

# Internationalization of the Curriculum at BCIT

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I would like to thank the Super PD Committee for granting me the leave to research internationalizing the curriculum at BCIT during the 2008-2009 year. I would also like to thank my colleagues and Mark Bullen at the Learning and Teaching Centre for supporting my leave.

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## Introduction

As a post secondary institution, it is important that BCIT is well-positioned to respond to the fast pace of global change, at both the local and national levels. Furthermore it is vital that we understand the impact of global economies and geopolitical issues on Canadians. Globalization is constantly changing the employment prospects of our workforce. As an educational institution, we facilitate British Columbia's economic viability and competitiveness. BCIT can do this by providing employers with graduates who are not only technically knowledgeable, but globally competent, as well.

During 2009, BCIT developed a new strategic vision for BCIT with extensive input from the BCIT community. As a result, internationalization has taken a higher profile through several references to learner diversity, world views, international opportunities for our learners, and enrolment of international students to increase "global awareness of BCIT and enriching the learning experience of the Institute's community" (BCIT 2009-2014, Strategic Plan: Advancing, p. 21).

*Industry and business continue to respond to a growing and more competitive international marketplace fuelled by exponential technological change. Employers expect BCIT to produce graduates who are job-ready, who can lead and work effectively in a global context. The development of new, innovative programs and the revision of existing programs are important factors in our ability to compete.*  
(BCIT 2009-2014, Strategic Plan: Advancing, p. 14)

Internationalization is not only about content. It is also about the cultural diversity we have in our classrooms, whether they are face-to-face or online environments. At BCIT, we have a community which reflects the diversity of our local neighbourhoods, our schools, our hospitals, our workplaces – almost every phase of our daily lives.



We are no longer insulated from cultural differences as in the past.



“Today, we encounter people of different cultures in every realm of our lives. When we meet each other, we discover differences in perspectives, behaviors, and communication styles. As we interact, we are engaged in an intercultural communication.” (Olson, 2001)

## Description of the Project

In September 2009, we conducted two surveys on internationalization of the curriculum in the BCIT community. One targeted the full time and part time studies instructors, and the other targeted full time BCIT students. Additionally, from January 2009 to May 2009, I conducted more than 50 instructor interviews, and 10 student interviews. This report focuses on this study, as well as an extensive literature review, and phone interviews investigating best practices of faculty from other post secondary institutions such as Virginia Technical University, San Francisco State University, University of California at Riverside, University of Victoria, Capilano University, Simon Fraser University, University of New Brunswick, Ryerson University, Thompson River University, Humber College, to name a few.

As a result of this study, we have been able to get a view of:

- Attitudes and beliefs of BCIT instructors and students
- BCIT student achievement of learning outcomes which reflect an internationalized curriculum
- Teaching strategies used by BCIT instructors – this was measured both as a standard practice and as a practice for internationalizing

- Challenges BCIT instructors and students face with regard to internationalizing the curriculum
- Their perceptions of institutional support for internationalizing the curriculum

The researchers of this study (Terry Fuller and Qin Liu) are currently comparing different factors with each other: demographics; part time and full time perceptions of institutional support for internationalization; differences in perceptions of instructors and students, etc.

Based on Nilsson's (2000) definition, an "internationalized curriculum" is defined in this study as a curriculum which provides international and intercultural knowledge, skills, and abilities, aimed at preparing students (both domestic and international) for performing in an international and multicultural context. This definition was used because it emphasizes the *international* as well as the *intercultural* components of an internationalized curriculum. Internationalization of the curriculum includes not only international students, but also domestic students who bring their own international experiences, unique identities, culture and/or language that enrich the classroom and campus, as well as providing valuable links to the community. Internationalization is not only about learning elsewhere, but it is also about learning to solve local problems or address local issues within an international context; or learning to address international or global issues within a local context.

The focus of this study was to determine:

1. The level of understanding of our faculty on internationalizing the curriculum
2. What strategies they use, if any, to incorporate an international or intercultural dimension into the learning experience
3. Identify challenges faculty face in incorporating an international or intercultural dimension into their teaching
4. What support faculty need to internationalize the curriculum
5. To what extent BCIT students have achieved learning outcomes with an international dimension
6. What teaching and learning strategies have been most useful for educational professionals to use to give their students a global perspective in their disciplines

A framework of teaching and learning strategies is being developed based on the findings of the study and will help faculty to develop an internationalized curriculum, even if it is in small steps. But if faculty are to be successful in internationalizing their curriculum, there *must* be clear institutional support and recognition.

## Methodology and Data Collection

This study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches of inquiry. Two surveys targeted teaching faculty and full-time students. The instructor survey included questions regarding teaching beliefs related to:

- Internationalization of the curriculum
- Current teaching practices and strategies
- Their beliefs about student achievement of learning outcomes related to international or intercultural understanding
- Use of teaching strategies that would facilitate student achievement of those outcomes
- Challenges they had encountered in terms of internationalization

The student survey included questions on their perceptions on:

- Their level of international or intercultural understanding as a result of taking the program
- Teaching strategies that they believed facilitated this international or intercultural understanding.

Both surveys were conducted online in the fall, 2008 at BCIT. A total of 313 instructors and 328 full-time students responded to the survey campaigns, with a response rate of 17.7% and 14.9% respectively.

I conducted more than 50 follow-up faculty interviews and 10 follow-up student interviews in the spring of 2009. The interview questions were designed to gain insight on the research and survey questions.

## Results of the Quantitative Survey

Data from this study show that varying efforts to internationalize the curriculum occur mainly through individual faculty initiative. Seventy-six per cent (76%) of the respondents indicated that they encouraged students with experiences in another culture to contribute their knowledge and skills to assignments, projects and class discussions.

We asked instructors to rate teaching strategies that were recommended from the literature (Knight, 2000), such as the use of:

- Projects or assignments that challenged a student's own cultural biases or assumptions
- Case studies or roles plays with an international or intercultural dimension
- International study tours for students
- Partnerships or initiatives with a foreign institution

Not all these strategies were found to be helpful for BCIT instructors. In fact, very few instructors are involved in international partnerships or initiatives, and there are few and limited opportunities for student mobility. However, most instructors surveyed and those interviewed did use project assignments (in teams) and case studies as part of their teaching practice. It is my belief that if there were stronger institutional support structures in place, better partnerships and linkages with international institutions would occur and as a result would encourage instructors to use all four strategies with respect to internationalizing their curriculum.

Generally, instructors responded positively to internationalizing the curriculum (54.9% to 63.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements on internationalizing the curriculum); however, actually incorporating an international or intercultural dimension into the content does not appear to be a standard practice. Some instructors felt that their courses were highly technical in nature and their students had to learn Canadian standards in the discipline, or were limited in what they could include in the curriculum by regulatory agencies. Consequently internationalizing the curriculum was not a priority for them. It appears that while instructors agree in principle with internationalizing the curriculum, workload and the lack of time and resources prevent them from practicing it.

Faculty evidently understand the importance of their role in internationalizing the curriculum – almost 60 per cent of those surveyed felt that they should play a primary role in internationalizing the curriculum. This is supported by the literature and may indicate that an increased profile or understanding of what internationalization of the curriculum is would make faculty more receptive to it.

Most of the challenges that faculty identified were related to support, workload, time and other resource-related issues; that is, there was not enough time or resources to add more content related to internationalization; and, as mentioned above, others indicated they didn't think it could be easily implemented in their discipline or program. Instructors are pressed for time and/or may not feel comfortable teaching content with which they are unfamiliar or lack expertise. A number of respondents provided positive comments about internationalization while questioning the relevance of an internationalized curriculum to students' primary educational needs.

In terms of learning outcomes which reflect content with an international dimension, results from both the instructor and student surveys suggest that outcomes emphasizing *intercultural* competence (Nilsson, 2000) (attitudes such as open-mindedness and curiosity toward other countries and cultures, biases and attitudes, tolerance, tact and sensitivity to others, etc.) were easier to achieve than the cognitive outcomes that stress *international* competence (such as practices and applications in other countries and cultures, self-assessment of one's own knowledge and skills on global issues and systems, impact of global events on local systems, and vice versa etc. )

Often referred to as the "centrepiece of internationalization" (Green, 2008), the curriculum is the most difficult element of internationalization (AUCC, 2000), but it is where one begins to make the transformative move towards internationalizing the campus, which must be "driven and supported by champions [faculty] on the ground, whose work can then be supported and built upon to ensure sustainable initiatives on campus." (AUCC, 2009 p. 5). In the past ten years, Canadian post secondary institutions have shown a greater interest in internationalization at the curriculum level (AUCC 2008). In order to keep with this trend, BCIT needs a solid support system in place so that the instructors don't feel overwhelmed at the prospect. The Learning and Teaching Centre is well positioned to provide that support through its faculty development initiatives.

The most important reason for internationalizing the curriculum is "to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and intercultural competent" (AUCC, 2007b, p. 1). Furthermore, an internationalized curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop an international disciplinary perspective, as well as to develop an understanding of their place in this complex world. It may also make BCIT graduates more employable in a multicultural workplace and/or more attractive to employers with international businesses or focuses. For the instructors, it provides new perspectives in their discipline as well as in their teaching and learning strategies which make the material relevant to domestic students as well as international students (AUCC, 2009). As one BCIT instructor put it:

It's important to anticipate cultural backgrounds in teaching for the simple reason that culture will affect a person's perception of what is being taught. Teaching uses metaphors, and metaphors have a cultural bias.

## Results of the Qualitative Survey

Instructors and students who participated in the quantitative survey were asked in the online survey if they would be willing to be interviewed. Out of the 117 who responded positively, the researcher was able to obtain interviews with 50 faculty members. Although there were 57 students who expressed an interest in participating in the interviews, I was able to interview only 10.

For the most part, faculty who were interviewed supported internationalizing the curriculum. Even those, whose discipline was more technical in nature, believed that teaching skills that made their students more intercultural and internationally competent (as defined by Nilsson) was a valuable approach because it would make their students more competitive in the job market. Most had a clear idea of what internationalization of the curriculum meant, and some have been practicing it in their teaching.

The use of teams is pervasive at BCIT. As one student pointed out, BCIT stands for “being cramped into teams”. Most instructors (with the exception of those who have large classes and some of the PTS courses), use teams as a teaching and learning practice. Teams designed to reflect the cultural diversity of the classroom can be a highly effective strategy for learning to work with multiple perspectives. Other teaching strategies that help BCIT students apply knowledge are: case studies, team presentations, reviewing current issues and relating them to the discipline in group or class discussions, field trips, and cooperative learning (think pair share, jigsaw, and panels). Some instructors bring the world into their classrooms by using Elluminate Live, Skype and wikis. These technologies can be used very successfully by having students and instructors work with students and professionals from other parts of the world.

Instructors identified the following knowledge, skills and abilities which they felt students would acquire as a result of internationalization:

- Cultural awareness
- Open mindedness
- Environmental awareness (in terms of assessing a situation)
- Critical thinking, such as analyzing economic impact of world events on BC, Canada, and vice versa
- Global awareness
- Understanding and encouraging multiple perspectives in the workplace
- Good communication skills in a multicultural workplace
- Working in diverse teams
- Negotiating in a Canadian and non-Canadian context
- Resolving conflicts effectively
- Self awareness (knowing one’s own perspectives and prejudices)

Put succinctly, global competencies are the ability to observe and listen, analyze and evaluate, interpret and relate. These reflect the views held by private sector executives “that Canadian graduates need to enter the job market with international and intercultural skills if Canada is to compete effectively in today’s globalized economy” (AUCC, 2007c). David Stewart-Patterson, executive vice-president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives states, “It makes good sense for universities to develop globally engaged citizens, quite simply because Canadian business operates internationally. Canadian universities should do whatever is necessary to be the engine of the country’s economic success. (AUCC, 2007c) He adds that Canada’s cultural diversity is one of its best competitive advantages.

While most instructors in the interviews felt that internationalization is essential in today’s world, there are important challenges they face. The challenge most frequently stated was that of workload (lack of time, no release time, too much content already, etc.), which was reflected in the quantitative survey as well. Other challenges were language proficiency (this is a particular problem in most part time studies courses, in which there is a large body of international students), plagiarism, use of technology, management support, buy in from instructors, and learning styles and attitudes. Also, some instructors have been involved in other faculty development initiatives over the years and felt that there was no

reward or appreciation, so they were reticent about putting a lot of time and energy into internationalizing their curriculum when there might be little or no reward or institutional support.

Almost without exception, instructors would like to work internationally, whether it be short term or long term. Instructors felt it would enrich their curriculum, their teaching, and the learning experience of their students. This is supported in a survey I conducted in 2005 on faculty and student mobility.

The students who were interviewed identified some of the same challenges: language requirements for the program and student workload. They understand the importance of internationalization: if an internationalized curriculum would make them more competitive in the job market and workplace, they were receptive.

## Discussion

The initial findings of the study provide the following implications. First, there have been tangible impacts of cultural diversity among students on internationalization on the BCIT campus. The results of both the qualitative and quantitative study indicate that faculty respond to the needs of the diverse student population through their teaching strategies. Even though not all the instructors surveyed consider cultural diversity as “a general resource and potential enrichment” (Otten, 2000, p. 19), the study does indicate that many instructors do make an effort to capitalize on the cultural diversity of their students.

Second, it may be a while before BCIT has an institute-wide implementation strategy for internationalizing the curriculum. Although there is no major initiative currently in place, this study shows that an international or intercultural dimension of teaching and learning at BCIT is mainly evident as an informal response to cultural diversity among students, or through an individual instructor’s own initiative. Lack of resources, time, support and perceived disciplinary boundaries have constituted greater challenges for internationalizing course content than efforts to address cultural diversity among students.

Third, faced these challenges the task of internationalizing the curriculum is indeed daunting. Recommended strategies for curriculum internationalization (Knight, 2000) will require strong collaborative efforts among faculty and a lasting commitment from leadership at the institute and program level. Most instructors who were interviewed considered internationalization as essential and a smart move from an institutional point of view, and were open to learning how to internationalize their curriculum (with minimal impact on an already heavy workload). The Learning and Teaching Centre can play a central role in providing professional development for teaching faculty to internationalize their courses, and recommending teaching strategies which will provide experiential intercultural learning for BCIT students. This type of professional development will support instructors to bring an international dimension in their content, if and when appropriate.

Fourth, there may be greater challenges to internationalization in an institution such as BCIT that is committed to regional or local development than one that serves a broader community. The study shows some instructors were concerned about the relevance of internationalization to their commitment to regional stakeholders. Though these are valid concerns, we should keep in mind that:

- Canada is one of the most export trade-dependent nations in the world and is susceptible to the impact of global economic or geopolitical events

- There are 2800 registered exporters in BC alone (from the British Columbia Manufacturers' and Exporters' Database which is regularly updated)
- At least one in three Canadian jobs is trade-related (Wilson, 1998 and Steve Turnbull in the International Trade and Transportation program at BCIT)
- We are part of Asia Pacific, an important trade consideration for BC

## Recommendations

Since the majority of BCIT students will not gain international competence through study abroad or any student mobility programs or initiatives in the immediate future, it is our responsibility as an educational institution to broaden our students' understanding of the interconnectedness between the local and the global by promoting an interdisciplinary approach to our curriculum and an international view at the disciplinary level. It is also important to include intercultural learning outcomes in our curriculum, which would promote open mindedness, tolerance, and working effectively with multiple perspectives – skills that are so important in the workplace, and in life!

We can do this through a variety of ways; for example develop an internationalization of the curriculum strategy that is supported at all levels of the institute, which may include:

- Engaging the business community. They are a source of support, since they will need a workforce who can meet global demands and a diverse workplace.
- Supporting mobility programs for both students and faculty
- Supporting faculty development initiatives to train our faculty to internationalize their curriculum

At least once per term, invite authors or experts in different disciplines to talk to the BCIT community about globally oriented topics (using the model of BCIT's popular Technologically Hip series). For example the impact of:

- Our local environmental policies on the global environment (oil, water, natural resources, etc.)
- Climate change and BC water
- Mining on the global environment
- Fish farms on the environment (i.e. fish farms in BC, Sweden, Norway, Chile, etc)
- Global economy/events on BC businesses
- Global internet crime on BC businesses
- Mountain pine beetle on our logging industry (with an international tone)
- Climate change on international trade and international business
- Immigration policy on human resources and hiring practices of BC businesses
- Global political and economic environments on the workforce in BC and Canada
- Global climate changes on water demands and our water policies (River Institute)

Instructors can then have discussions or problem solving assignments based on the issues raised in these events.

There are several teaching strategies that are recommended in the literature for internationalizing the curriculum. Many of these strategies are already used at BCIT on a regular basis, particularly teamwork. However, the strategies can be adapted specifically for internationalizing the curriculum and for creating

an international dimension to the dynamics of learning. These strategies aim to expose the students to multiple perspectives and promote the awareness of their own attitudes, values, and behaviours. Learning global competencies teaches students that what one does at home has relevance elsewhere (Olson and Kroeger, 2001).

Teaching strategies that will form the framework for internationalizing the curriculum could be:

- Promoting multicultural and cross cultural awareness through learning experiences such as team work, interviewing other students, sharing personal histories or stories, etc. (these strategies would vary according to the learning outcomes, content, and discipline)
- Using technology to promote awareness of the impact of the global economy, environmental policies and laws, political events on local issues
- Introducing technologies (e.g. Skype or Elluminate Live) to link internationally knowledgeable or professionals into the learning experience.
- Using linked assignments (taking an existing assignment and linking it to a new outcome with an international or intercultural dimension)
- Using case studies which illustrate the impact that issues in other countries will have on local issues or businesses
- Making use of case studies, product based or problem based learning that require students to use Skype or other communication technologies to communicate with other international professionals
- Tying current events known through journals, newspapers and professional publications to local issues
- Going on field trips to local businesses to see how they are being impacted by geopolitical or global events; or have those industry reps come as guest speakers

At the program or institutional level, strategies could be:

- Cross disciplinary team teaching. This encourages students to learn to work with multiple perspectives from a disciplinary point of view, as well as from a cross cultural point of view. It also would encourage collaboration among various programs in the development of interdisciplinary courses and research with a global or international focus.
- Survey local businesses and industries, as well as and professional or credentialing associations. Since the disciplines are the “harbingers of change” in the curriculum (Green, 2000), it behooves us to see what global skills and competencies they are requiring and/or advocating.
- Hire people with either international credentials (i.e. work abroad), or those who have international or global perspectives.
- Link internationalization of the curriculum with curriculum reviews, program and institutional goals.
- Study the language proficiency issue and recommend strategies to address the challenges from language entrance requirements. Ask ourselves if it is fair for instructors or for other students to accept students who cannot cope with normal course requirements and cannot meet industry standards.
- Offer international credential. This credential would be in addition to the credential in the discipline and would reflect the number of courses students have taken with an international dimension – either with international content or teaching strategies that recognize the intercultural dimension of the student population. These credentials could be used to market

our institute as well as graduate skills. It would also encourage instructors to add an international dimension if it made their programs more attractive to students.

## Conclusion

This study sought to gauge instructor and student beliefs and attitudes with respect to internationalization of the curriculum, instructors' current practices, perceptions on student achievement of learning outcomes with an international dimension, and challenges faced by both students and instructors.

Internationalization has many dimensions, and internationalizing the curriculum is considered the most crucial element to a successful internationalization initiative, and faculty have "a proprietary interest in and responsibility for the curriculum and as such play a critical role in the success (or failure) of any curricular reform." (Bond, 2003). It is therefore important to get their buy in on any internationalization effort, which means that those challenges that were identified in this study must be addressed.

Furthermore, faculty must see a clear link between internationalization of the curriculum and their discipline. They also must clearly understand that an important benefit of providing intercultural experiences will give their students valuable skills for the workplace. While it is believed the internationalization of the curriculum will indeed develop BCIT graduates to meet the demands of the global marketplace, BCIT must engage faculty in developing a successful internationalization strategy.

This study will provide valuable information for establishing and supporting a strategy for internationalizing of the curriculum at BCIT.



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