



# Global Education for All?

November 2017

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# Introduction

As global education expands at American colleges and universities, do all of our students have access to these opportunities? Or are we widening the divide between haves and have-nots on our campuses, with students from privileged backgrounds taking advantage of such opportunities, while other students are unable or unwilling to do so? This concern lies at the intersection of two great priorities in American higher education today: *global* and *equity*. Our school, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), is typical in stressing both of these priorities; “global education” and “equity and inclusion” are two of the six priorities in its current Academic Plan.

But as managers of global programs, we have long wondered just how well is UNC living up to this dual commitment. And we are not alone. Many universities and national organizations such as Diversity Aboard, The Association of International Education Administrators, and NAFSA have been actively working to diversify global education. Much of this work, however, has narrowly focused on increasing racial/ethnic diversity in credit-bearing Study Abroad programs. While good progress has been made in this arena, how might the demographics look across other facets of global education? Have we made progress here as well and what sorts of interventions are proving successful?

To address such questions, UNC has over the past five years adopted broad definitions of both *student diversity* and *global opportunities*, it has used a systematic, data-driven approach to explore ways to open access to under-served students, and it has developed a few early interventions targeting such students. What we have found, in a nutshell, is that students from a variety of backgrounds, disciplines and perspectives have a strong interest in global education, but that they face a series of barriers – financial, cultural, and institutional – that prevent them from taking advantage of the global opportunities that are proliferating on our campus. We found that we can overcome some of these obstacles through focused interventions, but these require attention and resources that may be difficult to “scale up” to reach all under-served students.

## Broader Definitions

We began this project by adopting broad definitions of both *student diversity* and *global opportunities*, thereby deliberately going beyond the traditional approach that has focused on racial/ethnic diversity in Study Abroad programs. Regarding *student diversity*, UNC focuses also on students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, in part because 43% of our students receive financial aid. UNC also stresses disciplinary diversity to target students our data indicate are less likely to participate in global experiences such as those in fields like Nursing, Math, and Education. Furthermore, we target first-generation college students, LGBTQ students, transfer students from community colleges, students with disabilities, non-traditional students, athletes, males, and veterans, all of whom are traditionally under-served by our global programs.

To meet the remarkably diverse interests and concerns of UNC students, we realize we need to define *global opportunities* expansively as well. In addition to promoting credit-bearing Study Abroad programs, we are encouraging students to pursue internships, research, service learning, volunteering, and working abroad. We are also stressing to students that global opportunities exist on campus, and we are actively encouraging them to take advanced foreign language classes and globally-oriented courses. Attending the

Latin American Film Festival, meeting with a visiting ambassador, and joining a student organization that addresses climate change are all global opportunities students can pursue while on campus. Finally, we are assisting students in finding global opportunities in the local community: in Chapel Hill, for example, students can work with Latinx immigrants or Burmese refugees to broaden their perspectives in striking ways. Of course we don't claim that attending a lecture on campus is the same as studying abroad for a year; we do, however, believe that all of these global experiences can bring complementary value to a student's education.

In short, UNC's goal is to increase, for example, the number of math students studying abroad, students with disabilities conducting global internships, males taking foreign languages, Native Americans earning Fulbright awards, students with significant financial need performing global public service, and first generation college students applying to the Peace Corps. If we accomplish this goal, then our students who pursue global opportunities will more accurately reflect our student body as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

In line with findings at other universities, UNC has identified three broad categories of barriers that underserved students face in pursuing global opportunities: **financial**, **cultural**, and **institutional**.

**FINANCIAL BARRIERS** are the most obvious ones because global opportunities cost money and many students cannot afford them. Often overlooked, however, is the issue of lost wages: some students must work to support themselves and their families and cannot forego that income, so they are unable to even consider studying abroad or taking an unpaid internship. Even the \$135 passport application fee is a significant financial barrier for some students. In order to address the significant financial challenges that many of our students face, UNC has made enabling students to pursue global opportunities a central priority in its ongoing fundraising campaign.

**CULTURAL BARRIERS** refer to a student's background and experience. Some students do not know about global opportunities and this barrier can be addressed with good outreach, marketing and promotion. A more significant barrier is the student who cannot conceive of herself as the kind of person who pursues global opportunities, perhaps because none of her family or friends have ever done so or because she has a disability that makes this seem unattainable. Some students also remark that just coming to Chapel Hill from a small town in North Carolina has already been a significant cross-cultural experience and so they wonder why more is needed. Another barrier can be family concerns. Family members may have worries about safety or may question how a global opportunity will help their child succeed academically and secure a job upon graduation. We are currently gathering data that we hope will help reassure parents that global opportunities are a good investment and not a dangerous or wasteful distraction.

**INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS** are impediments found at the university and there are many. Academic ones include minimum GPAs requirements to participate in programs and rigid curricular requirements for certain majors. Bureaucratic ones include the slow pace of travel reimbursements or cash advances, which can be significant barriers for students living on the financial margin. Students also tell us that information and resources on global opportunities are decentralized and can be difficult to find and navigate. Furthermore, funding to pursue a global opportunity is often awarded through a competitive application that may favor students with prior global experiences or with more experience selling themselves to review committees. Finally, faculty members should be aware of the influence, both positive and negative,

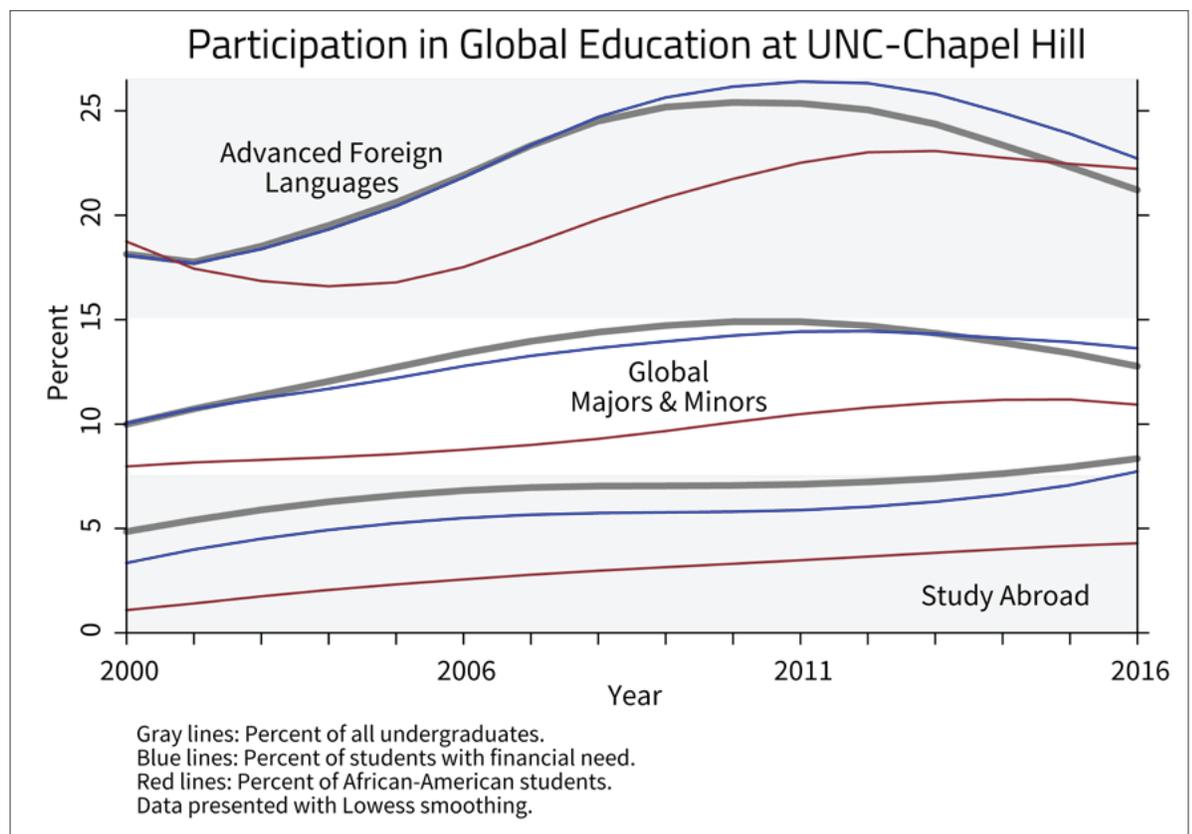
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<sup>1</sup> At this point, UNC's focus is on undergraduate students but the plan is to expand attention to graduate and professional students as well.

they can have on students. A professor saying to a student “Your paper was really good, you should apply for a Fulbright” can change the trajectory of that student’s life. However, some faculty have a narrow conception of the type of student who should pursue global opportunities, and this narrowness can lead them to encourage some students over others, or to discourage (implicitly or explicitly) certain students. Needless to say, universities should not encourage ill-equipped students to pursue global opportunities, but we should work hard to ensure that all capable students have access to such opportunities, regardless of their academic discipline, age, disability status, educational or family background, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

## Promising Trends

We have also been gathering data on what kinds of students are undertaking what kinds of global opportunities. One of our first eye-opening findings was that UNC – like other universities we work with – is not set up to keep track of many global opportunities students pursue. Major universities are so decentralized that there is no single database of, for example, overseas internships and undergraduate research. So the accompanying charts focus on three prominent aspects of global education that our Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is able to track: *Study Abroad*, *globally-oriented majors and minors*, and *advanced foreign language courses* (beyond the three semesters required by UNC).



All three of these aspects of global education have expanded noticeably over the past 15 years. The percent of UNC undergraduates participating in Study Abroad in any given year has risen from 5 percent in 2000-2001 to 8 percent in 2015-2016. The proportion declaring globally-oriented majors and minors has risen from 10 to 13 percent over the same period, and the proportion taking an advanced foreign language has risen from 18 to 21 percent.

The rate of under-served students participating in these global opportunities has also increased over this period. This is particular true for students with financial need, defined by UNC as students who meet federal eligibility standards for student aid. These students now participate in Study Abroad at almost the same rate as the student body overall. (The blue line in the shaded Study Abroad region of the graph has almost caught up to the thick gray line representing the percentage for all undergraduates.) In the past several years, students with financial need have signed up for globally-oriented majors and minors – from Asian Studies to Comparative Literature to International Business and beyond – at a rate higher than the student body at large, and they have taken advanced foreign languages at a higher rate for almost a decade.

However, we must acknowledge that UNC’s provision of global education opportunities for other under-served groups is mixed. The proportion of African-American students participating in Study Abroad, for example, has tripled over the past 15 years, but remains 4 percent lower than the student body as a whole. (Compare the red line in the shaded Study Abroad region of the graph with the thick gray line representing the percentage for all undergraduates.) At the same time, African-American students are now just as likely as the student body overall to take advanced foreign languages, and have increased participation in global majors and minors over the past decade even as the rate for all students has plateaued – suggesting that the persistent gap in Study Abroad participation is not due to lack of interest in global educational opportunities.

Not shown in this graph, but also important for improving access to global opportunities is the patterns for other under-served groups. Asian students and Hispanic students participate in these global programs at rates equal to or greater than other students. Natural science majors study abroad at almost the same rate as other undergraduates, and professional school student participation has taken off over the past decade, led by undergraduates in the Business School, which has identified global education as central to its training mission. In advanced foreign language courses, by contrast, undergraduates in the natural sciences and professional schools are no more likely to study advanced languages now than they were 15 years ago, falling behind the rising rates among students in the humanities and social sciences.

Male students continue to lag behind female students in Study Abroad participation, and the gender gap in advanced foreign language courses and global majors and minors has widened in recent years, with female students now participating at rates 6 percent higher than male students.

Transfer students, too, are consistently under-served by our global programs. We do not yet have a good explanation for the lag in foreign languages or global majors but for Study Abroad it’s clear – the timing is difficult, and we are trying to address this issue with new interventions.

## New Interventions

Alongside data-gathering, we have developed various interventions to diversify our campus’s global education programs. First, we formed a task force involving university units dealing directly with under-served student populations. Among these units are Academic Counseling, Accessibility Resources and Service, the American Indian Center, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, Housing and Residential Education, the LGBTQ Center, and Scholarships and Student Aid. Convening twice a year, with subgroups meeting

more frequently, the task force has brought global education to the attention of administrators who may not have given it much thought, so that they now promote global opportunities to the students they work with. The group has also been valuable in shaping programs, understanding the challenges faced by different student populations, disseminating information, and connecting students with opportunities. Task force members who focus on issues of student identity often stress the importance of targeting our messages; for example, to reach Latina students in STEM fields, the message needs to be tailored specifically to them and may differ from the message we send to African-American males in the Business School.

The task force, along with student input, also helped us launch two new programs geared specifically to reach students when they first arrive on campus. [Global Take Off: Puerto Rico](#) provides full funding for 12 students to participate in an interactive, five-day, faculty-led trip to Puerto Rico over Winter Break. In collaboration with the Institute for the Study of the Americas and the Stone Center for Black Culture and History, this program is only open to incoming students (first year or transfer) who have limited or no global travel experience and demonstrated financial need. This program received over 250 applicants in its first year and funded 12 students, 8 of whom were African-American, 8 were first generation college students, and 2 were transfer students. The program cost \$17,000 in its first year and it is supported for five years by a private donor. [Passport to Go!](#) provides full funding (\$135) for first-year and new transfer students to obtain their first U.S. Passport. These students must demonstrate financial need, have never had a U.S. Passport, and have never traveled outside of the country. Since 2012, 189 applicants have received a passport, of whom more than a third are African-American, one quarter are first generation, and one quarter are transfer students.

The primary goal of both these programs is to draw new students into a pipeline that leads them from these early interventions to other global opportunities later in their careers at UNC. We are evaluating these threshold programs by measuring how many global opportunities participating students subsequently pursue – because of these programs, does a student then study abroad, do globally-oriented public service, learn a new language, befriend an international student, or apply for a Fulbright? And will the student participant encourage a friend or relative to do the same? Importantly, there is a legitimate critique that universities run the risk of seeming to shunt traditionally under-served students into short-term opportunities while preserving long-term opportunities for privileged students. That indeed is a significant problem and to counter it, we need to find ways to ensure that all global experiences, whatever their duration, are accessible, rigorous, and rewarding.

As a third intervention, UNC's Center for Global Initiatives hired a program manager dedicated to promoting access to global education, with matching funds from a U.S. Department of Education grant. This position not only leads the above-mentioned programs but is also the first point of contact for under-served students exploring global opportunities. This clear point of contact is important to prevent students from being bounced around from one office to another, which can lead them to become discouraged. This position also manages the new [Embark Carolina](#) website that features a student-focused how-to manual on finding global educational opportunities, as well as a searchable database of funding sources to support students' pursuit of such opportunities.

As a result of these deliberate interventions, undergraduate programs at the Center of Global Initiatives received four times as many applications from African-American students last year as in 2013. Applications from transfer students tripled; applications from first-generation college students quintupled; applications by students who had never traveled abroad rose by a factor of ten.

Because these interventions are quite new, it is premature to draw definitive conclusions about whether they are successful in diversifying global opportunities at UNC, but the early results presented above seem promising. These interventions have attracted hundreds of applications from under-served student populations, and they have gained traction from UNC administrators, both in the vibrant working group and at the campus's highest levels, where access to global education has been made one of the top priorities in its new fundraising campaign.

Fundraising is going to be critical if we are to scale up these efforts and make global education accessible to all student. It is not clear to us what infrastructure it would take to achieve ambitious goals like doubling the number of students studying abroad, providing passports to all incoming students, or offering globally-oriented research or internship opportunities to every student who wants one. Such large-scale interventions may be the next frontier in opening access to global education

## Conclusion

UNC's effort to connect more diverse students with more diverse global experiences lies at the intersection of two key priorities for universities today: *equity* and *global education*. Bringing these priorities together requires a concerted effort that defines both broadly. It also requires a data-driven approach so that institutions can track progress and address ongoing gaps. Finally, it requires addressing the significant barriers many students face pursuing global opportunities through targeted interventions. If universities can push all three of these efforts forward, then we will reach a point where global education is accessible to all our students. Such inclusion would be good for higher education, for our country and for the world.