

Student Voices

Global Partners in Education Journal Special Section
Mariko Eguchi, Guest Editor of GPEJ
University of Shimane, Japan

We are pleased to announce five winners of the Global Partners in Education Journal (GPEJ) Student Essay Contest. This contest was conceived at the Seventh Annual Conference of Global Partners in Education held in Monterrey, Mexico when the participants discussed means to increase student participation in GPE. GPE offers a course called Global Understanding (GU) that allows students around the world to meet and discuss topics via videoconference. The survey results every year demonstrate that the participants of GU are highly satisfied with their experiences, showing improved perspective taking, greater interest in interacting with people from other cultures, and discovering their own cultures. The faculty is aware of the impact of GU on students, but the voices of the students have not yet been heard. That's why we called for the Student Essay Contest so that their experiences can be shared by many readers of GPEJ. We asked the students to respond to the following prompts:

How has the Global Understanding experience helped prepare you for your future personal and professional goals? Describe how this program has influenced your perceptions of your own culture and other cultures.

Although it was our first attempt with a very short notice, we were amazed by the number of submissions: 53 submissions from 17 partner institutions representing 14 countries. Thank you to everyone who submitted an essay and those who encouraged their students to write about their experiences of GU. The essays reflected their experiences of GU, describing how they expanded their horizons, how they feel toward others, and how they see others as well as themselves differently. We received many thoughtful and insightful essays and judging which ones were the best was very difficult. After multiple rounds of judging, we selected the following winners.

Hajar Usama Akl, Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt

Galina Gazizullina, Ural State Pedagogical University, Russia

Kenyetta McLaurin, East Carolina University, USA

Daniel Molina Hernández, Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico

Ting Poh Poh, University of Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

These essays beautifully describe their personal growth toward becoming a global citizen. They demonstrate how they begin to see their future goals as a traveling journalist, savior of his country, inquirer of the meaning of humanity, English teacher, and well-rounded individual with a global perspective. Please enjoy reading their stories that touched upon self-awareness, leadership, tolerance, perspective, and communication ability, all of

which today's young people should possess in the 21st century. You will see the impact of GU on our future leaders.

My Own Way to “Save Mexico”

Daniel Molina Hernandez
Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico



Daniel Molina Hernandez was a student in the Universidad de Monterrey (UdeM), Mexico, at the time he took the Global Understanding course. He is currently an economics major at Manhattan College in New York City, USA. He loves reading books, listening to music and traveling around the world. Daniel hopes to become an economic analyst and go back to his native country to make it a better place to live.

Two years ago I thought Lebanon was a war zone and North Carolina a little village in the south of the United States. Obviously, I was wrong. My egoism and lack of empathy for global geography were the main causes of these beliefs and, after the first class of Global Understanding, I realized I had to change this way of thinking, and I had to change it fast.

Before the start of the semester I chose this course randomly out of a large pool of options of advanced placement classes. When I sat down in the classroom and Miss Marioly started explaining to us what it was about, I started feeling a sense of excitement. Maybe this was the usual empowerment someone feels the first day of classes, but I realized quickly that this was not like any other course. I had no idea if this sensation was mainly because of the idea that I was going to be able to partner with someone from Peru or the Middle East, or the fact that this class did not require exams. But so it started, days and days of presentations on Lebanon, Peru, United States and Mexico, my country. Each of them with facts that I would have never imagined, creating a restlessness about this data and the anticipation of discovering if they were real by asking native people from these countries. The semester started in a blink of an eye, and from one moment to another our videoconferences with Lebanon were already on. Without noticing, the same happened with the United States and Peru.

These interactions, especially with a culture as different as the one in Lebanon, made me realize how different and unique our lives are compared to a world filled with distinct stories and backgrounds. As Jhumpa Lahiri said in her short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*, “our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there.” This phrase reminds me to the interactions I had in class. For us it was 8:30 am, we were all sleepy and almost with our pillows still attached to our faces. At the same time an entire day had already passed in Lebanon. The sensation of being so far away

from each other and having the possibility of sharing ideas and thoughts about our home, for me, was amazing. I understood that my *normal life* is an abstract concept that no one can standardize, and understanding this is what makes us grow as people and as societies.

Although I had the goal of studying abroad during my bachelor's degree, Miss Marioly's class made me realize how big and rich my country is. I fell in love with Mexico and that encouraged me go and learn about ways of making my home a better place to live. I also found out that countries have common situations, and that cooperation might help them solve their issues in a faster and more effective way. Basically this is what I'm looking for by studying in New York City. I'm searching for ways to help my country and, eventually, other developing nations find a way of using their scarce resources in effective ways to become places where the migration rate is positive. I want my Mexico to be a place where people from other places are not scared to travel. A place where kids can play on the street again, where teenagers can party all night long and where adults are not permanently afraid of a government where stealing is part of the daily practice. And, although we are having a rough time right now, I'm very proud to say that I love my country and because of this I will work for a nation where I want my kids and my grandsons to be raised.

Global Understanding Shaping My Future

Ting Poh Poh

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia



Ting Poh Poh is a student at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu currently studying for a bachelor's degree in Computational Mathematics. She loves reading inspirational books. In addition to reading, she enjoys jogging and playing badminton. In the future, she hopes to become a mathematics lecturer and travel the world with her family.

The Global Understanding (GU) course is essential for helping me to become a well-rounded individual with a global perspective. It is especially important nowadays as the world is getting more connected. As I cannot study abroad, this course allowed me to learn about world cultures without traveling. I was able to communicate with people from different beliefs and cultures directly through video conference and social networks. I could clearly see their attire and classroom as well as hear their voices. Besides that, I could share information about Malaysia and express my point of view to them.

Personally, reflecting upon my experiences during GU classes, I found myself becoming more confident when talking with foreigners. Before taking the class, I felt anxious and

nervous about conversing with them. Now, I am confident and I like to talk with them. I experienced the differences and similarities between their country and my country. I also read online newspapers to learn about their current news and follow up on what is happening in their country. I found myself becoming knowledgeable. I also developed a deeper understanding of global issues such as political and economic issues. Thus, my worldview has become more mature since I am aware of global affairs. In addition, I have learned to be open-minded and always think positively.

In my future career prospects after I graduate from university, I can enhance my employment with a wide range of careers through the experience of the GU course. This experience broadens my career options because I can work for some companies for which communication with diverse customers is needed. Besides that, I also can work in a foreign country, not only in Malaysia. With this experience, I can explore new ideas and make informed decisions for the company. As nowadays employers are more focusing on the soft skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, as well as intercultural knowledge and awareness, I will gain a professional advantage over others in the job market.

The GU course has influenced my perceptions on Malaysia's culture. There are a variety of cultures in Malaysia. It is essential to understand our own cultures and introduce them to the world. Before this, I only knew my own Chinese culture and I did not really understand other ethnicities' cultures in Malaysia. I have learned about Malaysia's other cultures from my classmates of different ethnic origins as they shared their cultures with the foreigners. Therefore, I gained a greater depth of intra-cultural knowledge. I appreciate and am glad to live in Malaysia because I can learn about different cultures and also celebrate various festivals with all Malaysians.

The GU course also influenced my perceptions of the cultures of foreign countries. It allowed me to understand different lifestyles, economic standing and global perspectives on life. Before experiencing the GU course, I thought foreign people, especially Americans, were all very open and unceremonious with complicated relationships. From the cross-cultural communication, I have learned not to judge people from other countries without an in-depth understanding about them. I also learned to understand and respect their cultures. Furthermore, I have improved both of my speaking and listening skills through the communication process in order to make them understand me better since we all have slang in speaking English. Besides that, I also have learned their expressions when they converse to us.

We need to think globally since we are facing large scale changes in our society. Therefore, global understanding is very important. It encourages me to see things from different perspectives. Besides that, global understanding helped me acquire skills that will be very useful in life. We need global consciousness in order to stay on the cutting edge of our profession. In addition, if we understand how other people experience the world, conflicts will not occur. The GU course is the only course that has shaped me to become a knowledgeable person in understanding people around the world. Through this

course I met foreign people and made friends with them. It helped me to widen my views in contact with people around the world.

Global Understanding Experience: Changes in Perception

Hajar Usama Akl

Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt



Hajar Akl is a Journalism student in the faculty of Mass Communication at Pharos University of Alexandria in Egypt. She is passionate about photography and is known for constantly taking pictures! She loves crime shows, among other things, and in the future hopes to be a photojournalist who helps reveal injustice and hopefully make a difference, no matter how small.

It is a small world. We hear that phrase a lot, perhaps too much so that we never really stop to think of what it means, or how small the world has actually become. We are closer together, yet farther apart. It is something I find myself frequently marveling at: the concept of a shared planet, yet minds so incorrigibly diverse it feels almost as though we live in separate worlds.

I do not often get the chance to meet with people of different cultures and backgrounds, even though it is an experience I find to be extremely entertaining and pleasurable. There is a certain mystery to every culture. A corner of this boundless earth, partially uncovered by simply getting to know a culture that is different than yours. It is such a humbling experience to learn about a culture that is new to you. An experience that I will certainly not underestimate.

It is in our very own human nature to make assumptions, or stereotype. But you would be surprised how different people actually are from how they are perceived. It is surprisingly pleasant to have your perception of others changed. And it is equally surprising when you have others' perception of you changed. I remember a foreign student during a video conference telling us, "You're just like us," when we asked them how different we turned out to be from their expectations. It is probably something that I will not forget. Behind the simplicity of those four words lies a deeper meaning. I think the basis of that meaning is what leaders and people everywhere should focus on. We're all the same, equal, no matter how different: "you're just like us."

I think the ethical value that the Global Understanding experience has added to my intellect is priceless. It is not a common occurrence to feel one with those who share the same piece of land, so imagine how rare it must be to feel one with those on another continent. The core belief of humanity and the essential ingredient for an unmarred world

is the understanding of the fact that we are all humans. We have a right to exist, a right to be heard and a right not to be judged. We are more alike than we care to admit.

The Global Understanding experience has reinforced my dream of living a life that reveals the true meaning of humanity, a focus on our similarities rather than our differences. And if we look hard enough, we find that there are many.

I recall that in one of our video conferences we were discussing our definitions of success. Not only was it then that I came to the realization that success, in its simplest form, is being able to do something that you love. But I also realized, again, how alike we are. Every one of us aims for the same thing: happiness. And again, I was astounded by how we relentlessly insist on focusing on how different we are, rather on the things that bring us together.

My perception of other cultures changed, but so did my perception of my own culture. In the short time that we spent together, I have learned a lot about my fellow classmates. And, given the fact that I did not live in Egypt until recently, there were a lot of interesting parts of my own culture that I did not know and enjoyed learning about.

At the end of the day, it is easy to picture an ideal world. A world where it matters not where you are from, or how you dress, or what religion you follow, but only how you treat others. A perfect world in my imagination is a world where we are not divided into groups and subgroups: we are simply who we are. Perhaps a perfect world will never be achieved, but a more understanding one could be attempted. All it takes is for us to listen a little more, and judge a little less. Perhaps it is naïve of me to believe so, but one can truly, and full-heartedly hope.

From Local Thoughts To Global Understanding

Galina Gazizullina

Ural State Pedagogical University, Russia



Galina Gazizullina has graduated from Ural State Pedagogical University in Russia and now is working as an English teacher. She enjoys traveling and often helps her friends as an interpreter for bands from all around the world. In the future Galina hopes to travel and work in different parts of the world.

*“All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family.”
Mohandas K. Gandhi*

In the modern society it is almost impossible to stay isolated from other cultures and their influence. At first, people around the world feared everything that was alien or unknown to them but then, they

acquired some tools and methods to tame this fear. “Global Understanding” is, indeed, one of those tools.

People tend not to realize how little they know about the world around them. Most of them do not even care. We travel to other countries, we watch movies, we listen to the music from around the world, yet, we never think about the culture that they came from. I used to be a person like this. However, being ignorant in this instance was inexcusable for me as I was going to become an English teacher, an ambassador to the world for the children looking up to me. Knowing my future role, I wanted to open up my heart to the world and embrace it. Reading textbooks and watching movies could never give me a full picture of other cultures, so having heard about Global Understanding, I picked up my phone and signed up immediately. And since being a student means a constant lack of time and money, for me, Global Understanding seemed like the most efficient way I had to explore other cultures. The effect it had was above all of my greatest expectations.

The first and the most important result of Global Understanding is the destruction of stereotypes. Unfortunately, people sometimes believe what they are told and shown instead of discovering the truth themselves. That is how stereotypes are born. However, once you touch upon the truth you keep wondering why you chose to believe lies. Even the easiest and shortest talk with a representative of another culture may give more information about the country and the people than some kind of a documentary or piece of news. Global Understanding helps people open their eyes and ears, teaches them to see, to hear, to discover and **to understand**. There are some things that are generally known but not understood, like “never judge a book by its cover”. People know this proverb, but do they truly live it? I do now. Global Understanding let me have friends from all around the world without even thinking of them as “foreigners”.

Secondly, the wide scope of the project enabled us to acquire the information not only about such big and well-known countries as the USA but also about those which we do not hear about on TV very often. Why have I never heard anything about Algeria? Because I have never even bothered to ask. All these bits of information that we were getting during our classes encouraged us to learn even more about the country we were engaged in a conversation with as fifty minutes were never enough. Once you get a glimpse of the exploring and learning it’s always very difficult to let it go. That is why even outside the university walls I could find myself googling about the Black Jesus of Peru, for instance.

Moreover, meeting all these young and aspiring people, listening to their stories about themselves and their country which they are proud of cannot but inspire..Sometimes I found myself mesmerized by their stories or even their facebook profiles. Their open minds and clear visions encouraged me to develop my own. And once one gets inspired it is harder to hold the fire inside. It’s crucial to share one’s ideas and aspirations with as many people as possible. Gradually having little victories over myself, I kept noticing that my friends started to look up to me. I felt this fire inside, so did people around me. I do hope, that some of them were able to catch this fire and to go on living with it.

The last but not least thing that Global Understanding brought to my life is the understanding of my own culture. During the project I realized that having lived in Russia all my life I did not know a lot about it. It made me research our history and customs which led to the acquisition of a cultural identity. I started to realize that I was the bearer of my own culture as well as the culture of the entire country. That fact imposed a responsibility for preserving and presenting my culture to other people. It also prompted an increased interest in it.

Finally, I would like to say that Global Understanding does a great job in blurring the lines between people and cultures, showing everyone that country, nationality, language and religion are just mere formality. We are not so different after all!

In Pursuit of Happiness

Kenyetta McLaurin
East Carolina University, USA



Kenyetta McLaurin is a Cinematic Arts student at East Carolina University in the United States. She enjoys photography and exemplifying her artistic potential through film. Kenyetta also inspires to become a world traveler using her love for art to pave the way. She recently had the opportunity to travel to China and hopes that that cultural experience will uplift her creativity and consciousness.

The first time I ever told my mother that I was planning on running away, I was five years old with my kindergarten backpack on my shoulder and a grin on my face. As all parents respond when their kids plan to execute a dramatic exit, my mother asked, "Where are you going?" Without falter and full of confidence I announced, "Far, far, away and never to return!" Thinking back on this moment, I have always felt inside myself that I was meant for far more than my single stoplight town. I have a craving to travel, to experience, and coming back home has never been an option. This desire led me to the Global Understanding class in the fall of 2014. I had been anticipating taking this class since I heard of it freshman year, and now two years later, I have finally achieved this stepping stone towards my dream of journeying.

In the grand scheme of my career goals, I want to pursue a life of traveling the globe to learn how the cultures of others affect their subjective well-being, or happiness. I can see my research stemming from the structure of society as a whole, continuing on to family structures and how children are raised. I want to learn how different cultures are fostering happy, healthy, and efficient human beings into our world. In order to do this I needed the tools that would allow me to build relationships with those who were from different cultures than myself, and that was exactly what the Global Understanding class provided for me.

My experience in the Global Understanding course has been an interesting one, and I honestly cannot think of how it could not have been. My class was partnered with Baotou Teacher's College and Krosno State College. Through the course, I was able to interact and share experiences with students from China and Poland. I learned the process of building rapport with my partners by asking questions on relatable topics such as popular culture or college life that created a common ground. This enabled us to get comfortable in our present situations and more open about discussing difficult topics that dealt with the meaning of life or our differing political systems. My Chinese partner and I had a desire to learn more of one another and we soon realized that we both had similar personalities and viewpoints on life. We both understood the stresses of life and school and I will always remember when she said, "We are friends now, so we must support each other!" Understanding this fact enabled all of our conversations to go much smoother and a friendship blossomed quickly.

I believe the most useful tool I learned from this program was the difference between an ethnocentric worldview and one that is culturally relativistic. During the course, I became aware of what truly makes up Southern American culture and how it reflected into different aspects of my own life. Through this, I was able to unlearn my ethnocentric view of my culture. Interacting with my partners enabled me to be more eloquent and knowledgeable of my own culture and doing so led me to become understanding of others around me. I became willing to unlearn what I knew so I could grasp the perspective of my partners and develop a culturally relativistic view.

This skill boosted my confidence in my ability to speak with others, even in my own community. Instead of imposing what I believe to be true on those I do not agree with, I am able to listen and understand. I had become aware of how my stance on a cultural and societal level was not a free one. I was subjected to my society and all its conveniences and lack thereof. As I truly contemplated this concept, I began to unlearn my role and realized that others from all around the world experienced the same fate. It has become an intrinsic part of the human condition. We have all learned our cultures and our societies have influenced us, thus we are all walking the same path but with differing perspectives. This idea allowed me to see where I stood on a global scale with my partners and found a unified truth in us all. We are all experiencing our different perspectives to bring light to one true view of our innate human character.

Although only 5 essays were selected for publication, all of the students who participated in this contest deserve recognition for submitting such thoughtful essays. Congratulations to all!

Noor Abouchahine, Modern University of Business and Science, Lebanon
Aneta Adamska, Krosno State College, Poland
Alina Adylbekova, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, Kyrgyzstan
Hajar Usama Akl, Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt
Haram Awan, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan
Noor Chehayeb, Modern University of Business and Science, Lebanon
Qing Dong, Shaanxi Normal University, China
Isabel Espinoza Herrera, Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola, Peru
Hanya Mohamed Sherif Ahmed Ezzat, Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt
Sarah Faircloth, East Carolina University, USA
Katelyn Fey, East Carolina University, USA
Mariam Yasser Fouda, Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt
Daria Galyaminskikh, Ural State Pedagogical University, Russia
Galina Gazizullina, Ural State Pedagogical University, Russia
Olesya Goldina, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia
Maria Gorshenina, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia
Miranda H. Guardiola, East Carolina University, USA
Saima Haroon, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan
Elizabeth Hollers, East Carolina University, USA
Sylwia Horowska, Krosno State College, Poland
Kong Xueling, Henan Polytechnic University, China
Veronika Kostenko, Maritime State University, Russia
Carson A. Krainiak, East Carolina University, USA
Cecilia Ng Ka Ling, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia
Liu Jingfang, Henan Polytechnic University, China
Shiqi Liu, Shaanxi Normal University, China
Liu Wenhua, Henan Polytechnic University, China
Youssef Tarek Hussien Kadry Mahmoud, Pharos University of Alexandria, Egypt
Taskeen Mansoor, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan
Kenyetta McLaurin, East Carolina University, USA
Kiril Miladinov, University American College Skopje, Macedonia
Daniel Molina Hernandez, Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico
Ana Karenly Morales García, Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico
Daniel Olecki, East Carolina University, USA
Irina Pafnutieva, Maritime State University, Russia
Monika Piskadło, Krosno State College, Poland
Ting Poh Poh, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia
Daniela Romero, Universidad del Pacifico, Ecuador
Sonia Romero Pico, Universidad del Pacifico, Ecuador
Yang Shuang, Shaanxi Normal University, China
Kyle Smith, East Carolina University, USA
Tamara Taseva, University American College Skopje, Macedonia

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Alexis White, East Carolina University, USA
Benjamin Wigand, East Carolina University, USA
Leah Wojciechowski, East Carolina University, USA
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Vyacheslav Zakharov, Maritime State University, Russia
Zhang Wen, Henan Polytechnic University, China
Yunpeng Zhao, Shaanxi Normal University, China
Karla Angeles Zuñiga, Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola, Peru