

Chapter 39

Fostering Global Citizenship in Higher Education: Development of an International Course in Global Health

Lee Stoner

Massey University, New Zealand

Lane Perry

Western Carolina University, USA

Daniel Wadsworth

Massey University, New Zealand

Mikell Gleason

University of Georgia, USA

Michael A. Tarrant

University of Georgia, USA

Rachel Page

Massey University, New Zealand

Krystina R. Stoner

University of Georgia, USA

ABSTRACT

Despite growing public awareness, health systems are struggling under the escalating burden of non-communicable diseases. Arguably, one must place themselves within the broader/global context to begin to truly understand the health implications of personal choices. Fostering a 'global citizen' perspective among graduates has become an integral part of the Higher Education (HE) discourse; this discourse can and should be extended to include global health. A global citizen is someone who is aware of global issues, socially responsible, and civically engaged. From this perspective, personal health is not solely an individual, self-serving act. Rather, the consequences of lifestyle choices and behaviours have far-reaching implications. This chapter details: (a) the development of an international global health course designed to foster global citizenship; (b) the research-led pedagogy; (c) the methods of student evaluation; and (d) the importance of such a course within the broader context of HE.

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INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship development has become an integral part of the HE discourse; this discourse can and should be extended to include global health. Global health, alongside climate change, is one of the greatest contemporary challenges facing humanity. Considering this, universities have an opportunity to address contemporary societal issues that presumably their graduates will be grappling with after graduation. While there are many ways of engaging students with extant issues, study abroad and other internationally focused pedagogies can serve as a powerful approach. However, it has been argued, with specific reference to global health, that there is a ‘...need for a radical reform to curricula to foster engaged global citizenship; yet little is written depicting how individual courses and their instructors may support such reform’ (Hanson, 2010). This chapter will argue that HE and the process of study abroad can play a key role in the fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs), a major global health issue. Specifically, a critical understanding of global health can aid in fostering global citizenship, which in turn may empower students to become civically engaged and potentially drive social change.

BACKGROUND TO NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

From Personal to Global

Health systems are struggling under the escalating burden of NCDs. This is currently recognised as a global issue; worldwide there were 57 million deaths in 2008, 63% of which can be attributed to NCDs, with over 80% of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries (Hunter & Reddy, 2013; WHO, 2015). Clearly, lives can be saved and the global economy would be much stronger if people did more to avoid poor lifestyle choices such as physical inactivity and unhealthy eating habits (WHO, 2013). Yet despite growing public awareness about NCDs and the consequences of such lifestyle choices, NCDs continue to rise. Based on this observation, perhaps ‘personal’-responsibility is not the answer, and conceivably the answer is ‘global’-responsibility, manifested as an awareness of and commitment to global citizenship.

Obesity, a prominent NCD (Stoner & Cornwall, 2014), makes an excellent *exemplar* for the ‘globalization’ of health. Globally, the prevalence of obesity (defined as a BMI ≥ 30) doubled between 1980-2008, from 6.4% to 12.0% (Stevens et al., 2012). Notably, as with the general trend for NCDs, obesity is now increasing at a faster rate in low-and middle-income countries than high-income countries (Kelly, Yang, Chen, Reynolds, & He, 2008; Popkin, Adair, & Ng, 2012), thereby particularly afflicting nations with limited public health resources and ensuring this phenomenon is a true global health concern. Since changes to our genetic makeup cannot fully explain this relatively recent obesity pandemic, lifestyle factors have been cited, including declining physical activity levels and less healthy food choices. These lifestyle choices are *modifiable*, implying that we have the power to change this crisis through personal responsibility. Yet despite growing public awareness, the trend has not been encumbered (i.e., perhaps ‘individual’ responsibility is not the answer). In fact, the global prevalence of obesity is accelerating and obesity is occurring at an increasingly younger age (Olshansky et al., 2005), leading to personal, community, national and global consequences.

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