Executive Summary

INTERNATIONALIZING THE CURRICULUM

Improving Learning Through International Education:

Preparing Students for Success in a Global Society

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In *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Expanded and Updated, 2006), Thomas Friedman cogently describes the promise and peril of an economic and geopolitical future shaped by the forces of globalization wrought by technologically driven global connectivity, international commerce and cross-cultural competition. Related to this has been a sharp increase in the degree and intensity of contact and, at times, misunderstanding and conflict between peoples of diverse cultures. Perhaps more than at any other time in history, the challenge to educate community college students has emerged not only in the academic disciplines supporting their chosen professions, but also in the overarching cross-cultural and international aspects and ramifications of their future employment and personal lives.

Recent events have shown unequivocally the pressing need for American students to comprehend adequately the peoples of other cultures. Isolation is no longer an option. In response to this need to produce a citizenry that is culturally literate and globally competent, the field of international education, including education at the community college level, has taken on a new urgency and importance.

In recognition of these developments, and in response to the objectives contained in the strategic plan of the Tennessee Board of Regents, Motlow State Community College (MSCC) chose the topic of international education and, specifically, internationalizing the curriculum to prepare students to compete successfully in the global society Friedman described, as the topic for its *Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).*

A review of the literature revealed the existence of policy and precedent regarding the importance of international education in American higher education. While four year institutions and some community colleges have developed and implemented a variety of international education initiatives, most community colleges appear to have done relatively less in this regard, though with some notable exceptions. Within the variety of international educational opportunities available to students, study abroad is clearly the most recognizable international education initiative. Indeed, for many the notion of international education is synonymous with study abroad. Even so, however, studies show that the vast majority of college students never study abroad. This is particularly true of the typical community college student due to their employment and family responsibilities, coupled with financial limitations. Thus, relying either solely or principally on study abroad as the chief vehicle of international education, however appealing it may be, will fail ultimately to impact appreciably the lives and learning of the large majority of students.

As a result, the Motlow College QEP focuses on the internationalization of the existing curriculum since the curriculum is the point where the great majority of students will learn about other cultures. A survey of current MSCC course syllabi revealed that 76 percent of courses contain little to no indication of international content, 19 percent moderate international content, and only 6 percent of course syllabi surveyed indicate a significant degree of international content . A separate survey of faculty and staff internationalization experience and interest revealed little overall internationalization experience and foreign language proficiency. However, significant general interest and receptivity to the integration of more international curricular content and co-curricular learning experiences was found.

The question was how to best “internationalize” the curriculum. A review of the best practices literature with regard to internationalization of the curriculum in community colleges revealed ample precedent and extant model programs internationalizing curricula by the infusion of international modules, especially in consortia of community colleges dedicated to enhancing international education.

The best practices review also revealed that infusing international content into the existing curriculum through international modules presented a viable, cost effective method for introducing international content into current courses, thereby obviating obstacles and limitations inherent in the creation, approval, and implementation of new courses of purely international focus. Moreover, simply adding an “international course” would still miss the majority of students as such a course would be an elective and, thus, probably bypassed by most students.

In the MSCC QEP, courses to be internationalized via the infusion of an international module will be identified on a voluntary basis by faculty with interest in this initiative. Faculty may choose to adopt, adapt, or create an entirely new international module. The QEP establishes supportive faculty development in international expertise, respect for academic freedom, and preservation of faculty stewardship of the curriculum. One to three internationalized courses will be introduced each academic year with the intent that, over the five-year period of the QEP, at least 15 courses will be infused with substantial international content. The QEP specifies the standard of quality for each international module and the requisite hierarchy of authority for the approval of a module before infusion in a course. Funding for the QEP will come from a new $5 international fee (authorized by the Tennessee Board of Regents) per student per semester. Collection of this fee is projected to generate surplus revenues over and above the actual costs for the implementation of the QEP.

A major emphasis is the assessment of the effectiveness of the pedagogical objectives of the QEP. Each internationalized course will have specific student learning outcomes (SLO) articulated and linked with appropriate quantitative and qualitative assessment measures that will determine whether the intended SLOs have been achieved. Assessment results will be used to “close the loop” whereby the results of the assessment of internationalized courses will be formative in that they will be used to adjust the QEP as warranted.

General administrative oversight for the QEP is vested in a new position—the Coordinator of International Education (CIE) who, working with the deans and faculty, reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and President of the college. A current faculty member with significant experience and interest in international education will assume the duties of the CIE, with this role being compensated with redistributed time (i.e., reduction in teaching load). In support of the CIE and mission of the QEP, a new standing committee—the International Education Committee (IEC)—is established. In collaboration with the CIE, the IEC will assist in the administrative oversight of the QEP and coordination and oversight all related internationalization initiatives at the college.

In summation, the MSCC QEP describes a practical, sustainable approach and timeline for selecting courses in which international modules are to be infused, and the infrastructure needed to carry out the mission of the QEP. Through Motlow College’s QEP, student learning will be enhanced through the planned infusion of specified international content across the disciplines and courses within the existing curriculum, thus ensuring that the majority of students, irrespective of major, will be exposed to learning of an international nature. The acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes will enhance the student’s success in the global society of the future.