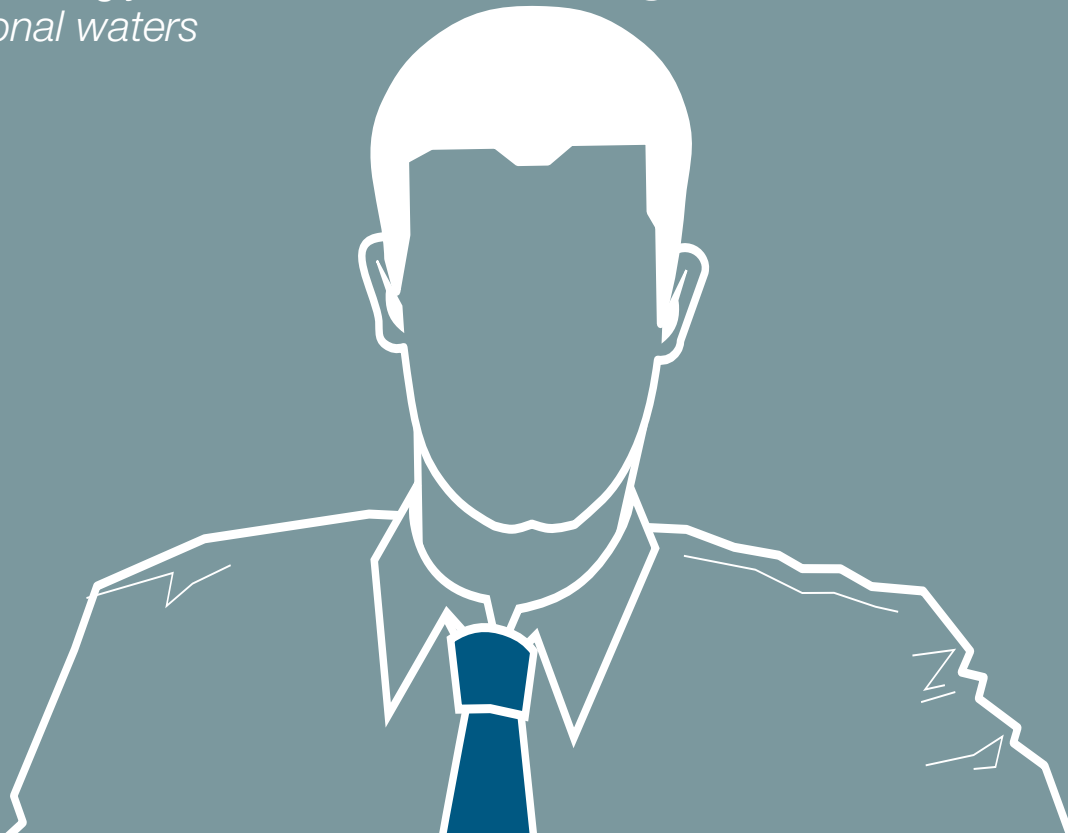


Creating Global Citizens

Moving Beyond Borders

*Michael Lenaghan, Myra Medina,
and Ginny Peterson Tennant present
an alternative program vision building
linguistic and cultural bridges
over increasingly troubled
international waters*



Putting an Unknown City on the Map

If Creating Global Citizens (CGC) were likened to an old-fashioned stool, the three legs would be comprised of **1** Language Skills, **2** Cultural Awareness, and **3** Service. In the coming semester, CGC students will travel to the Dominican Republic (DR) to a small city called "Frasquito Gomez." It is indeed so tiny that Dr. Lenaghan jokes, "It's not on any map in the world." More seriously, this impoverished city also fell off the map of the presidential plan for meeting United Nation (UN) goals, but a well-intended intervention brought it to the attention of DR officials and help has been sent on the way.

The school at Frasquito Gomez has no electricity, floors, or water. It does not even have a sign. Lenaghan remarked, "It is at kilometer marker 126 out of Santo Domingo." However, students' sweat equity may pay off. The United States is in desperate need of competent nurses to assist its aging population. Nursing is a desirable and respected career in the DR, so it seems a match made in heaven for the CGC, since Miami Dade College trains virtually every nurse, paramedic, police officer, and firefighter in the county.

What do you get when you combine a top-notch psychologist, a political scientist, and a language specialist in Spanish? Well, at Miami Dade College (MDC) the result has been the reversal of the currents now much in debate about erecting walls. Miami Dade College has entered its second semester of a program designed to tear down walls that separate us as global citizens. Michael Lenaghan, the globetrotting professor of political science onboard the Global Citizens project says, "It's only natural. After all, we live in multi-cultural Miami — and indeed paraphrasing the poet Danté, we are a separate person for each language that we speak."

Polishing a Golden Apple

Multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual Miami is a microcosm of the world, and on a good day, a scholar can advance toward being a global citizen, professional, and community developer. The Learning Innovations Leadership Team (LILT) at Miami Dade College empowers and enables faculty to identify alternative venues to provide students with opportunities for success.

Under the auspices of a MDC "Golden Apple Grant Program," three professors created and implemented an interdisciplinary learning community entitled, "Creating Global Citizens (CGC): A Multidisciplinary Learning Community." The grant-funded project involved intertwining, interconnecting, and integrating two beginning Spanish courses taught by Professor Myra M. Medina, a revamped Psychology of Personal Effectiveness course conducted by Professor Ginny Peterson Tennant, and an International Relations course led by Professor Michael Lenaghan. The professors decided to encapsulate the project into a learning community format for several reasons.

Learning Communities as Bridges

Research in the learning community literature indicates that the peer interactions afforded by a learning community allows deeper, more internalized and complex thinking, and processing to take place (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000). In addition, learning communities are intentionally structured to help students make two types of

connections. First, students are encouraged to connect ideas from different disciplines to see how knowledge from one course is relevant to knowledge in another course because they are co-enrolled in two or more courses simultaneously (Klein, 2000; MacGregor, 1991). The second connection involves linking students through on-going social interactions because of being with the same students for extended periods. As a result of being part of an academic community, the students further develop their identity and integrate their learning into their worldview as well as their social and academic experiences.

The type of learning community that Medina, Peterson-Tennant, and Lenaghan used consisted of a common cohort of students simultaneously enrolled in two or more interdisciplinary courses that were linked by a common theme. The overarching theme of the learning community was "creating global citizens" in addition to having the Dominican Republic as a focus of research. This focus on the Dominican Republic had a clear purpose: the faculty plans to take the students to the Dominican Republic so the students can practice the language notions learned in the classroom and engage in Service Learning during their visit to that nation.

The Creating Global Citizens learning community extended over two academic semesters. In the Fall term, the students took Spanish I and the multicultural psychology course. Then the cohort of students continued into the Spring semester with the second Spanish course linked with a course in international relations. Essentially, the professors used Smith and Hunter's (1988) idea of creating an enhanced sense of academic community between students and faculty. This was done through mutual participation in both in-class and out-of-class activities. Some of the in-class activities included guest speakers, simulation games such as Barnga, "They're Not Like Us," and the Mixed Up Zoo, Hispanic music and dance, food tasting, and interactive WebCT assignments. Outside of class time, the learning community and their professors attended the Miami International Book Fair, and dined at "Versailles," a Cuban restaurant located in the heart of Little Havana in Miami. The students also participated in several Service-Learning experiences that were fully integrated into the curriculum of the learning community.

Why Have a Language Component?

Speaking more than one language provides an additional dimension to being a global citizen. As well, there are many multiple advantages to being able to communicate in more than one language. This capability opens up a completely new world because it is not just about conjugating verbs and memorizing grammar rules. Learning a language implies becoming cognizant of another culture and how people in that culture think. At times, people tend to create invisible but impenetrable barriers because they do not understand each other especially those who speak a different language. Being able to communicate in a foreign language affords individuals the opportunity to expand their horizons and achieve a better understanding of others.

Considering the impact of technology and globalization, an additional advantage to knowing more than one language is having a competitive edge in the job market of a global economy (Foreign Language Education, n.d.). A study conducted with alumni from the