

# **BRIDGES NOT WALLS:**

## **DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

### **Randolph College | Lynchburg, Virginia**

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Randolph College has a longstanding commitment to cultivating a global perspective in a liberal arts setting. Our Quality Enhancement Plan affords an opportunity to move beyond the College's traditional commitment to global education and begin to promote *intercultural competence*, a more comprehensive and significant goal. Globalizing and internationalizing were popular concepts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the new imperative of liberal learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is intercultural competence, and this imperative forms the conceptual foundation of the QEP, a vision we express metaphorically in the title *Bridges Not Walls*. *Bridges Not Walls* is the initial step in our attempt to prioritize and implement intercultural competence, an industry standard defined as:

... the capability to accurately understand and adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonality. Intercultural competence reflects the degree to which cultural differences and commonalities in values, expectations, beliefs, and practices are effectively *bridged*, an inclusive environment is achieved, and specific differences that exist in your organization are addressed from a 'mutual adaptation' perspective. (Hammer, 2009)

In a Randolph College context, this will mean establishing both curricular and co-curricular initiatives that will make it possible to achieve clear student learning outcomes, all of which promote elements of intercultural competence. The goal of this QEP cannot be to produce intercultural competence as a whole concept at Randolph College; this is too abstract and too elusive. But we can hope to identify specific student learning outcomes as defined by the broad concept and to measure some of their indicators. This interpretation of intercultural development and competence is based on work by experts in the field of intercultural communication including Bennett (1993), Chen and Starosta (1996), and Deardorff (2004). *Bridges Not Walls* has the following three dimensions, based on work by Deardorff (2004):

1. **Knowledge:** Understanding cultural identities with an awareness of one's own cultural rules and biases, recognizing and responding to these biases, and understanding influences upon one's predispositions, including the history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, practices, and beliefs of a culture.
2. **Skills:** The ability to communicate and behave effectively in an intercultural situation, including the ability to interpret experiences from the perspectives of more than one worldview, recognize the feelings of another cultural group, and negotiate a shared understanding when cultural differences are present.
3. **Attitudes and Values:** The ability to value one's own culture, [and] the culture of others ... to be open to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures without judgment, to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and to understand the life-enhancing role of cross-cultural interactions.

Based upon Deardorff's three dimensions, Randolph College has established three student learning outcomes for *Bridges Not Walls*. While these outcomes are not, in application, rigidly sequential, it should be observed that they do reflect a developmental, progressive structuring of Deardorff's three dimensions.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students will develop an understanding of the American experience. (Largely a <i>Knowledge</i> outcome.)</li><li>2. Students will develop an understanding of the diversity of people and perspectives, both here in America as well as around the world. (A <i>Knowledge / Skills</i> transitional outcome.)</li><li>3. Students will develop the ability to interact effectively with those who are fundamentally different from them. (Largely a <i>Skills</i> and, implicitly, an <i>Attitudes/Values</i> outcome.)</li></ol> |
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