

“Teaching Global Effectiveness in the Twenty-First Century”

**American Institute of Architects New York Chapter
Global Dialogues Series:
“Global Campus (re) Orientation”**

February 3, 2014

Good evening. I’m sorry I can’t be there for what promises to be a very stimulating discussion.

Since I am in pre-recorded mode, I thought I should contribute by being provocative. So I’m going to make three aggressive assertions that you can respond to after I’m done.

Assertion number one: every college student should learn how to work as an outsider in a different dominant culture.

For those of you who are fluent in more than language, you know that you can never sound as smart in your second language as you do in your first language. It’s partly about vocabulary, and it’s partly about cultural practices.

In this multicultural century, people who are engaged in the fastest moving part of global society will be spending significant amounts of time what I call “playing away” – working in contexts where they are the outsider, the foreigner. Playing away involves “code switching” – moving back and forth between your first culture and the local culture. As I said, nobody is perfect at “code switching,” but with education you can both (a) improve your understanding of a second language and culture, and (b) improve your ability to be effective when you are the outsider.

Assertion number two: every university should help its students learn how to be effective members of multicultural teams where there is no single dominant culture. Universities are supposed to nurture in their

students the knowledge, the intellectual skills, and the values they will need so that they can enjoy satisfying adult lives.

American universities are the best in the world at this stuff, but they are weak on the multicultural skill set.

Most American universities today are internationally diverse. We have a critical mass of students who are playing away.

But we do not exploit our diversity enough. We continue to act as if our students were all Americans. We could do a lot more to help our traveling students learn how to be more effective playing away; and we could do more to help our home students learn how to be more effective teaming up with other people who are different.

Assertion number three: sometimes, but only occasionally, the best way for a university to step up its game is to build a campus overseas.

NYU is the model for a university that is fully committed to being fully transnational. It is internationally diverse here in New York. It has two full-blown campuses overseas, in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, and on both of those campuses every student is playing away. There is no majority culture. And at NYU, students from all three primary campuses are encouraged to circulate among the three, as well as among 11 more campuses that are situated in the world's most important cities, on six different continents. And within each campus, NYU is focusing hard on ensuring that what happens inside and outside the classroom helps all our students develop the kind of twenty-first-century global effectiveness that I have been describing.

But here's the hedge. Very few universities can do what NYU is doing. NYU is lucky to be based in the most culturally diverse city in the world. NYU has built a reputation for quality that makes outstanding overseas institutions want to partner with us. NYU had the guts to move first, and so it developed skills and experience in this kind of education that are hard to come by. And finally, NYU was able to work with world-class architects, to ensure that its campuses would facilitate the kind of education that it aims to provide.

Most universities don't have these resources. And if they don't, an overseas campus is a very high stakes gamble. I think that, rather than taking that gamble, most universities will better serve their students if they strength the global, multicultural education they offer at home, while encouraging their students to participate in programs like Sweet Briar College's Junior Year Abroad (a program that changed my life).

On the other hand, there are a few universities that do have the resources to follow NYU's example. For the sake of their students, and for the sake of twenty-first-century global education, I very much hope that they will.

Thanks for hearing me out, and have a great conversation.