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A FULBRIGHT OPPORTUNITY IN HONDURAS: AN ABROAD CONVERSATION ABOUT THE MEANING OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, ASSESSMENT, AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TODAY

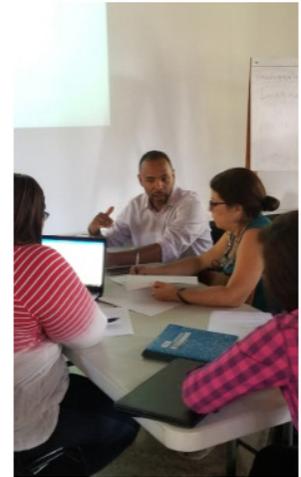
This Fulbright Specialist opportunity in Honduras revealed a faculty community questioning the meaning of assessment of student learning outcomes, classroom management and student engagement in Higher Education today. In this regard, a framework based on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) was a successful framework to facilitate workshops on these topics at Escuela Panamericana Zamorano in Honduras. This Fulbright opportunity built on previous similar experiences at higher education institutions in Colombia, Spain, Cuba, Costa Rica and Argentina. The SoTL movement represents a bridge reconciling faculty passion for teaching and learning and different discipline ways to develop knowledge and skills, with administration expectation regarding assessment of student learning. Overall, it was critical to use faculty language to shape conversations with faculty from Honduran institution. All workshops aimed to embody faculty dissimilar pedagogical backgrounds, varied research skills, and ways to preserve discipline identities and passion for teaching in this age of accountability. The SoTL scope decreased found tensions between faculty vision regarding assessment and language used by administration to convene assessment duties.

This engagement included nine 3-hour workshops. The first series of four workshops focused on Classroom Management and Student Engagement. This took place during the first week and set the tone for a subsequent workshop on Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, and a second series of four workshops focused on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. About 15-20 faculty members attended each workshop of both series and around 50 faculty members attended the Assessment workshop. Several faculty members attended the three different workshops. The Fulbright Specialist also met groups of students on three different occasions, two academic- department faculty members, the College Dean and all academic chairpersons, the Dean of Student Life, the Vice President of College Affairs, staff members overseeing student life, the

director of Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and two members of the Board of Trustees. All of these meetings helped to understand college life, culture, and academic expectations. This Fulbright opportunity also intended to help the Honduran institution with the preparation for accreditation process with Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) agency.

What the Fulbright Specialist Opportunity brought to Honduras: The value of the process and speaking faculty language: It was essential to talk with faculty using language rooted in different discipline identities. It was also suggested to support the role of the department chairperson in assessment. They are key players translating institutional vision on assessment to faculty, and also bringing back faculty voices to the administration. It was discussed how to recognize faculty members that naturally embrace the process, such as statisticians and sociologists. They can help other faculty members to understand the meaning of the process. The institution should recognize that many faculty members feel unavoidably uncomfortable performing this task, as the course-evaluation process is outside their area of expertise. In this regard, as the host institution already has some faculty members taking leadership in assessment process, it was suggested to formalize a Faculty Assessment Committee with an advisory role to the process.

Redesigning the academic assessment cycle: The institution has a comprehensive three-year meta-assessment cycle at course level to document student-learning outcomes. It was suggested adding a fourth year to this cycle to assess the assessment, close the loop, and connect different dots. It means to analyze what works, what they learned, what should be refined, and build understanding on the meaning of the process, while embracing all faculty voices in the process.



The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a framework to foster a culture of dialogue and inquiry about teaching and learning: The Zamorano faculty members are really committed to improve students' learning. The SoTL scope showed to be an effective framework to foster a culture of inquiry and documenting teaching practices. This organically embodies an assessment process and serves as a bridge to reconcile dissimilar faculty and administration expectations regarding evaluation. This seminar brought to the surface several successfully implemented teaching and assessment strategies by the host institution's instructors that were unknown by other faculty members. Thus, these workshops naturally open new collaborations. They learned new several teaching techniques to manage large lecture halls such as using case studies and using clickers from the phone, and several strategies to set the tone during the first day of classes.

What the Fulbright Specialist Opportunity Brought back to the United States

The Escuela Panamericana Zamorana has an impressive Experiential Learning program, Learning by Doing (Aprender

Haciendo) program in all majors. This robust program instills students' work responsibility, discipline, professional mindset, and ability to solve problems and create solutions in real-life settings related to agriculture and food production. The host institution's graduates value this program as the most significant portion of the curriculum. Furthermore, all students at Escuela Panamericana Zamorano are required to have a second experiential learning opportunity structured as an internship before graduation. Many of them develop it in US labs and companies. The feedback received from internship-based institutions demonstrated students have the knowledge and skills to thrive in different job settings. Thus, several experiential learning strategies from this program can be implemented as part of Service Learning programs in US institutions.

Meta assessment Cycle Effectiveness: The host institution has a comprehensive three-year assessment cycle to document course-level student learning outcomes (SLOs). They use Nuventive Improve software. All faculty members are involved. They redesigned all syllabi, created SLOs and assignments that assess the objectives. They shared several ways to enhance assessment making it more sustainable and meaningful. This long-term assessment movement has three staff members with Education majors working on assessment, accompanying faculty, and facilitating the clerical work. They report to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Overall, this showed the need to have full time staff members with the appropriate educational background facilitating the task and able to convene a meaningful message for faculty community.

Invisible (Hidden) Curriculum: The host institution is intentional about student well-being during their campus life years. They use the term invisible curriculum to

embody all student campus life non-academic aspects. The term curriculum brings to mind connectivity and institutional efforts to constantly enhance students' human experience on campus. Some of them are from different countries and remain on campus for long periods of time. They have a strict discipline code, as well as a calendar of cultural and sports events to enrich student experience. The creation of an Arts course was suggested during this visit. This might serve as a bridge reinforcing the connection between academic curriculum and the invisible one, and, ultimately, enhance student experience on campus.

Strategies for managing large lecture hall groups

Some professors shared strategies that create individual experiences for students during the first day of classes. This breaks class anonymity and engages students regardless of large class size throughout the term. The advantages and disadvantages of other phone Apps as clickers were also discussed among host faculty members.

Overall, this experience reinforces the transformative impact of an abroad experience from both the visiting faculty member and the host institution faculty members. It was an opportunity to listen and learn from each other regardless of different institution settings and nationalities. The opportunity reinforces an international faculty community message: the faculty community members need to have intellectual conversations about different ways to document teaching and learning effectiveness. There is a need to recognize different discipline identities and multiple ways to understand pedagogy. This intellectual diversity has to be an institution driving force propelling administration needs to document institution values.

About the Author

Nelson Nunez Rodriguez is Professor of Chemistry, Unit Coordinator at Natural Sciences Department, and former Director of Center for Teaching and Learning at Hostos Community College of the City University of New York. He currently serves as Fulbright Specialist on STEM Education and sub-award Principal Investigator for a NIH IRACDA program. His scholarly interests focus on developing scientific skills in urban college students. He received a Bachelor Degree in Biology from Havana University, Cuba in 1992, a Ph.D. in Chemistry from National University of Cordoba, Argentina in 2001 and developed a four year-postdoctoral training at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York.