

# The Impact of First-Year Foundations of Business Global Classrooms on Subsequent Global Engagement and Learning Outcomes

Jodi Cataline, Dana D'Angelo, Tatiana Fried, Lia Richter

Lebow College of Business, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Email: [dangeldc@drexel.edu](mailto:dangeldc@drexel.edu)

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## Abstract

Global Classrooms (GC) allow students the innovation in curriculum to work with international students and faculty who are enrolled in participating partner universities around the world. Students who take part in these global classroom experiences focus on team-based projects through mutual collaborations. After the project concludes, students write reflective papers on their experience. Students involved in international virtual exchange through global classrooms are impacted long term through the development of broadened ways of thinking, connecting, and engaging globally.

## Keywords

GC (Global Classroom), COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), IVE (International Virtual Exchange), Student Engagement, First-Year Students

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## 1. Introduction

Through the Foundations of Business Global Classroom (FBGC) I and II courses, Drexel University's LeBow College of Business offers a globally minded program to first-year business students. This unique approach of early exposure to global work provides many benefits to all of the parties involved. A qualitative KSA (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) analysis was conducted to examine the learning outcomes recognized by these first-year students through a review of reflective assessments submitted after the conclusion of the program. The same students

were subsequently tracked throughout the remainder of their enrollment at Drexel on if and how they furthered their global engagement. In addition, quantitative analysis based upon enrolled student data collected over the eight-year period showed evidence that over a third of the students who participated in the global classroom during their first year pursued at least one other global experience throughout the remainder of their academic career, with some students embarking on as many as six additional post global classroom endeavors.

## 2. Overview of International Virtual Exchange Global Classrooms

There have been several research initiatives around the introduction of international virtual exchange (also known as a global classroom) to students in higher education. According to *A Global Classroom for International Sustainability Education*, the global classroom is built on a hands-on, collaborative research model that is inquiry-based, problem-driven, context-sensitive, and solution-oriented. By combining interdisciplinary liberal arts approaches based on historical, epistemological, ethical, and sociological analyses with a problem-based and solution-oriented sustainability science research educational model, the global classroom uses virtual technologies to educate students on ways to engage and contextualize complex sustainability problems (Wiek et al., 2013). The need for the global classroom was brought on by the impact of globalization in the business world and the demand for international team collaboration. Using technology, the global classroom has seen more widespread use in universities to prepare students for working with international teams and in a globally minded world. From an article posted in the *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, the rapid rate of globalization and the developments in information and communication technology have significantly changed the way work is conducted in organizations. Following the rise of reliance on virtual collaboration in the business world, academia has also adopted virtual technologies, initially in delivering distance learning, but eventually, as a means of enhancing the in-class experience (Taras et al., 2013). The benefits of the global classroom have expanded as globalization has grown, and higher education has adapted accordingly.

Over the past decade, universities have been implementing global classrooms to enhance their students' learning and global engagement. Higher education institutions have adopted international virtual exchange programs to provide students with a well-rounded education and to introduce students to new and different cultures during their careers. The necessity for introducing these virtual exchanges has additionally grown due to COVID-19, but well before the pandemic, global classrooms have had very impactful outcomes within curriculums. Research shows that the positive long-term impacts of global classroom initiatives include improving teaching methods, international learning, communication, inclusivity, diversity, increased interest in international cultures, and increased probability of learning an additional language (Siergiejczyk, 2020).

### 3. Background and History of the Foundations of Business Global Classroom (FBGC) at Drexel University LeBow College of Business

Global classrooms at Drexel University are specific courses across the curriculum that engage its students with students from one of its partner universities abroad in a content-driven project using a range of interactive technologies. Faculty from any discipline incorporate a global element into their course objectives and relate it to an international partner institution's offered course or module. A global classroom's purpose is to connect students with different cultural and geophysical perspectives and experiences via internationalizing the curriculum, providing different perspectives regarding fields of study, facilitating cross-cultural experiences for students, and developing or expanding international research agendas.

For the LeBow College of Business, the global classroom initiative starts with selective Foundations of Business I and II course sections in an undergraduate student's first-year curriculum. This "global out of the gate" approach enrolls selected first-year business students in an effort to provide unique experiences at the start of an academic career<sup>1</sup>. In the Foundations of Business Global Classroom (FBGC) I and II courses typically offered, students are placed into teams with other students from universities abroad. The integrated student teams are then tasked with collaborating together to reach common objectives in their respective courses through projects designed to enhance content as well as cultural learning.

In fall 2014, the first global classroom project was launched in one Foundations of Business I course section and a selected group of students at the University of Leeds in England. This initial pilot program spanned one month, and was done synchronously, using what was then a new and innovative technology called *Zoom*. It was very successful for both faculty and students.

Building on that success, the FBGC was expanded the following fall in 2015 with an additional course section, engaging and onboarding another Drexel LeBow faculty member. Building on the momentum, by the academic year 2016-2017, three course sections were offered, as well as a follow-on global classroom project in the following semester in the sequence course, Foundations of Business II. All the projects were done in continued collaboration with University of Leeds (Simmons et al., 2017).

In its fourth and fifth years, the FBGC continued to expand, adding both a fourth course sections, as well as two additional global partner universities' faculty and students. Drexel LeBow faculty began to gather research and present through multiple international publications and conferences, in collaboration with their FBGC partners. Additionally, optional travel components were de-

<sup>1</sup>Drexel University students enrolled in the global classroom are those who self-selected to declare International Business as a major; opted to be a part of a Global Learning Community (GLC); are First Year Exploratory students in the Goodwin College of Professional Studies; or requested to be placed into a course section with a global classroom component.

veloped and were offered to Drexel students; these faculty-led short-term programs are known as Intensive Courses Abroad (ICA) at Drexel University.

Through 2018, the FBGC projects were done using a one-to-one partner connection - Drexel and one partner university per section. In 2019, the FBGC student projects were further enhanced so that students could collaboratively work with multiple universities on one project (a three-way global classroom). This multi-partner structure also applied to the optional travel components, where three partners met in one location, bringing faculty and students together for a one-week intensive course abroad.

During the pandemic, the established global classrooms from the FBGC history provided a seamless transition to fully remote learning for Drexel LeBow (and partner university) students. Continued and ongoing assessment supports pre-pandemic successes.

#### **4. Additional Global Engagement Opportunities at Drexel University**

In addition to global classrooms, students at Drexel University have several other established opportunities to globally engage, both traditional and unique, and with mobility and non-mobility. These other global options are briefly explained below and are used as a basis for the research analysis to understand a student's global activity after the FBGC experience.

##### *Global Engagement Scholars*

The Global Engagement Scholar (GES) program provides Drexel University students with the necessary structure to document and connect a wide variety of international experiences to become globally minded professionals. To earn this achievement, students must complete a combination of globally oriented coursework and co-curricular activities. These can include a combination of study or co-op abroad, foreign language study, and participation in related campus organizations and events. A travel element is not required. (For more information see <https://drexel.edu/global/student-programs/global-engagement-scholars/>)

##### *Traditional Study Abroad (Free-Standing Full-Term Programs)*

Study abroad opportunities allow for students to choose one of 30 available locations to spend a ten-week quarter to fully immerse themselves in the culture of their selected region. Available courses and study opportunities differ by quarter. While exploring abroad, students complete specific coursework that aligns with their degree requirements at a partnered university. (For more information see

<https://drexel.edu/global/student-programs/education-abroad/programs/undergraduate-programs/full-term-ug-country/>)

##### *International Consulting Residencies*

International Residencies provide students with the opportunity to study the global dimensions of business decisions. After ten to twelve weeks of dedicated coursework, students travel to immerse themselves and to develop a deeper un-

derstanding of the international economic and business environment along with the opportunities and challenges facing companies in that area. (For more information see

<https://www.lebow.drexel.edu/academics/undergraduate/experiential-learning/international-opportunities/international-residencies>)

*Intensive Course(s) Abroad (Short Term Faculty Led Programs)*

At Drexel University, Intensive Courses Abroad offer the opportunity to have international academic experiences in a condensed period, typically seven to ten days. Drexel University faculty lead the program, which often includes an on-campus course before and/or after traveling either to prepare the students for the upcoming travel or to reflect on the experience abroad. (For more information see

<https://drexel.edu/global/student-programs/education-abroad/programs/intensive-courses-abroad/>)

*Global Research with STAR*

Through the STAR (Students Tackling Advanced Research) Scholars Program, undergraduate students can work under a faculty member to conduct research. The research topics vary depending on the faculty mentor of the student but typically involve a global aspect. The research findings are presented in the STAR Scholars showcase. (For more information see

<https://drexel.edu/pennoni/urep/undergraduate-research/STAR-scholars/>)

## 5. Research and Methodology

As information was being collected throughout the initiation and expansion of the Foundations of Business Global Classroom, it was observed that the majority of the undergraduate students reported valuable and applicable takeaways, and a greater interest in global engagement. This evidence then prompted additional research and analysis on how the FBGC experience directly impacted first-year students to subsequently engage in other global opportunities before graduation.

The research conducted since the launch of the FBGC in 2014 has been both qualitative and quantitative. Overall, the analysis focuses on the impacts of participation in the FBGC on subsequent academic years for the students' personal and professional development as well as their activity and involvement in international opportunities.

## 6. Qualitative Data and Results

In the 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 academic years, two undergraduate students from Drexel University's LeBow College of Business respectively took part in a specialized research program, Students Tackling Advanced Research (STAR), that is offered at the University. This faculty-mentored research opportunity requires students to spend 350 hours doing research and related activities, and then present their findings at the STAR Scholars Summer Showcase. A portion of the results from these two projects is highlighted in this article; the students

were mentored by the authors, and they compiled and analyzed data from the FBGC.

Upon completion of each FBGC course, enrolled students are asked to write a reflection paper to articulate their experiences and learnings. In total, over 150 papers were scanned and analyzed for themes and patterns. The qualitative data from the student reflective responses was examined using a Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude (KSA) analysis. Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes analysis is a process that is based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Learning outcomes are classified so that students can identify areas of strength and educators can pinpoint areas of improvement. The six-level framework for teaching and learning objectives are: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. After this framework is applied, the learning outcomes are measured in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities (also often referred to as knowledge, skills, and attitudes) (Bloom, 1956).

A preliminary scan of the FBGC reflections allowed for the data relating to Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes to be reviewed. For the purposes of this research, knowledge was defined as "remembering, reasoning, problem solving, concept formation, and to a limited extent, creative thinking". Skills were developed when "the individual can find appropriate information and techniques in his previous experience to bring to bear on new problems and situations". Lastly, attitudes were defined as "interest, attitudes, and values, and the development of appreciations and adequate adjustment" (Anderson et al., 2001).

After the initial scan was conducted to point out the learning outcomes that the students self-reported, the data was then categorized into the KSA format in a second scan. The third scan of the reflection papers was to ensure that no self-reported takeaways that were discussed in the papers were missed during evaluation. The fourth and final scans ensured that no learnings were miscategorized. From there, qualitative results were consolidated, analyzed, and compared across categories.

The analysis of the student reflective papers resulted in top themes that appeared on several occasions throughout the reflection papers. The number of occurrences represents the number of times a student mentioned the theme in their response. In each response, one student could list more than one knowledge item, skill, or attitude, depending on their experience. The percentages illustrate the repetition of the theme compared to the total number of knowledge items, skills, or attitudes recorded. The findings are summarized in the tables below as **Exhibits A, B** and **C**. All values are listed in descending order by percentage from most often to least often stated.

**Exhibit A** shows the most common themes that were present for knowledge gained. The top three themes were: gaining knowledge of markets and industry through research; understanding working in a dynamic global team; and applying business knowledge taught in the classroom to the project work. The first theme, knowledge of markets and industry through research, was the most

common occurrence with 23.97%. The FBGC projects often involve a heavy research component that focuses on understanding specific aspects of an industry or market situation. Students use secondary and sometimes primary resources to find information and data relating to their research topic. The second theme, understanding working in a dynamic global team, was also highly reported with 21.23% of occurrences. Students remarked that they learned more about direct global teamwork through their FBGC projects (including language barriers, distinct separate cultures, and time differences). The third theme, applying business knowledge taught in the classroom to the project work, was apparent in 14.38% of responses. The FBGC course introduces students to a variety of topics including accounting, finance, marketing, operations, and business ethics, among other things that correspond with relevant business problems analyzed in the participating students' team projects.

**Exhibit B** illustrates the most frequent occurrences present in terms of skills acquired. The top three themes were teamwork and collaboration, communication and listening, and presentation skills. The first theme, teamwork and collaboration, occurred in 21.88% of student responses. This response highlights the interpersonal skills that were used and gained during participation in the FBGC. This is especially notable when it comes to the global challenges to overcome such as time differences, cultural contrasts, and language barriers. The second theme, communication and listening, was prevalent in 20.54% of responses. A major component of the FBGC experience is learning how to work on a team of people that are from diverse backgrounds. Learning when to listen and when to speak up, accounting for differences in culture and language, falls under this category. The third theme that was noted was presentation skills with 19.64% of responses. The FBGC courses require a final project and presentation of findings for the students to present at the end of the term. With restrictions on delivery time and visual aids, students noted an improvement in presentation skills specifically in slide design and as well as speaking to the topics in a concise yet knowledgeable manner.

**Exhibit C** acknowledges the most consistent instances present in terms of attitudes toward various related topics from the project. The top three attitudes noted were global perspective, personal growth and understanding of self, and appreciation of team dynamics and communication. The first theme, global perspective, accounted for in 41.46% of responses. The FBGC encourages students to tackle a global problem that challenges them to expand their outlook and perspective. The teams often represent students from multiple parts of the world, which additionally adds to the global aspects of the course. The second theme, personal growth and understanding of self, presented in 27.44% of the responses. The FBGC final project and presentation allows for students to work in a global team to accomplish a common goal, while examining their own strengths and areas of development in that contribution. The third theme, appreciation of team dynamics and communication, was in 20.12% of responses.

For students, this is often one of their first experiences working in teams towards a common outcome. Learning about the importance of understanding various team dynamics, team roles, leadership styles, and the teamwork phases, are critical components to the FBGC experience.

Though this analysis involves business students, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained are transferable to many contexts and are also interconnected. They cross both personal and professional development, individual and teamwork, local and global environments, and short- and long-term growth. The students were able to identify this learning, and it was easily mapped to Bloom's framework. The unique benefit of the FBGC was that it also is offered in the very beginning of a student's academic career at the university, providing a particular "jump start" to building these KSAs that often otherwise occurs in later years as an undergraduate student.

## 7. Quantitative Data and Results

The quantitative data collected was a compilation of all student's global experiences recorded over the course of academic years 2014 to 2021 for students that participated in the FBGC. The data was captured and analyzed in Microsoft Excel. Data collected included student name, university identification number, academic year of enrollment in the FBGC, and additional international experience sought. The experiences available for further engagement in global opportunities were: 1) traditional study abroad, 2) Intensive Courses Abroad (ICA's), 3) Global Engagement Scholars Program, 4) International Residencies, and 5) global research. This has all been captured and defined in the paragraph titled "Additional Global Engagement Opportunities at Drexel University" and further defined in that paragraph.

An analysis was conducted to determine and quantify the percentage of students who, after participation in FBGC, went on to engage in another global experience offering at Drexel University. The data was compiled reviewing completed study abroad applications, enrollment in the Global Engagement Scholar program, participation and enrollment in specific course designations for both the ICA's and International Residencies. The data does not determine when after completion of the FBGC subsequent engagement occurred, only that the student did pursue and experience another global opportunity prior to graduation from Drexel University. This methodology became rather useful considering that during data collection the world was impacted by the COVID-19 virus, and many international opportunities ceased.

Building upon the KSA research, the post-participation global engagement of FBGC students was gathered and analyzed to ascertain if and how the experience in the first year impacted interest and participation in global opportunities in subsequent academic years. Note that Drexel University primarily has students enrolled for five years, with eighteen months of cooperative work experience embedded as part of their coursework. Note also that data was not collected on



whether the student worked internationally, as those opportunities are somewhat prohibitive in nature and not the “norm” of a co-op student.

The data that was collected and analyzed had a total of 522 students who enrolled in the Foundational of Business Global Classroom during their first year at Drexel University’s LeBow College of Business. The time span of data collection was between the 2014 and 2021 fall semesters, including the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

The data produced results as evidenced in the following tables labelled D and E below. With 522 students participating in the FBGC, 174 individual students sought one or more additional global experiences, which is 33.33% of the population size. **Exhibit D** will demonstrate a breakdown of the percentage of students by year.

**Exhibit E** depicts the students who pursued additional global experiences. Of the 174 students who engaged post FBGC there was a total of 266 additional global experiences sought completion of the global classroom. The breakdown of those experiences is as follows: 48.5% pursued an Intensive Course Abroad, 25.9% pursued a traditional study abroad, 11.3% pursued the Global Engagement Scholar program, 8.6% pursued another global classroom, 3.0% pursued global research opportunities and lastly 2.6% pursued an International Residency. The experiences were not tracked by when the student sought them; however, they were tracked by type of experience. Some students pursued up to six additional experiences prior to graduation. Note that 77.1% of the above additional experiences sought were international mobility experiences. The data was not differentiated based on demographics; each student was tracked only by student ID number, year enrollment year and experience sought.

## 8. Further Discussion

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many international programs for the academic year 19/20 were cancelled or postponed for health and safety purposes. The data set does encompass the global programs that have occurred during the 2014 to 2022 academic years, noting that the FBGC did continue during the pandemic, although travel experiences did not.

LeBow College of Business at Drexel University will also be adding new partnerships with more universities abroad to expand the FBGC experience and offer it to more students within the college and will continue to link optional mobility programs in the form of ICAs and other short-term study abroad programs to the FBGC. Additionally, more international virtual exchange programs will be added to the college’s course offerings in the upper-class years as global classrooms become more broadly integrated into the curriculum.

It should also be noted that the quantitative data is reflective of the first-term enrolled students in Foundations of Business I. Often students in other non-GC sections of the first course request to be enrolled in the GC sections for the second course of the sequence, thus joining the FBGC in Foundations of Busi-

ness II. Although not a significant number, those that do enroll are very engaged and have participated in varying subsequent global opportunities noted in this research. This research can be expanded to include that population in the future, but the researchers do not believe it will have statistically significant impact on the results.

Research will additionally expand to include alumni who are former FBGC students to understand the long-term impact of first-year global engagement. A first study conducted in 2020 for this post-graduation analysis indicated several highlights. In a survey of nearly 100 senior-level and graduated students, with a near 45% participation and completion rate, three-quarters of respondents stated that they had discussed their first-year international engagement opportunity in an interview three to four years after the GC itself; approximately two-thirds of respondents believed that they had a competitive advantage over their peers due to their international experience in their first semester and first year; and over half of respondents reported that they had used or planned to use KSAs developed from their first-year GC in their internships or jobs (D'Angelo et al., 2020).

Future opportunities based on this initial research will include ongoing coordination with Institutional Advancement and Alumni Relations. Data can be collected for alumni engagement of FBGC participants, as well as the global scope of post-graduation jobs or continuing education.

Further updated research conducted in 2021, with the support of an additional student researcher, studied the impacts of the FBGC on remote learning during the pandemic and focused on both the mental well-being and career development of participants. This study involved both surveys and focus group interviews. As shown in **Exhibit F**, data suggest that 78% stated they formed meaningful bonds with project teammates who were all virtual and from both various US domestic locations and from around the globe with partner university programs. Additionally, 70% of respondents stated that they would participate in another Global Classroom during their time at Drexel, which is reflective of the quantitative results and trends overall for global engagement, and 100% stated it provided a competitive edge when interviewing for internships. Lastly, when asked, 70% of respondents agreed that participation in the global classroom project improved their well-being during the pandemic shutdown.

Lastly, the data that was collected and quantified in **Exhibits D** and **E** below were additionally analyzed for retention, as it became apparent that the students who engaged post FBGC clearly continued to retain at Drexel University. The retention numbers with this data set have been significantly higher than with the college's data that has been collected. The average retention between the years of AY14/15 and AY 20/21 where college data was available show that the FBGC has an averaged 7.17% higher retention comparatively to graduation data over those specific years noted above, or year over year data as the students are measured throughout their enrollment in the college. Due to potential confidentiality issues, there will not be an attached table with specific data included in this article,

however the authors felt the retention was something to note to show demonstrate student engagement.

## 9. Conclusion

In addition to providing a unique curriculum that is also fun and memorable for a first-year student, global classrooms offered in foundation courses have both professional and personal impacts. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are garnered and applied much earlier for these participants, and the experience motivates them to seek more global opportunities, well beyond the engagement of a non FBGC student. The success of the FBGC has now also influenced the overall curriculum and is showing impact even beyond the time as a student. Well before the pandemic, international virtual exchange was being used to support global mindsets and build international experience. Having it already established allowed a very quick adaptation for full remote learning and offered human connection during an unprecedented time. Post-pandemic, the FBGC and other GCs will continue to broaden both student and faculty development.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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## Appendix

### Exhibit A

The most common themes that were present in terms of knowledge gained were as follows:

Knowledge	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Knowledge of Markets and Industry through Research	35	23.97%
Understanding Working in a Dynamic Global Team	31	21.23%
Application of Business Topics to Project Work	21	14.38%
Marketing Techniques	19	13.01%
Global and Cultural Awareness	17	11.64%
Leadership Techniques and Career Preparation	11	7.53%
Start-up Organizational Culture	6	4.11%
Presentation Creation Techniques	4	2.74%
Idea Development and Growth from an Intangible Concept	2	1.37%

### Exhibit B

The most common themes that were present in terms of skills used and gained were as follows:

Skills	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Teamwork and Collaboration	49	21.88%
Communication and Listening	46	20.54%
Presentation Skills	44	19.64%
Research	30	13.39%
Technical Skills	20	8.93%
Time Management	14	6.25%
Leadership	13	5.80%
Problem-solving	8	3.57%

### Exhibit C

The most common themes that were present in terms of attitudes gained were as follows:

Attitudes	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Global Perspective	68	41.46%
Personal Growth/Understanding of Self	45	27.44%
Appreciation of Team Dynamics and Communication	33	20.12%
Increased Motivation/Involvement	18	10.98%

**Exhibit D**

Term	Count of Enrolled GC Student	Students with Add'l Global Experiences	Pct of Students with Add'l Global Experiences
AY 14/15	23	3	13.04%
AY 15/16	45	19	42.22%
AY 16/17	36	20	55.56%
AY 17/18	69	23	33.33%
AY 18/19	74	44	59.46%
AY 19/20	95	37	38.95%
AY 20/21	81	16	19.75%
AY 21/22*	99	12	12.12%
Total	522	174	33.33%

There were 174 students out of 522 in total who sought an additional international experience or 33.33%. This includes all students with noting that students will more likely engage after completion of freshmen year; however, the newest members (rising sophomores) are still included in the data. \*With the omission of our newest population (AY 21/22) the overall percentage of additional engagement would increase to 38.3% (423 students 162 further engaged). Also note that AY 20/21 and AY 21/22 were pandemic years where international travel was prohibited so the decrease may have led to less engagement, or that engagement may just be postponed.

**Exhibit E**

	Count of Student Participation	Percentage of Student Participation
ICA's	129	48.5%
Study Abroad	69	25.9%
GES Scholar	30	11.3%
Int'l Residency	7	2.6%
Global Research	8	3.0%
Add'l Global Classroom	23	8.6%
Total	266	100.0%

**Exhibit F**

Criteria	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	Might/Might Not	Probably/Definitely Not
Participate in Another GC	33%	37%	22%	8%
Provided a Competitive Edge for Internships	58%	42%	NA	NA
Formed Bonds with Global Teammates	50%	28%	16%	6%