

## 6

*Intercultural competence and related global learning outcomes are increasingly becoming a priority for postsecondary institutions to assess. This chapter discusses the complexities of assessing this outcome.*

## Assessing Intercultural Competence

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In his book *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Derek Bok (2006) laments the poor job postsecondary institutions are doing in preparing students for the twenty-first century. Other scholars have likewise noted the central responsibility of today's institutions of higher education being to train students to function more effectively in our integrated world system (Cole, Barber, and Graubard, 1994). This brings intercultural competence and diversity to the fore of what needs to be addressed within student learning. One study concluded that "the intensity of globalisation [sic] in recent years has brought intercultural competence acquisition studies back to the center [sic] stage" (Kuada, 2004, p. 10). Thus intercultural competence development is playing, and will continue to play, an ever-increasing role in the future, given the growing diversity of American society.

Given the growing importance of intercultural competence within postsecondary education, it becomes imperative to more closely examine what this concept is and how best to assess it in our students. This chapter explores definitions of intercultural competence, highlights some practices and lessons learned in the development of intercultural competence, and offers practical guidance in assessing intercultural competence.

### Defining Intercultural Competence

There is no consensus on the terminology around intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). The terms used to refer to this concept vary by discipline (for example, those in social work use the term cultural competence, while those in engineering prefer to use global competence) and approach (the diversity field uses such terms as multicultural competence

and intercultural maturity). Fantini (2009) found a variety of terms being used, both within the literature and in regard to assessment tools. Among them are multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, international communication, transcultural communication, global competence, cross-cultural awareness, and global citizenship. For the purposes of this chapter, the term used will be *intercultural competence*, given that it applies to any who interact with those from different backgrounds, regardless of location.

One of the first steps in assessment is knowing exactly what is to be assessed—in this case, in defining the concept of intercultural competence. Too often, this term is used (as are other similar terms) without a concrete definition, especially one that is grounded in the literature. As discussed by Fantini (2009), it is essential to arrive at a definition of intercultural competence before proceeding with any further assessment endeavors. In defining intercultural competence, it is important to recognize that scholars have invested effort for more than five decades in developing this concept within the United States, and individuals should consider this body of research when proposing a working definition of intercultural competence. However, two studies (Deardorff, 2006; Hunter, White, and Godbey, 2006) showed that in the case of postsecondary institutions such definitions and scholarly work were often not used; instead, definitions relied primarily on faculty discussion, without any consultation of the literature.

There are countless definitions and frameworks published on intercultural competence. The first study to document consensus among leading intercultural experts, primarily from the United States, on aspects of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) was determined through a research methodology called the Delphi technique, an iterative process used to achieve consensus among a panel of experts. The aspects on which these experts reached consensus were categorized and placed into a model (Figure 6.1) that lends itself to assessment and to further development of detailed measurable learning outcomes. Specifically, this model was derived from the need to assess this nebulous concept; hence its focus on internal and external outcomes of intercultural competence based on development of specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills inherent in intercultural competence.

Given that the items within these dimensions are still broad, each aspect can be developed into more specific measurable outcomes and corresponding indicators depending on the context. The overall external outcome of intercultural competence is defined as *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of indicators of appropriate behavior in specific contexts.

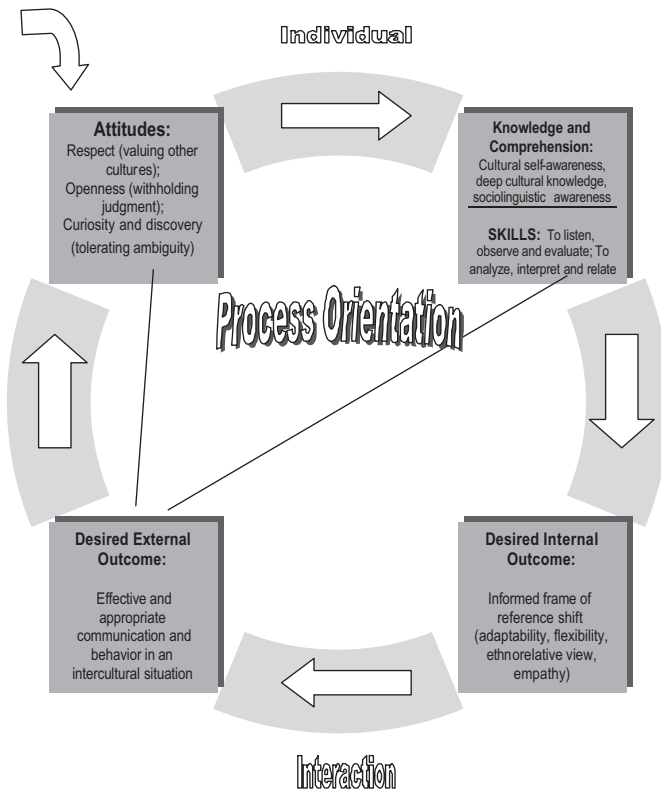
There are several key points to consider in this grounded-theory-based model that have implications for assessment of intercultural

**Figure 6.1. Intercultural Competence Model**

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE MODEL**

*From "The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States" in Journal of Studies in International Education, Fall 2006, 10, pp. 241–266 and in The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence, 2009 (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage).*

**Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2009):**



*Notes:*

- Begin with attitudes; move from individual level (attitudes) to interaction level (outcomes)
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills

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competence. First, intercultural competence development is an ongoing process, and thus it becomes important for individuals to be given opportunities to reflect on and assess the development of their own intercultural competence over time. In addition, this suggests assessment should be integrated throughout targeted interventions.

Second, critical-thinking skills play a crucial role (see the Skills module in Figure 6.1) in an individual's ability to acquire and evaluate knowledge. This means that critical-thinking assessment could also be an appropriate part of intercultural competence assessment.

Third, attitudes—particularly respect (which is manifested variously in cultures), openness, and curiosity—serve as the basis of this model and have an impact on all other aspects of intercultural competence. Addressing attitudinal assessment, then, becomes an important consideration.

Fourth, intercultural experts agreed on only one aspect of this study: the ability to see from others' perspectives. As a result, assessing global perspectives and the ability to understand other worldviews becomes an important consideration as well. This deep cultural knowledge entails a more holistic, contextual understanding of a culture, including the historical, political, and social contexts. Thus any assessment of culture-specific knowledge needs to go beyond the conventional surface-level knowledge of foods, greetings, customs, and so on. Further, knowledge alone is not sufficient for intercultural competence development; as Bok (2006) indicated, developing skills for thinking interculturally becomes more important than actual knowledge acquired.

## Models of Intercultural Competence

There are other models that have been used to frame aspects of intercultural competence, among them Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993), King and Baxter Magolda's intercultural maturity model (2005), and Cross's cross-cultural continuum (1988), all of which are developmental in nature, meaning they outline stages of growth. There are other models and frameworks purporting to define intercultural competence (see Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009, for a more thorough discussion), although many are not based on actual research. Regardless, in assessing intercultural competence, it becomes very important to define this concept within the context in which it will be used; to that end, frameworks such as the ones highlighted here can become a key tool in laying the groundwork for assessing intercultural competence. These intercultural competence models can help educators specifically identify characteristics of intercultural competence that can be prioritized and translated into clear learning objectives that are actually measured or evaluated through assessment plans.

**Practices That Lead to Development of Intercultural Competence.** How can intercultural competence be developed in students?

There are two means by which this can be done in postsecondary education: through the curriculum, and through co-curricular activities. This is often termed “internationalizing” the campus, which means bringing an intercultural and global dimension to students’ educational experiences.

Data show that fewer than 10 percent of undergraduates take a course in international relations, and fewer than 20 percent of four-year colleges even require more than two years of foreign language study (Bok, 2006). It is thus incumbent on postsecondary institutions to ensure that intercultural competence is integrated throughout undergraduates’ course work.

What does it mean to infuse intercultural competence and global learning into courses? First, it is important to understand what it is *not*, which may often be relegated to inclusion of an international reading in a course or addressing this topic in one lecture, or even taking just one course in international studies or a related topic. Such cursory treatment is far too limited in guiding students through the developmental process of intercultural competence acquisition. To that end, intercultural competence needs to be addressed throughout many undergraduate courses, in particular STEM courses (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and faculty themselves need to understand more fully this concept as they integrate it into the curriculum. This infusion of intercultural competence and global learning into courses entails finding multiple ways throughout a course to bring in diverse perspectives on issues, helping students begin to see from multiple cultural perspectives, using students’ diverse backgrounds within a course, and requiring students to have either a local cultural immersion or an education abroad experience (possibly through research, service learning, or internship, in addition to study) related to the major.

Given that intercultural competence manifests differently depending on the discipline, it becomes important for academic departments to engage in reflection and collaboration around a number of questions: What intercultural skills and knowledge are needed in this major? How does globalization affect this major, and what global learning should be required of graduates of this major? How can departmental assessments of students’ intercultural competence go beyond one aspect, such as knowledge, to ensure that students have actually attained a degree of intercultural competence, and what will be the evidence of this? How can we prepare our students to comprehend the multitude of countries and cultures that may have an impact on their lives and careers? More broadly, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes do our students need if they are to be successful in the twenty-first century? Bok (2006) outlines how colleges can better equip students for a more global, interdependent world, notably the requirement of a well-constructed foundational course that provides a framework for understanding a variety of perspectives on global issues, including foreign and comparative material into courses, and requiring foreign language.

Beyond integration of intercultural competence outcomes within courses, it is important to understand that intercultural learning is transformational learning, which requires experiences (often beyond the classroom) that lead to this transformation. Consequently, development of intercultural competence does not unfortunately “just happen” through learning about another culture or because persons from differing backgrounds are in the vicinity of one another, or even interacting with each other (Allport, 1954). To this end, service learning and education abroad become two mechanisms by which students’ intercultural competence can be further developed, leading to students’ transformation (see Deardorff and Edwards, forthcoming).

Intercultural interaction is central to both service learning and education abroad experiences. The contact hypothesis theory (Allport, 1954) constitutes a helpful foundation on which to implement intercultural experiences successfully. Erickson and O’Connor (2000) claim that “contact theory . . . was introduced and developed by social psychologists to examine and evaluate the various conditions under which face-to-face contact would promote greater personal and social understanding between members of different ethnic and racial groups” (p. 63). Among those conditions for optimal learning interactions are common goals, intergroup cooperation, equal status of interactants, and mutual support for rules, laws, customs, and authorities.

**Service Learning.** Assessment of intercultural competency within service learning is often conducted in international service-learning settings (see Camacho, 2004; Kiely, 2004; Merrill and Pusch, 2007; Parker and Dautoff, 2007; Urraca, Ledoux, and Harris, 2009). Although it is identified and assessed as intercultural competence in some domestic service learning settings (see Fitch, 2004, 2005; Slimbach, 1996), more often research on domestic service learning has referred to such assessment in terms of cultural responsiveness (Brown and Howard, 2005), multicultural learning (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Paoletti, Segal, and Totino, 2007), or diversity (Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill, 2007). Even though cultural responsiveness, multicultural learning, and diversity share similarities with intercultural competence, domestic and international service learning would benefit from using the structure(s) within intercultural competence theories to more intentionally frame articulation of learning objectives, project planning, community engagement, and critical reflection in order to more clearly express specific characteristics for assessment and move away from discussing the learning that is occurring in broad terms.

By its very nature, service learning “involve[s] students in relationships across human differences, e.g. gender, race, age, economic status, national origin, faith, sexual [and gender orientations], and/or educational attainment” (Slimbach, 1996, p. 102). These intercultural exchanges mean that some learning about identities different from students’ own will

occur; the question becomes, Will the learning perpetuate stereotypes or will it open students to be more appropriate and effective in their views about and engagement with other people, especially those who differ from them? Assessment through critical reflection can help ascertain the degree to which students learn and understand their own and others' identities, which is an important element in intercultural competence development.

**Education Abroad.** Assessment with education abroad usually involves pretesting and posttesting, along with a program satisfaction survey. Recently, though, an increasing number of study abroad programs are more intentionally addressing intercultural learning and incorporating assessment throughout the program (Vande Berg and Paige, 2009). Study abroad assessments often include a self-perspective inventory, along with direct evidence of student learning such as critical reflection papers, others' observations of students' interactions, and capstone projects.

A fundamental aspect of study abroad programs (as well as service learning opportunities) is adequate preparation of students in intercultural learning so that they are better able to articulate the learning that occurs, beyond declaring that it "changed my life." This adequate preparation means helping students with an understanding of intercultural competence frameworks, vocabulary, and concepts so that they can apply them to the learning that occurs before, during, and after the experience.

**On Campus.** Given the small percentage of American college students who study overseas, it is crucial for institutions to maximize the curricular and co-curricular resources available on every campus, from international students and scholars to international faculty, to service learning opportunities in the community—something that has been referred to as "internationalization at home" or IaH (Nilsson, 2003). This integrated approach to programming, within a larger campus internationalization context, can help institutions develop more comprehensive programming that goes beyond fostering social opportunities to actually creating intercultural learning opportunities for all students. Maximization of such resources and opportunities is essential in development of all students' intercultural competence in preparing them for the twenty-first century.

Programming that brings together international and domestic students in intentional ways is one mechanism to help further students' intercultural competence. As Bok (2006) notes, "The best way for undergraduates to learn from one another is not through taking classes but in the dorm room discussions, mealtime conversations, and other group activities" on campus (p. 248). Placing the programming within the context of comprehensive institutional internationalization efforts through an integrated "internationalization at home" approach can benefit both students and the institution.

Given that the only element all the experts agreed on in the Deardorff (2006) study was the importance of being able to understand and see the

world from others' perspectives, it becomes important for programs, whenever possible, to address multiple worldviews and comparative perspectives. For example, speaker series that bring in people from diverse backgrounds can raise awareness of other perspectives on specific issues. Likewise, foreign films become a way to bring in other worldviews, especially if combined with discussion and reflective work.

There is also a great need for programs to bring domestic and international students together in *meaningful* interactions. Such programs would involve adequately preparing (such as during orientation or through cross-cultural training) for interaction between domestic and international students, having specific intercultural learning goals for all participants, and encouraging meaningful domestic-international interactions through relationship-building opportunities. These opportunities could take the form of programs such as community service, mentoring, language partnering, book clubs, and even intramural sports.

## **Assessment Process for Intercultural Competence**

**Prioritizing Goals Related to Intercultural Competence.** As discussed earlier in this chapter, the important first step in assessing intercultural competence is to define the concept itself by using the existing literature and work as a basis for the definition and framework. Most definitions and models tend to be somewhat general in terminology, so once a definition has been determined, it is important to develop a process that generates specific measurable outcomes and indicators within the context to be assessed.

To begin this process, it is best to prioritize specific aspects of intercultural competence based on the overall mission, goals, and purpose of the course or program. The definition used for intercultural competence will determine both the aspects to be assessed and the level of assessment (individual, program, organization). As in the case of learning outcomes, the level is usually that of the individual and the learning that occurs for each individual. For example, from the overall mission, "understanding others' perspectives" may be an essential aspect of intercultural competence to assess and thus become a stated goal. From that point, one would engage other key persons in dialogue about the specific measurable outcomes related to this overall goal as to the best ways to achieve it. These ways of achieving the stated goal become the specified objectives (which will be discussed in more detail shortly).

The process of prioritizing various aspects of intercultural competence is an important one and should not be done too quickly or taken lightly. The process itself often involves dialogue and discussion with key stakeholders, including students, to determine which specific elements of intercultural competence should be the focus of programmatic efforts and assessment endeavors. It is important that prioritization not be a one-time



discussion but rather an ongoing process since priorities may change from program to program, from course to course, or from year to year. Generally, it is advisable to choose two or three specific aspects to assess at a given time, to control the amount of time, effort, and resources needed in the assessment efforts.

**Stating Goals and Measurable Objectives.** It is very important to spend sufficient time defining intercultural competence and developing clear, realistic, and measurable learning outcome statements based on the goals and prioritized foci of intercultural competence aspects (instead of the concept as a whole) because these outcome statements determine the assessment methods and tools to be used. Already developed frameworks of intercultural competence, as previously discussed, can be used in framing and defining this concept. Once the specific aspects of intercultural competence have been prioritized, it is time to write measurable objectives, or outcomes statements, related to each of the prioritized aspects (see Chapter Two of this volume).

A key part of assessment is to ensure identification of realistic objectives: can they be accomplished within the parameters of the course or program? Are these objectives specifically addressed in the program or curriculum? For example, it would not be realistic to expect a participant at a beginning language level to speak another language fluently after only two or three weeks in another country. Likewise, for short-term study-abroad programs in postsecondary institutions, outcomes must realistically match the length and learning interventions of the program.

The American Council on Education (2007a) lists common intercultural learning outcomes found at the intersection of international and multicultural education. Even these statements can be tailored more specifically to a particular course or discipline. Another resource to use for outcomes statements is the intercultural rubric developed by faculty through the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU, <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/>).

Given the complexity of intercultural competence, a multimethod, multiperspective assessment plan is desired. Advocating use of multiple measures in assessing competence, Pottinger (1979) stresses that “how one defines the domain of competence will greatly affect one’s choice of measurement procedures” (p. 30) and notes that pen-and-paper assessment tests have been widely criticized, in part because of the effect of the test format and also the limits a paper test places on the complex phenomena being measured. Since competence varies by setting, context, and individual, using a variety of assessments (see Chapter Two), both direct and indirect, ensures stronger measurement.

Further, using the definition of “effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural settings” (Deardorff, 2006), measures need to have multiple perspectives, beyond the learner’s. The learner can indicate to what degree he or she has been effective in an intercultural

setting, but it is only the other person who can determine the appropriateness of behavior and communication in the interaction.

So, what does this all mean in assessing intercultural competence? Such assessment involves effort, and there is unfortunately no silver bullet regarding an assessment tool; given the complexity of this concept, it would be challenging—if not impossible—for one tool to measure an individual's intercultural competence. For example, there are numerous questions to answer: "Intercultural competence from whose perspective, and according to whom?" and "Intercultural competence to what degree?" Further, specific priorities of intercultural competence for a course, department, or institution will vary as determined by each unit's unique mission statement and goals. Thus the tool being used in one course or program may not be appropriate for another course or program if the goals differ.

Given how daunting intercultural competence assessment can seem, it is important to start with manageable portions. This means starting with one or two clearly stated intercultural competence learning outcomes. Then, design an assessment package around those outcomes that consists of one direct measure and one indirect measure. To collect this evidence, it is helpful to explore what is already being done to collect evidence of student learning and simply adapt data already being collected so that the data align with the stated outcomes. This may involve adding a couple of questions on an institutional survey to students, or on a study-abroad satisfaction survey. Or it could mean using data already collected, such as through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

**Assessment Approaches, Methods, and Tools.** As just discussed, it is important that a combination of direct and indirect evidence be collected to assess students' intercultural competence, given its complexity. Here are some brief descriptions of approaches that can be incorporated into an assessment plan.

**Direct Evidence: Learning Contracts.** When appropriate, it is often helpful to work with learners to have them develop their own learning objectives related to the overall intercultural competence goals. This not only ensures a more effective and relevant learning process but also allows the learner to indicate the evidence for successful learning. Learning contracts consist of the learner negotiating with the instructor on what specifically will be learned, how it will be learned, the time line for learning to occur, evidence of learning, and action taken as a result of the learning. (See Malcolm Knowles, 1975, for further details on learning contracts.)

**Direct Evidence: E-portfolios.** Many institutions are turning to e-portfolios as a means of collecting direct evidence of students' intercultural or global learning. Artifacts placed in the portfolios by students include reflection papers, term papers, photos, and other documentation of student learning. Numerous software programs support e-portfolio

development and track specific learning outcomes. Assessment of portfolios is often implemented with rubrics. Rubrics for intercultural competence, and several other areas, were developed with faculty across the United States over an eighteen-month period by the AACU.

**Direct Evidence: Critical Reflection.** Reflection is essential in developing learners' intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Thus journaling, blogging, and reflection papers become tools through which to collect data on student learning. One tool to use in pushing students to go beyond descriptive reflection is to use a set of *what* questions: What? So what? Now what? Or simply ask students, "As a result of this learning, what will you do now?" (Knefelkamp, 1989) Writing prompts can also be used: "I learned that. . . . This is important because. . . . As a result of this learning, I will . . ." (Clayton, 2010).

Reflection should be thought of as a critical and legitimate process for promoting and assessing learning. Well-designed reflection goes beyond journal writing (although this may be an aspect of it); it is an "intentional, structured, and directed process that facilitates exploration for deeper, contextualized meaning linked to learning outcomes" (Rice and Pollack, 2000, p. 124). Through effective reflection, students can engage in an examination of their personal opinions, attitudes, and positionalities; explore their relation to others and the work in which they are engaged; and bridge their day-to-day interactions with individuals to broader social and cultural issues (O'Grady, 2000; Rice and Pollack, 2000). Such reflection can be a rich source of data for research on students' intercultural competence development within the curricular context and, when combined with other data sources and methods, help inform creation of a more rigorous assessment plan.

**Direct Evidence: Performance.** Increasingly, observation of students' performance in intercultural situations is becoming a way in which to obtain others' perspectives regarding the appropriateness of students' behavior and communication. For example, a host family may be asked to complete a reflection on a student homestay. Supervising teachers may be asked to complete observations of student teachers' interactions in the classroom. Supervisors may be asked to do the same for interns, and so on. Such performance assessment is an opportunity for students to apply intercultural knowledge and skills in relevant contexts.

**Indirect Evidence.** Indirect evidence of student learning around intercultural competence is collected primarily through surveys or inventories from the learner-perspective. There are more than one hundred such instruments currently available, some with more evidence of reliability and validity than others (see Fantini, 2009). In employing these instruments, it is absolutely critical that users understand exactly what the instrument measures and how this aligns with the stated learning outcome. It is also very important that use of any of these indirect measures be coupled with direct measures of student learning, as discussed earlier.

In selecting indirect intercultural assessment tools, some key questions can aid in selecting the most appropriate tool(s): What are the goals and objectives to be assessed? What evidence is needed to indicate success at achieving these objectives? What does the tool measure? How well does the tool align with the stated objectives? What are the limitations and cultural biases of the tool? Is the tool valid (accurate) and reliable (consistent)? Is there a theoretical foundation for the tool? Does the tool measure human development relevant to intercultural competence? Are the administrative and logistical issues involved manageable? How will the data be used to provide feedback to students on their own intercultural competence development? (For further detail on intercultural competence assessment, see Bolen, 2007; Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2009; Paige, 2004; and Stuart, 2009).

Other indirect evidence related to students' perceptions of intercultural learning and intercultural competence development can be collected through interviews and focus groups.

**Some Examples of Intercultural Competence Assessment.** Given challenges to assessing intercultural competence, are there examples of programs that are indeed engaged in such assessment? International education programs in postsecondary institutions offer some illustrations. Georgia Tech uses a self-perspective inventory, a portfolio, and a capstone course to assess intercultural learning. Another example is Duke University, which uses several self-perspective inventories, combined with self-reflection assignments, observations, and embedded course assessments. On a broader scale, the American Council on Education (2007b) has worked with numerous institutions within the United States in articulating global learning outcomes. Through this process, multiple assessments were used, primarily through an e-portfolio method and a custom-developed self-report instrument.

Other postsecondary institutions have also engaged in assessing intercultural competence through multiple measures, among them use of self-perspective, journals, host family observations, supervisor observations, faculty observations, embedded in-class assignments, participant interviews, focus groups, and portfolios. It was not unusual for these programs to spend months—and in some cases up to two years—articulating the initial goals and objectives for developing and implementing an assessment plan on intercultural competence and global learning.

## Conclusion

Assessing intercultural competence as a learning outcome is not only possible but also necessary as postsecondary institutions seek to graduate global-ready students. Given the complexity of assessing intercultural competence, other questions can be raised: How do educators avoid oversimplification of intercultural competence and yet develop reliable

methods with which to measure student outcomes of internationalization? How can educators avoid the inherent limits of assessment methods (such as those associated with tests, inventories, and self-report instruments)? How can assessment of intercultural competence be integrated throughout a student's postsecondary experience? Should intercultural competence be assessed generally, or specifically? What constitutes core intercultural competence? Is identification of components of core intercultural competence too simplistic? What roles do personal traits, self-schema, emotions, and motives play in intercultural competence development and assessment? How can intercultural competence be assessed as a "social judgment" made by persons involved in the interaction (Lustig and Koester, 2006)?

This plethora of questions points to the need for additional research on assessment of intercultural competence. In the meantime, however, current research as discussed in this chapter suggests that intercultural competence assessment begins with a clear definition and framework derived from the literature, which translates into concrete, specific goals and measurable student learning outcomes. These prioritized learning outcomes are then assessed through both direct and indirect measures.

Ultimately, assessment and learning are integral to student development and thus assessment goes beyond simply documenting students' overseas experiences or international courses completed. Rather, what is the evidence that students are developing intercultural competence? Educators need to use the assessment data to guide students in their development as well as to look more broadly at the collective impact institutions have on student learning in answering the question, "How well prepared are our students for this global world in which we live and work?"

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