

## **Advancing Family Science and Family Science Programs through the Internationalization of Family Science Curricula**

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**ABSTRACT.** As scholars and practitioners seek ways to advance family science and family science programs, globalization is an important consideration. Indeed, internationalization of curricula is a current trend in higher education that merits serious consideration given increasing numbers of graduates will work in international and global contexts and/or with international and global families. Currently, few programs offer students perspectives on families that extend beyond U.S. cultural norms. This article addresses these concerns by providing faculty and administrators basic ideas for integrating international/global examples, assignments, and programs into family science curricula, emphasizing campus, community, and other resources available at minimal or reduced costs.

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### **Advancing Family Science and Family Science Programs through the Internationalization of Family Science Curricula**

Instructors, practitioners, and researchers of family science recognize the importance of adaptation/change. As family structures, legal systems, and societal norms change, family science curricula, interventions, programs, and research interests also change. Staying abreast of the latest developments in research and practice is a hallmark of family science. Indeed, the desire for progress seems to be the impetus for this special issue of *Family Science Review*, which focuses on advancing family science and family science programs.

As scholars look to advance family science, they must consider ways in which globalization is changing family dynamics. Currently, few departments or programs seek to integrate global ideas into family studies. However, international education organizations continue to call for increased internationalization of the entire university curriculum. This oversight stems not from lack of interest, but is the result of limited exposure to other cultures. Even international faculty members often have in-depth experience with only two or three cultures. This presents numerous challenges for scholars, teachers, and practitioners. For example, theoretical arguments are the foundation of teaching, practice, and research in family science. However, little theorizing about families accounts for globalization. Thus, explanations for many familial phenomena are incomplete and often are culturally/nationally specific, which limits the ability of family science programs to prepare their students for a global world. Furthermore, given ever decreasing financial resources, many departments cannot expand their training and programming beyond the campus, let alone internationally. Given these constraints, there is little wonder as to why family science programs lack international focus.

Lack of attention to globalization is problematic given increasing numbers of graduates from family science programs find themselves working with international families. Failing to provide students' academic and practical experiences with international families means that family science programs are not preparing graduates for the global marketplace. In essence, the national focus of most family science programs (driven by current theory and research) shortchanges students by not preparing them for a post-graduate world. Lack of attention to international families at the graduate level compounds the problem because it leads future practitioners, educators, and researchers to maintain the status quo. Given the needs of students and the aforementioned constraints, the purpose of this article is to outline some ways in which faculty can begin the process of internationalizing family science curricula with limited resources. The suggestions below are by no means exhaustive. They are meant to provide a starting point for (a) discussions among faculty about ways to internationalize family science curricula and (b) resources for beginning the process of integrating international family examples, scenarios, and other instructional activities into curricula. Specifically, this article addresses campus resources, community resources, and governmental/organizational resources useful for faculty as they seek to advance their programs.

### **Campus Resources**

Many universities already have resources to help faculty internationalize family science curricula. Offices of multicultural affairs or international affairs (and sometimes both) exist on most campuses. These offices are valuable resources because their staffers are likely to be individuals with significant international experiences and a variety of international contacts. They may also administer programs designed to foster intercultural awareness on university campuses. For example, international fairs/days are a common method of exposing individuals to cultures beyond their own. Some campuses have “friend” programs designed to connect U.S. students with international students in the hope that these cross-cultural relationships can help international students transition to university life. Assignments requiring students’ participation in such programs are an excellent way to achieve curricular goals because students learn directly from international students about their families while applying course concepts to these interactions. Faculty members often overlook these resources as many have misperceptions about the function of these offices. However, international and multicultural affairs offices are in unique positions to assist faculty with curricular development. For example, these offices are especially useful for enhancing diversity courses required in most family science programs, which too often focus solely on diversity within national cultures (e.g., racial/ethnic relations in the U.S.). Family science programs acknowledge diversity is a critical component of education. However, that acknowledgement should not accompany exclusion of global families from the curriculum, since diversity exists within and outside the U.S.

Study abroad is another campus resource that can be useful to faculties as they work to internationalize their curricula. Many institutions provide opportunities for faculty members to develop discipline specific study abroad programs. Developing a departmental study abroad program is an excellent way to (a) forge international contacts in the field, (b) expose faculty members to diverse cultures, and (c) provide students with international experiences that relate directly to their academic programs. Furthermore, study abroad in locations where students are not fluent in the dominant language is important for students who may work with families whose primary language is not the language of the host culture because it helps students understand the experiences of these families. For a department or campus where developing such a program is not feasible, study abroad offices can recommend programs for students that would best fit major curricula. Developing relationships with providers of other study abroad programs is one method for connecting students with appropriate programs and for ensuring achievement of specific curricular goals for internationalization. Regardless of a program’s ability to develop study abroad options on its campus, faculty should encourage students to study abroad to gain international experiences that will likely be essential to their future work with families.

Educational institutions that employ international faculty members or have international students have designated administrative officers with the responsibility for processing visas for these individuals. Unless a campus has a law school with a specialist in immigration law, this individual is often the best informed person on campus in the area of immigration policy and practice. Many family science practitioners need to understand basic immigration policy, especially if they work with diverse communities. Thus, this staff member could be an important

guest speaker in family courses or assist in development of courses on immigrant families. This person could also serve as a contact to connect faculty with international faculty and students.

International faculty members and students are invaluable resources for internationalizing curricula because they can provide students firsthand knowledge of how families function in other cultures. These individuals are often willing to share their time and experiences with students and faculty members as it increases people's understanding of their lives and cultures. Forging relationships with international faculty members can provide for interdisciplinary collaboration along with increasing students' exposure to international families. Furthermore, it can assist international faculty members in adapting to university life at the institution.

Many universities, centers for teaching and learning, and external funding organizations also offer development funds for the express purpose of improving instruction. Partnering with centers for teaching and learning would allow family science programs to bring experts in international education to their campuses to help with program development and with internationalization of the entire university curriculum. Moreover, some institutions maintain specific funds reserved for international travel and international education. Faculty members interested in internationalizing curricula could use such development funds to participate in program exchanges. Combining these funds with external grants, travel awards, and other awards could minimize costs of internationalizing curricula.

One family science program that embodies many of the aforementioned ideas is the Child, Youth, and Family Studies (CYFS) program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Through the relatively recent formation of a Global Consortium for International Family Studies, the CYFS program brings together family science experts from Australia, Greece, China, India, and the U.S. The program offers graduate specialization in international family studies that involves faculty and students around the globe. While it is not possible for every family science program to emulate CYFS, those wishing to internationalize their curricula should explore CYFS's program for ideas they could implement on their own campuses.

### **Community Resources**

As faculty members move beyond the resources of a campus, they typically find that even communities that appear monolithic rarely are. Individuals and organizations within local communities provide opportunities to connect students with international family experiences. The value of these community resources is the diversity of the resources. For example, including guest speakers where appropriate is a great way to engage students and internationalize curriculum. In fact, guest speakers need not be international speakers. For example, family attorneys who specialize in international adoption have expertise with international families, adoption processes, and international governments. These attorneys are excellent resources because they can compare and contrast U.S. cultures and laws to cultures and laws of other

nations. Hearing from these experts is especially important for students who will be practitioners working with international families (e.g., social work students).

Many religious organizations sponsor mission trips, missionary exchanges, and international students studying religion in the U.S. Similar to family attorneys, missionaries can provide insight into differences in family life across cultures as well as the role of religion (a significant part of family life for many individuals) in these diverse families. Family studies programs at religious institutions are in especially advantageous positions for utilizing these types of resources. Some faith-based universities offer religion/missions courses that could be cross-listed or that family science faculty members could co-teach as part of efforts to internationalize family science curricula.

Connecting with family organizations in the community is another way to internationalize family science curricula. These organizations often work with international families living in the community and can provide insight into challenges these families face while also offering students and faculty insight into the community resources available to assist these families. For example, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Fort Wayne, Indiana hosts a monthly series for the community entitled Diversity Dialogues, designed to foster increased understanding, awareness, and tolerance of a variety of family issues. For practical programs it is important that students learn about challenges that international families living in the U.S. face. Organizations such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) often have staff members and volunteers who have numerous experiences working with international families. These staff and volunteers can serve as excellent resources in helping faculty members internationalize curricula in meaningful ways for students. These individuals often understand nuances of family law and policy as they relate to international families that are critical for practical programs (e.g., social work).

Cities or communities with ethnic enclaves and/or large international communities often have community or cultural centers devoted to preserving cultural traditions of the primary culture. One great aspect of cultural centers is that staff members can often connect faculty members with cultural experts to serve as guest lecturers. Cultural events hosted at these centers also give students the opportunities to experience rituals, language, and family life as experienced in the primary culture. Similarly, many communities also have ethnic food stores/markets whose staff members can be valuable resources. Students who wish to become family science practitioners also need awareness of the ways in which diet, lifestyle, employment law, and other familial factors differ among cultures because these factors provide insight into family life.

Additionally, museums and historical centers offer valuable information about contemporary as well as historical families. Class excursions or even faculty member trips to these locations can provide important information that is useful for internationalizing curricula. For example, the Ellis Island Immigration Museum features background details on how families came to the U.S. and from whence they came. Furthermore, the museum supplies historical context in understanding the contemporary immigration debate, which is a significant challenge for many modern families. Sites such as the Japanese Internment Camps of World War II

provide insight into family life of a specific ethnic group at a specific time in history. Internationalizing family studies curricula requires understanding of the history of individuals and groups, foreign and domestic. This is a key way in which community resources are useful for internationalization of family science curricula.

### **Governmental, Exchange, and Other Organizational Resources**

Moving beyond the campus and local communities provides faculties additional opportunities to integrate international and global information into their curricula. Family science programs located in major metropolitan areas often have access to embassy and consular personnel who can provide guest lectures, information about faculty/program exchanges, and other cultural opportunities that would connect with curricular goals. Many embassies have personnel whose primary responsibilities include educational programming in the host country in an effort to forge international cooperation and understanding. These individuals are valuable resources for faculty wishing to internationalize their curricula because they often have expertise in curricular design and programming. They can also connect faculty with practitioners and researchers from their own countries who can provide background information, resources, and curricular suggestions. For example, if a social work department wanted to offer a course in comparative social policy or comparative social work practice, connecting with foreign social workers through a country's education specialists residing in the U.S. could minimize the course development work required of faculty. This interaction could also maximize student and faculty exposure to international family law/policy and social work practice.

International exchange programs designed to foster interaction between U.S. and foreign universities, faculties, and students are important resources. For example, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) sponsors faculty exchanges, undergraduate and graduate student scholarships, study trips, lectures, and institutes designed to foster greater understanding of German culture. In fact, DAAD defrays or covers costs associated with these exchanges for teaching and/or research. The U.S. Department of State (through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs) sponsors various exchange programs for U.S. citizens and non-citizens. These include the world famous Fulbright Program, an excellent opportunity for faculty and graduate students to conduct field research, acquire language skills, and develop international contacts. Exchange programs are one way for faculty to connect with international scholars and expand their understanding of other cultures while working toward professional goals.

Several professional organizations focused on international education provide educational resources for faculty and students. For example, the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) sponsors several International Faculty Development Seminars (IDFS) each year. The seminars take place in countries around the world and focus on specific topics of interest to faculty across various disciplines (e.g., sustainability). Discounts and fellowships are available to faculty employed at CIEE member institutions.

Many professional organizations also host international conferences. For example, the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR) hosts every other biannual

conference in a location outside the U.S. Attending conferences outside the U.S. is a great way to meet international scholars and to explore familial life in other cultures. Specifically, attending a conference in Australia provides opportunities for scholars to connect with researchers at the Australian Institute for Family Studies (AIFS). Founded by the Australian government, AIFS pursues the goal of research on family wellbeing. Along with publishing research on Australian families, AIFS grants researchers access to data sets for secondary data analyses. Forging connections with such organizations is an excellent method for acquiring information and examples about international families to integrate into curricula. Many institutions will also fund presentations at international conferences (some institutions have more money for international conferences than for national conferences). Furthermore, professional organizations should consider inviting international scholars to participate in and provide training at meetings and conferences. Conference planners should give attention to the need for internationalization of family science programs and curricula and encourage those who submit to their conferences to do so as well.

Some states and higher education systems also have programs designed to help faculty members internationalize their curricula. For example, the Indiana Consortium for International Programs (ICIP) is committed to helping member institutions in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky internationalize their curricula. ICIP offers grants, conferences, and study tours to faculty members seeking to add international dimensions to their curricula. Organizations such as ICIP often provide different resources for faculty members and students to gain international experience. Furthermore, the express mission of many of these organizations is to improve the international focus of curricula at minimal cost to participants.

In addition to personal and professional examples, media examples are also an excellent resource for internationalizing family science curricula. International films provide numerous examples of family interactions in many cultural contexts. International colleagues could provide information about appropriate films. YouTube has numerous video clips from around the world. International media organizations (e.g., Al-Jazeera) offer glimpses into how other cultures view families. For faculty seeking international film examples, submissions to the International Family Film Festival (IFFF) might be a useful resource to consider. This annual film festival takes place in Hollywood, California and screens a variety of international films. Furthermore, media examples are excellent in that they often connect with students and are a very cost effective method for internationalizing curricula.

### **Summary**

As this article indicates, there is a plethora of methods for internationalizing family science curricula even with the limited resources available to most contemporary academic institutions. While this article only scratches the surface of options at the disposal of most faculties, it does highlight the ease with which faculties can begin modifying their curricula to

address needs of global families and practitioners working with those families. Although this is one of many ways for advancing family science (see other articles in this issue for examples), internationalization of family science programs is necessary for preparing students and researchers to meet challenges of modern families.

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