

Cultivating Cultural Competency: The Impact of Incorporating Global Studies into Undergraduate Nursing Curricula

Charlotte A. Buoni, DNP, MSN, RN, CCRN, CNE

As our world connections continue to expand globally through internet resources and social media outlets, students have an increased desire to travel and study abroad during their undergraduate education. Open Doors, a platform for U.S. Government data on student mobility, reported a 49% increase for the 2022–2023 academic year from the year prior in the number of U.S. students studying abroad for course credits (Institute of International Education, Inc., 2024). Students describe wanting to explore an unfamiliar part of the world, experience diverse cultures, and see the world from a new perspective as reasons for wanting to study abroad (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Nursing programs have the unique position to offer these opportunities while aligning the objectives of travel to their program's specific curriculum and end-of-program student learning outcomes.

Cultural competency in healthcare is more important today than ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic opened our eyes to how disease awareness and wellness initiatives must extend beyond borders. Nurses entering the profession care for a population that is older and more culturally diverse, requiring knowledge and understanding of how different cultures view and utilize healthcare resources (Jarosinski et al., 2024). Immersing students in a global study opportunity that focuses on the healthcare needs and practices of a host community is an excellent way to provide this education.

The ability to work as part of a team

on mutual goals and shared decision-making is crucial to nursing practice. In fact, “teamwork and collaboration” is one of the six competencies outlined for nursing programs to integrate into their curriculum to prepare nurses with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for safe, competent care by The Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Institute (QSEN, 2022). Students describe that through the global study experience, they develop a kinship with the members of the community as well as their peers on the trip, creating deep relationships with others and with nursing that will carry over into their careers (Jarosinski et al., 2024; Morgan, 2023).

Margaret H. Rollins School of Nursing (MHR) at Beebe Healthcare first integrated Global Studies as a Student Council Organization (SCO) activity in January 2020, where 20 students and two faculty partnered with MEDLIFE on a Service-Learning Trip (SLT) to Lima, Peru. MEDLIFE is a service organization providing medication, education, and development to low-income families everywhere and has permanent locations established in several South American communities (MEDLIFE, 2024). During this trip, students and faculty worked alongside MEDLIFE personnel, community leaders, and healthcare providers in mobile health clinics and community project development over the course of one week during the off-season of our program. The SCO President, senior student Lexi Leskovac, shared:

I will always cherish the lessons I

learned in Peru and the individuals who let us be part of their lives. This time in Peru positively impacted my leadership skills in the workplace and amongst my fellow new graduate peers. This was one of the most eye-opening experiences I have ever had, and I wish everyone the opportunity to experience the same (L. Leskovac, personal communication, 2020).

This initiative was a success and resumed in 2024 as an SCO event with plans to continue every other year. Fundraising is essential for this opportunity to be financially affordable for many students. Community support plays a large role, as shared by Kay Young, Director of the Foundation of Beebe Healthcare:

This community has been supporting the Margaret H. Rollins School of Nursing for over 100 years. Our alumni and contributors deeply understand the importance of scholarship funding, capital support for the school, and providing nursing students with the opportunity to participate in international mission trips. These immersive experiences allow students to serve communities in need, offering them invaluable learning opportunities while making a significant impact on global healthcare. In turn, they return to our community with exceptional training, broadened experiences, and a new perspective on providing care—whether here at home in Lewes, Delaware, or wherever their careers take them. (K. Young, personal communication, 2024)

Studying social determinants of health and populations with healthcare

disparities is integral to undergraduate nursing curricula. The MHR nursing program expanded its community and population health unit during the spring of 2024, with students assigned a project focusing on local and global populations with healthcare disparities. Seniors who participated in the SLT utilized their time that week to learn more about the population under study and to meet the objectives of the community service project presentation for their upcoming spring semester. This aligned the global SLT with course and end-of-program student learning objectives, especially

those focused on teamwork, community, and care for individuals of all cultural backgrounds (Margaret H. Rollins School of Nursing, 2025).

Studying abroad gives students the opportunity to witness and assist healthcare professionals in these countries interacting with their clients. These nurses and healthcare professionals provide role-modeling and experiential learning essential to the professional growth and development of students, demonstrating the importance of establishing trust and providing patient-centric care respectful of the culture's practices. Students who

participate in global studies consistently report outcomes of increased cultural competency and enhanced interpersonal skills through teamwork and collaboration (Jarosinski et al., 2024; Morgan, 2023; O'Donnell et al., 2022). These care practices can be adopted by the students and applied in their practice as they grow into healthcare professionals who provide culturally competent care to the members of our diverse community here in Delaware. ■

References

- Institute of International Education. (2024). *Open doors: U.S. study abroad*. <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/us-study-abroad/>
- Jarosinski, J.M., Fox, J.A., & Marshall, S.E. (2024). Lessons learned: Why study-abroad remains a critical component of nursing curricula. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 53, 110-117.
- Margaret H. Rollins School of Nursing. (2025). *Graduate competencies*. <https://www.beebehealthcare.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Student%20Handbook%202024-2025.pdf>
- MEDLIFE. (2024). *Service-learning trips*. <https://www.medlifemovement.org/>
- Morgan, D. (2023). Parameters of learning during clinical nursing study abroad: Focused analysis of phenomenological data using a change-transformative learning theory lens. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 73, 1-7.
- O'Donnell, C., O'Brien, B., Markey, K., McCarthy, J., Flaten, C., Mueller, C., Leinen, E., Martin, K., & Graham, M. (2022). Transatlantic collaborations: Baccalaureate nursing students' experiences of participating in a semester-long study abroad program. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 43(6), 357-362.
- Quality and Safety Education for Nurses. (2022). *QSEN competencies*. <https://www.qsen.org/competencies-pre-licensure-ksas>
- U.S. Department of State. (2024). *The value of study abroad*. <https://studyabroad.state.gov/value-study-abroad/why-study-abroad>



The DAISY FOUNDATION™
HONORING NURSES INTERNATIONALLY
IN MEMORY OF J. PATRICK BARNES

Want to Say Thank You to a Delaware Nurse?

Share your story of compassionate and skillful
nursing care.

www.DAISYnomination.org/DNA

Delaware Nurses Association