegheny College's GCS Program, a curricular/cocurricular scaffolded program spanning three years of engagement. By theme, the cohorts focused on refugees and migration; neurodiversity; impact of global climate change on food, energy, and water; empowering women worldwide; and COVID-19 oral histories. More than eighty students participated over the seven years of the donor-supported GCS Program. The institutional investment in the GCS cohorts yielded over 90 percent retention in each of the cohorts. Importantly, students remained at Allegheny even if they chose not to complete the GCS Program.

Working in collaboration with the Admissions Department, Allegheny College invited students to apply, arranged for participating faculty to interview them, and accepted them into the incoming GCS cohort prior to matriculating. GCS students committed to:

- attending an overnight orientation retreat with other GCS students at the beginning of the fall semester;
- taking a one-credit “Introduction to Global Citizen Scholars” course;
- taking a two-credit GCS class for three consecutive semesters beginning in the spring semester of their first year;
- participating in a one-year civic engagement placement in Meadville, Pennsylvania, during their second academic year;
- studying a foreign language for a minimum of two semesters;
- traveling abroad for at least one semester for an engaged international study away experience after their second year; and
- participating in diversity initiatives and conferences.

The college offered a \$2,000 stipend to GCS students to support their study abroad experiences. Cohorts worked collaboratively on a capstone project during their senior year.

With the support of their academic departments, faculty members applied to direct each cohort around a particular theme. Two faculty members were selected for each cohort; each faculty pair combined interdisciplinarity. They participated in the interview and selection process for their particular cohort. Faculty committed to two years of teaching and academic work with the students while remaining involved with them for all four years. Faculty received one course release, or an equivalent stipend, for each of the two years of academic commitment through a designated course.

Part of the strength of the GCS Program design is the multiplier effect of building in many of AAC&U’s high-impact practices, with students in the program participating in at least five of the ten practices. Each cohort is a structured learning community (practice 1) based on the cohort theme. The first-year seminar and GCS courses orient students and initiate them into this community (practice 2). The scaffolding of the program involves community-based service

learning (practice 3) early on, diversity and global learning (practice 4), and eventually a shared capstone experience (practice 5).

Program Takeaways

- A solid GCS or similar program must involve faculty and cocurricular administrators from conception at the design stage.
- One course is not enough. An ongoing curricular component is a key to the success of a rigorous GCS Program.
- A strong asset of a multiyear cohort program is utilizing peer leadership; it is important to structure formal and informal opportunities for upper-class cohort students to share their experiences with first- and second-year cohort students.
- The formation of a community of practice across academic disciplines, across cohorts, and across curricular and cocurricular institutional structures generated momentum and success.

Student Perspectives

“It’s hard to take yourself out of a place that you know. But it is in that uncomfortable place that you’re truly able not only to figure yourself out but also to figure out parts of the world around you.”

–*Cristin Archer, GCS I, 2019*

“Volunteering at ARC of Crawford County forced me out of my comfort zone, giving me new confidence. These connections taught me more about the people in the Meadville community and neurodiversity while giving the people I met a chance to get to better know a student from their local college. Maybe it's best to think of volunteering like a snowball, where you may start out with small tasks that seem insignificant, but the continued addition of these tasks contributes to a large difference.”

–*Sophia Garvin, GCS II, 2022*

“When I first applied to be part of this cohort, I did not know how little of the world I actually knew. This past year has been a learning experience... I strive to open my mind, to challenge my assumptions and judgments by engaging in intercultural, intergenerational, intersocial, secular, and interreligious exchanges...”

–*Pierre Jaeggi, GCS III, 2023*

“I think GCS changed my definition of community. In terms of the empowerment theme, I do feel empowered in the sense that I was able to do this virtual community service project with three or four other women to help vulnerable women in our community. So, the fact that we were able to do this despite a pandemic is empowering. I think this is a really good example of work that is empowering women because once you empower one woman, you’ve empowered a nation.”

–*Rutendo Mavunga, GCS IV, 2024*

“I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to expand my horizons through exposure to diverse cultures, develop my critical thinking skills through interpersonal interactions, and contribute to meaningful goals alongside fellow passionate individuals. It’s worth noting that education and personal growth are not confined to the traditional classroom and lecture settings but rather extend to real-world experiences that shape us in profound ways.”

–*Anh Nguyen, GCS V, 2025*

Faculty Perspectives

“I had no previous experience with community-engaged courses, so that produced a very new learning situation for me. The GCS course also has a student leadership component quite unlike other courses: one in which the students themselves should develop a large, community-engaged project in the final semester of the sequence. Identifying leadership tasks, supporting the leaders, and nudging others into action—these interactions with students were new to me.”

–Professor Eric Palmer

“Our Global Citizen Scholars cohort IV theme is ‘Empowering Women Worldwide.’ But more than anything, this second semester has been about motivating students to empower themselves through their active learning and by practicing empathy in putting others first. Empowerment is a word with many connotations. In its best iteration it is helping oneself by helping others—not an easy lesson for first-year students tested to the breaking point by the pandemic. But the teamwork and perseverance have paid off, and as they reflect back on this semester, we hope our students remember the three C’s—community, collaboration, and compassion—that helped them learn outside the lines, and against all odds.”

–Professors Ishita Sinha Roy and Caryl Waggett

“GCS required more than co-teaching one course. A sustained commitment to educating within the framework of its three pillars and the multi-semester commitment afforded the luxury of a pedagogy we do not normally practice in isolated courses. Meaning, in terms of content, really looking at a problem from multiple disciplines and letting student perspectives drive the exploration of the topic.”

–Professor Barbara Riess

Conclusions

Reflecting on our seven-year experience with the GCS Program, we believe there are transferable lessons and insights for global citizenship education:

- Global learning can begin in local communities by identifying disparities as well as opportunities and addressing them through collective impact and generative partnerships.
- Diversity and diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in the United States are vital to understanding global citizenship, bringing into focus the importance of students’

rich and varied life experiences as well as power dynamics and inequities of opportunities.

- A civic engagement commitment in the local community meaningfully precedes and informs global engagement. This is a useful prerequisite for study abroad experiences. In turn, a global engagement deepens local engagement.
- Applying the Patel triangle, attitudes, particularly limited attitudes, widen with new knowledge, and in turn relationships deepen and expand. Relationships shift perception and attitudes. With this comes new appreciative knowledge, deep learning, and commitment.
- “Baking in” quantitative and qualitative assessment of student learning at every level of the program can usefully include, for example, AAC&U’s Global Learning VALUE Rubric (qualitative assessment) and IUPUI’s “civic-minded graduate” (quantitative assessment).

For the students involved, the GCS seven-year experiment achieved our aspirational objective: Students developed a clear view of their identity and location in the world, an inclusive and global perspective, and the commitment to be citizen leaders addressing the complexities of the world.

References

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