

UF Globalizing the Curriculum

Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

00:06 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Hello, my name is Alexandra Bitton-Bailey and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. Our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations, and stories about teaching. Our guest today is Paloma Rodriguez, the director of the Office of Global Learning at the University of Florida International Center. Paloma's life and educational experience unfolded holistically as she traveled throughout the world. At the time, Paloma was not intentionally seeking an international educational experience but these unique and varied learning adventures that led her entirely by accident to discover that international education was a potential career path and one that would allow her to share her passion for the world and cultures with students.

00:59 Paloma Rodriguez

I did not know that international education was a profession. I - for me was an experience and then when i was teaching at Santa Fe college and i was teaching international courses, I came across this position that was coordinator of an office of international education and I realized that, well, that was maybe something I could do. So, I became responsible for study abroad programs and I met the field of international education as a discipline of learning and of professional activity back then.

01:32 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Before she came to the United States and became involved in international education, Paloma did not realize the challenges and barriers that many students face when considering study abroad. Because frankly, in Europe, travel is far more common. Working with students here made her realize just how important it is that students have the opportunity to receive an internationalized education and how transformative that prospect can be for all students.

02:01 Paloma Rodriguez

Growing up in Europe, having foreign languages and traveling abroad is much more second nature than it is in the United States so I didn't realize that this was something that had to be stressed with the impotence that we put here in the United States because people are not so likely to travel abroad or to speak a foreign language. Americans are less bilingual than Europeans that sort of thing. So, I embraced that quest that had not really been part of my experience like all of my friends spoke different languages and travel abroad. But I started in

this field at the community college where people face a lot of barriers and where i understood international education as a real opportunity for those students. So that's where I developed this sense of commitment to provide international education as a true enhancement to an education that is going to be opening doors and those doors are sometimes professional like we have so much information about what employers want and need and global awareness and an ability to interact with different others is at the top of their list. So, that is very clear but it's also that knowledge is built today internationally and our ability to be able to communicate internationally is part of what is going to make us empowered and able to solve complex problems that you know stretch beyond borders so i don't think that international education today is an add on or is an elitist pursuit or it is self-gratifying i think it is a necessity.

03:53 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

The international scholars program is a means by which students can gather curate and showcase the experiences and work they've accomplished while in courses and internships with a global focus.

04:06 Paloma Rodriguez

So, our undergrads may have a diversity of international experiences some of them study abroad and that's great. Others learn a foreign language, others may have a conversation partner or they're a navigator they are a buddy to an international student and some of them have several of these experiences so when the quality enhancement plan was being written, there was an idea of helping students formalize all those experiences, reflect on the learning that occurred through their involvement in them, perhaps create an artifact that demonstrates to themselves and to others where they have learned. So, the international scholars program is a global distinction program that seeks to bring all that together. Students go through a series of experiences like taking international courses, attending lectures on international issues, learning foreign languages, and then putting together a digital artifact that is an e-portfolio which looks like a website where they discuss these experiences in this multimedia format maybe they put videos of themselves speaking a foreign language and reflect on all the experiences and then at the end of this process, they gain a medallion that they can wear at graduation.

05:23 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

This program helps students to reflect on their overall learning and use those reflections for self-discovery. Really it intentionally helps students discover greater perspectives and understandings of who they are and their place in the world.

05:37 Paloma Rodriguez

The program was designed based on a lot of research on student learning gaps, on what our best practices were in terms of global learning, and what we discovered is that students go

through experiences but do not have a lot of opportunities to meaningfully reflect on their experiences and they graduate and we never asked them to look back to you know four years ago five years ago when you started at UF who were you and who are you now? So the e-portfolios are a kind of pedagogy that allow students to develop metacognitive skills and think about their own learning over time. It allows us to see that growth as well. It allows students to integrate the learning that happens in different contexts so in the classroom or outside or at home and because most of the students at UF are traditional students, they are at a point in their lives where they are developing their identity. So, the e-portfolio project with these global issues contemplating it allows us to think like who am I? How do I fit in the world? and reflect also on their values which is something crucial for global learning because it's not about knowing about the world it's knowing about your responsibility towards the world. So we scaffold these reflective opportunities through prompts to allow the students to think about you know not only what have you learned so now what are you going to do with what you have learned and what is your social responsibility?

07:21 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Students are able to share their e-portfolios at the University of Florida during the showcase week. These students are also able to use the great success their e-portfolio provides to find employment and additional internships. This mentoring program gets students to engage more deeply and take greater ownership of their own learning while opening new doors filled with possibilities.

07:45 Paloma Rodriguez

And every semester we have a graduation ceremony where the students present their e-portfolios, we have an e portfolio showcase. So you can see live, there, their enthusiasm in sharing their experiences and articulating them verbally after having articulated them digitally through the e-portfolios many of them have used the link to the e-portfolio to seek internship opportunities or employment and the feedback is always very positive so we have a little bit of national data about you know the value of e-portfolios for employability which is very very high but anecdotally we hear from students how they have used that and how employers have asked them about their e-portfolio in job interviews. I think the most important thing is that the program engages the students in an activity that they have never engaged before which is to look at themselves holistically and it is actually a very difficult task for them and we actually mentor them like every two weeks or so they come in person to our office and we give them feedback on the reflection and on the e-portfolio. They are also very enchanted with digital technologies so they really really love the fact that they can express themselves in that medium. So they they do videos and they upload documents and everything is interactive and it is a positive way to ask them to engage to learn something because that is the language they enjoy.

09:19 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Paloma is exceedingly passionate about globalizing the curriculum, which would allow all students - those who are able to study abroad and those who are not - to have a global

experience. Technology now allows for all classes to include elements of globalization with the help of technology and some creative teaching.

09:40 Paloma Rodriguez

My passion for curriculum internationalization has a lot to do with equity and access. Because in order to go abroad like most of the international education efforts are towards mobility to help you go somewhere so that you are immersed in a culture and you learn. But very few students are either able or convinced that that is good idea. So if we globalize the curriculum like this, take classes that you take on campus or online, then every one of our students can be exposed to these global perspectives and can have these experiences. And maybe 20 years ago or 30 years ago, this was not possible but now we have technologies that connect us to the rest of the world. So my dream would be that every UF student has a direct opportunity to interact with somebody from another country in a meaningful way, that is intentional, that it's an assignment that is the sign for them to really contrast the realities to learn from each other. And to do it in a way that where there is not a power differential, so that the students meet, you know, at the same intellectual level without any patronizing or paternalism or any negative dynamic, so that they can truly learn from each other and learn how to walk in each other's shoes.

11:01 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

One effective way of providing students with a globalized classroom and help them develop cultural competencies is through authentic experiences, such as virtual exchange. The International Center, faculty and students, are really excited about the possibilities of virtual exchange. And they have created loads of support materials to help faculty implement this strategy.

11:25 Paloma Rodriguez

We are starting to implement virtual exchange courses, that is courses where there is maybe a week or two or three, where there is a module that includes interaction with students abroad. So we have developed some training programs for faculty in collaboration with the Center for Instructional Technologies and Training and also with the Center for Latin American Studies, to train our faculty and their international faculty partners in an online five week long training, where they develop these modules and come up with a way or an assignment for their students to interact.

12:03 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Internationalizing a class is not as complicated as it seems. Now, a lot of us think about internationalization in terms of content only. But you can also think about internationalization in terms of soft skills that students will also need in their fields.

12:20 Paloma Rodriguez

People tend to think about internationalizing the class by including international content, and that is not possible for everybody. So imagine you're teaching an engineering class, and or finance and people tell me what but I have to teach the content. And your content is not international as when you are teaching history or something along those lines. So what I like to express is that you can internationalize your course, but by thinking about what are the international components or readiness that my students need, my students in my major, students in my class will need in the future. Maybe what you need is for them to be able to interact with people from other countries, because you are maybe in let's say, a health related field, or business as well. So maybe you want to emphasize the interaction. So that is a learning outcome associated with your class that does not involve distracting, right, students from content that is perhaps very tight. So I think everybody can do this. Absolutely think so. Especially if you think of the jobs students are going to have or they are going to be interacting in diverse teams. And how are they gonna do that right if they don't practice now when it is low stakes, so I think it is our responsibility to include some of that in the class.

13:44 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Adding elements of global learning to your course is pretty simple, and is readily available through a number of faculty support programs that the International Center has put together, including some with grants that are available for the globalization of a course.

14:00 Paloma Rodriguez

If they are interested, and they already know that their class is international, they can gain an International Scholars Program designation just by applying for it. And the only thing they need to do is to formalize the incorporation of our learning outcomes into their course and to report on that every three years, report on attainment. So that is one thing of being part of the team. The other one is perhaps you need a little bit of help. And your course maybe doesn't really fit this international designation. So we have a cohort-based semester long program, it's called the Global Learning Institute. And we are going to have other faculty who have successfully internationalize their courses sharing their experience and their tips. So, at the end of these eight workshops, the participants will have a proposal for an internationalized course. The only thing we offer is we have a series of grants for professional development. So for instance, somebody has been leading the students abroad for a long time but is now thinking, "Well how do i learn a little bit more how to do this more effectively?" or "What is the research on the impact of study abroad?" There are a lot of professional conferences where we have this conversation so i would invite anyone who wants to learn more to apply for one of our travel grants we can pay for faculty and also staff to go to a conference and learn more.

15:29 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

The faculty who joined the global teaching faculty communities that Paloma has started and supports, share an excitement and passion for the work that they do. It's also really valuable to be part of a community that offers support and encouragement as well as resources and funding opportunities.

15:47 Paloma Rodriguez

I think that sometimes teaching can be a little bit of an individual endeavor or a collective but only between you and your students. But being part of a cohort of people in different disciplines that care about this is very energizing so sometimes we do like luncheons where everybody gets together and I think that is positive, it's reaffirming. Another thing the faculty have been very appreciative of is of our grants to travel to conferences because that has discovered as it did for me several years ago, our world of professional dedication to this field because sometimes internationalization is something we do on in our own terms out of our own volition by finding a structure and a field of scholarship is very helpful.

16:38 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Paloma shares a sense of awe with her students when they experience something together for the first time. It's so impactful to share these moments alongside her students.

16:48 Paloma Rodriguez

I think a marking memory is when I have been a learner with my students rather than a teacher. So i would say that every time i have been in an experiential situation where either I'm taking the students to the Ringling Museum in Sarasota or I'm taking the students abroad, and the enormity of the place or the learning or the experience is an equalizer and I am like them - learning together. And I'm in Naples and I'm like, this looks like a church let me open the door and see what we find inside and we are together the qualifying this space. I think there's a bonding experience with the students and i have enjoyed that i think that most especially when I've seen students that have never ever been to a museum or they had never been abroad before and you really see the impact that that has on them.

17:50 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Paloma's biggest recommendation is to start small. Make the changes, additions, transformations that you feel capable of at the time. There is no one single recipe that will work for every instructor in every course.

18:05 Paloma Rodriguez

We are all really really busy and sometimes that stops us from trying. So what I would say is: there is a range of engagement. And if you want to try internationalize your courses a little bit, you can start there. And there is no prescription or checklist for the way in which we help you internationalize your course, so you are always in control of how much you want to try and this is a process of learning also for us so we can learn together. And the expectation that things need to be in a certain way, a number of hours, number of topics should not stop you because that's not how we approach the support that we offer. I guess the other thing i would say is think about what global experiences have meant for you and i think that's where you will find a rationale for internationalizing your course and bringing in those experiences to the classroom and let us you know figure this out together.

19:15 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Thanks for listening to this episode of the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. For more helpful resources developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida, visit our website teach.ufl.edu. We're happy you joined us and we hope to see you next time for more tips, strategies, and ideas on teaching and learning at the University of Florida.