



Transcript: Episode 3

International Education, Diversity and Inclusion: Opening the Window to the World *A Conversation with Dr. Steve McDowell*

Elcin Haskollar: Welcome to Diversity Talks. I'm Dr. Elcin Haskollar. I am your host. Support for this podcast comes from Florida State University's Center for Global Engagement and the President's Diversity and Inclusion Mini-Grant Program. Diversity Talks is a collection of conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion that impact our campus, our communities and beyond. Get ready to hear from leaders, from professors, from lawyers, and diversity officers as we uncover their stories and journeys. Each week, we're going to have a special guest and we'll share their unique experiences about how to create change.

Steve McDowell: Considering the role of international students is also important because they bring, through their personal experience and relationships with people on campus, windows into the world that you can't get in a textbook or just in a video. So, you get to know people when you build relationships, and that's hard even if we're sharing the same space. It's hard to build those relationships.

Elcin Haskollar: Today, my guest is Dr. Steve McDowell. Steve is the Assistant Provost for International Initiatives at Florida State University. He is also the Associate Dean in the College of Communication and Information and a professor in the School of Communication. He's a part of several different initiatives to help the FSU campus achieve internationalization, provide greater access to international study and research, strengthen institutional partnerships with higher education institutions in other countries and increase international competence among FSU students, faculty and staff.

Steve McDowell: Thank you for having me.

Elcin Haskollar: Thank you for being here today. Let's start this conversation by telling our audience a little bit about you. I know you are originally from Canada. When did you move to the U.S.?

Steve McDowell: I first came down in 1994 permanently, I was... Actually, had a congressional fellowship. So I was in Washington for a year, and then went to Michigan State for a year, and I've been at Florida State since 1996.

Elcin Haskollar: So, you've been in the U.S. for a really long time, right? Would you consider yourself as a Canadian or a Canadian American now?

Steve McDowell: I'm a U.S. citizen, and still have family in Canada, and still try to visit a couple of times a year, but this is my home in Tallahassee.

*Contact Dr. Haskollar and Dr. Kohli Bagwe at diversitytalks@fsu.edu with questions.
Honor diversity and practice inclusion.*

Elcin Haskollar: And that's wonderful. I know that what I'm about to ask you is a tough question because oftentimes it's harder for people to talk about themselves and put themselves into a box, but I would love to learn a little bit about some of your core values to who you are, and then your cultural identity. So how would you define your cultural identity?

Steve McDowell: Certainly, as you pointed out, I'm from Canada, so growing up, some of the debates and controversies that we had in the 60s and 70s included the role of French and English languages and cultures in Canada, and the role of multiculturalism, that there was a lot of new Canadians coming from different parts of the world, and also the relationship with aboriginal peoples, with First Nations, who have often and still experience discrimination and ill treatment. And so those debates, I think shaped my sense of what it meant to be a Canadian and what meant to be a citizen in a country where you have those types of debates animating public discourse.

Elcin Haskollar: And when you're thinking about some of your core values, what are some of those things, considering your background in Canada and with issues of multiculturalism in there?

Steve McDowell: I think interest in other cultures is one thing that I've enjoyed and really benefited from over my life, and also respect for other cultures. My own personal intercultural experiences included working for my sister and brother-in-law in a farm in Quebec when I was a teenager, and then after high school doing a church service project in Mississippi and Arkansas, in the United States, and getting to know people in those cultures. So, I really do think my interest in other people, other cultures is one of my core values, and then trying to understand what it means to respect and understand each other.

Elcin Haskollar: It sounds like you have a pretty multi-cultural upbringing. I know that you received your PhD in international affairs, like myself, but yours is from York University in Canada. Then, you got a fellowship that brought you closer to some of the South Asian countries like India. And I know that your work is built on the foundations of diversity, and you work with international students, you're very supportive of international students, you are teaching your course on International Communication course. So, when you're thinking about all of your personal experiences in Canada, in Southeast Asia, and here in the United States, can you give us some specific examples of how these experiences shape your personal perspectives on international education?

Steve McDowell: Certainly. I think as a starting point, we have to kind of understand that our personal experiences are one of many possible experiences that people might have in the world. So, it's easy for students in the United States to think, "Oh, this is the way that television is. This is the way that people communicate with each other, or enjoy sports," And so, many of our cultural practices, and I focus primarily on media practices, we think, "Oh, that's how it's done." And so, a big part of my focus on international communication with students is to try and understand how people use media, how the media is organized, how culture is organized in different countries. So, my courses themselves don't focus as much on the interpersonal intercultural communication, which we think of as intercultural competency, but on trying to understand media systems and media use in different countries around the world.

Elcin Haskollar: Let's talk about diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education, 'cause this is the term that we hear a lot about. And people do have a different conception of what diversity really is and what it might look like in colleges and universities, because for some people, this concept can be purely domestic as opposed to others, it could involve a lot of internationalization and international aspects. So for you, what does diversity and inclusion mean here at FSU, and how are we growing this concept on our campus?

Steve McDowell: Certainly starting from the domestic debates in the United States, diversity equity inclusion would say, “Well, how do we include the groups that haven't had access to education, public services and economic activity in United States?” So, making sure that people of color, people from rural areas, people from less wealthy backgrounds have access to the opportunities that higher education provides. And certainly FSU has really taken some major initiatives in that area with student success initiatives, with the CARE program, trying to welcome and really support students, and not just getting them into the university, but making sure they're going to be successful, and they getting the support from a cohort of friends and fellow students, from faculty and staff, so I think that's one area of diversity, equity, inclusion is, “Who are we serving, in terms of the students?” Considering the role of international students is also important because they bring, through their personal experience and their relationships with people on campus, windows into the world that you can't get in a textbook, or just in a video, so you get to know people and build relationships. And that's hard even if we're sharing the same space, it's hard to build those relationships. So, one of the programs on campus that does a great job with that is the Center for Global Engagement, that has a whole bunch of different programs, like the international coffee hour, to facilitate the building of relationships between students from United States and countries around the world. So, I think domestic inclusion in our programs, thinking about international students, and I think perspectives that we have in our research questions, in our research are another important part of diversity that includes international. So, many of our faculty have research projects that are all around the world. Learning Systems Institute is a research unit that has projects, a lot of them in Africa, but also in South East Asia, and so a really strong record of international education consulting. And then part of our curriculum and program, what we teach, what are the subjects, what's the content of courses, I think is another area of diversity that that's the job of a university to open up the world and have music, languages, cultural studies, as well as scientific and engineering studies that really engage the world and reach out to the world.

Elcin Haskollar: So, all of these things that you just mentioned are actually core components of campus internationalization. And I know that you're working really, really hard to try to internationalized the FSU campus, and also your work approaches diversity, equity, and inclusion from this perspective of working together to internationalize our campus. And I really want our audience to understand the role of internationalization, and how it fits within the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion. But before we do that, I want us to provide some clarifications on what does it mean to internationalized a university campus? What does it mean to you, and can you give us some specific examples? I know that you mentioned some perhaps you could elaborate on one of them?

Steve McDowell: Internationalization is a very comprehensive project and just as universities have so many things going on, we have student activities, we have courses, we have research, we recruit faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students. So, one form of internationalization has been what they call “mobility”, that students and faculty go to other parts of the world and engage in research, instruction, learning in those different contexts, and learn about those countries and societies through that mechanism. Another part is called internationalization at home, where we try to do more things on campus. Like I mentioned, coffee hours, conversation clubs, where we learn about the world, not by having to go somewhere else in the world. And I think that potentially gives more access to students who maybe don't have the time in their academic programs or don't have the money to engage in international mobility. Another part is faculty research. So as a comprehensive program, internationalization includes lots of different dimensions, but those are just a few examples.

Elcin Haskollar: So, you define internationalization in two parts, one being the mobility that students and faculty can go abroad to conduct research abroad, students can intern abroad, volunteer abroad, and then the other aspect was this aspect of internationalization at home. And I know that you are, and again, a senior leader, you are at the table making decisions on how we can incorporate a form of global learning within the university's general education classes. And as you were explaining these efforts of internationalization at home, right, has been enabled by the movement of globalization, which has given us lots of opportunities to connect our students with other cultures, and to help them gain skills like civic and global citizenship, and there are so many different ways that students can expand their global learning and really connect their classroom knowledge with the outside world, and authentically engage with the world. So, to clarify for our audience, what is global learning? When we are talking about internationalization at home and integrating global learning into the course curriculum for students, what is global learning and what is the vision of it? And other than studying abroad, what are some of the types of global learning initiatives at FSU?

Steve McDowell: As a concept, global learning tries to help us expand the scope of how we think about problems, how we think about questions and issues. Some of it might be multicultural, learning about other countries and other cultures. Others might be looking at the scope of an environmental issue, that is it doesn't stop at a country's borders, we are looking at a human rights issue, thinking about it in the global perspective is how problems in one country flow into or related to issues and practices in other countries. So, global learning as a strategy is, again, has multiple dimensions, one is the scope and one is opening up your focus to specific other places. I think in terms of our approach, again, it's very diverse, that is we have some university-wide requirements, the multicultural requirement, the diversity requirement, so that you have to take a course that includes some content, so that's one part of our strategy. Another part of our strategy is the experiential learning requirement that all students will have some hands-on applied learning opportunity, so that might be an internship, it might be a service opportunity, a leadership opportunity. And we're trying to make sure we have some international and intercultural opportunities on the experiential learning track as part of our strategy. But this global learning as an overall strategy, it has to... The university has really embraced it, you want it to be reflected in the basic division courses, so that students take in the first two years, but also in the upper division

courses that people take in their majors. And so, that's a very comprehensive and pervasive approach.

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely, and I'm perhaps biased, but I think global learning is really essential in helping students fill the gaps in their learning by adding a real value to be applied in the workplace. So obviously, the covid 19 pandemic has been really terrible for millions of people around the world, and it did drastically change how we view and conduct education around the globe, and it did impact more than 2 billion students in the entire world. But I think that one of the really aspects of the pandemic is that although it put a pause on many of the international initiatives that we consider as the backbone of international education, it also did force educators, like myself and yourself, to really think outside of the box and come up with innovative ways for inter-cultural exchange. I know that you're involved with many different things here at FSU, can you think of any innovative intercultural exchange ideas that we are trying to implement and push on our campus?

Steve McDowell: One thing that's worked out pretty well in the last number of semesters has been the idea of a virtual internship, that students, instead of having to go to a workplace, can go online and be part of an organization and part of its work and its organizational culture, but do that virtually. And it's different, but many organizations had to go virtual as part of the covid epidemic. Another approach that you and your colleagues are involved in is called Collaborative Online International Learning, where as part of the course content, you might have a project where you collaborate with students in another country. Two examples from my own work is we've had a South Asia Media and Cultural Studies Conference that we just had our seventh Conference this year, and for the last few years, we've had some presenters who joined us virtually through Skype or some other virtual platform. This year, we went online entirely, and we put the conference in the morning for three days, so that people from Europe and South Asia could participate without having to stay up in the middle of the night. And as a result of going virtual, we were able to attract and include a lot more diverse range of scholars from Europe, and South Asia, and the United States. So, there are actually some big advantages to moving to a virtual conference, even though we miss being in person, and having lunches together, and coffee breaks together, and talking informally in that way. I also included in my classes this spring a guest lecture from one of our alumni who's working in a non-governmental organization dealing with environmental issues, but who's based in Germany. And so again, we had a great session with her, but didn't have to have the expense and time of her traveling to campus here. So we've tried to be innovative and take advantage of the new technologies and network-based opportunities for connecting with people, for collaborating with people.

Elcin Haskollar: And I think these virtual opportunities are really great experiences for students because it gives them the opportunity to engage with other cultures and really discover the connections between the local issues in their local communities and the global issues in a larger context. And over time, they also build intercultural skills and global competencies, which are really essential skills in the workplace, 'cause when we are talking about post-graduation and trying to find a job and working efficiently and effectively with people across different cultures, students will need these skills in order to thrive and succeed in the workplace. You mentioned the South

Asian Media and Cultural Studies Conference, which you started seven years ago with your colleagues from the College of Communication, and as you were saying, because the format was virtual this year, you were able to really capture an audience from all around the world, and it's been really successful. So, I'm really curious to know, how does a conference like this contribute to your perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Steve McDowell: Certainly having face-to-face, well, virtual face-to-face connections with people from different countries is one of the best ways of learning. So, actually hearing what people are doing. We could expand in a virtual conference format to allow students to speak more informally, that's a technique we haven't... we talked about, but we weren't able to use this, some of the conferences we have gone to have used the kind of virtual coffee hours where people can talk, so you're not just hearing presenters. So, I think that's one of the ways that we can expand intercultural learning.

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely. So, when we put all of these to get these things together, trying to prepare students to work across cultures, making sure that the university classes, courses are preparing students to thrive in the workplace, but they're also incorporating international perspectives and non-dominant perspectives. What are some of the challenges of doing this type of work?

Steve McDowell: Certainly, the university is a really busy place, so the strength of a university is to say, we have 100-200 tenure track faculty, we've got 800 or more specialized faculty, and we benefit from allowing them to pursue problems that are important for society, problems that are important for their field. So, we go in different directions, and we work in departments, we work as colleagues and collaborators, but there are so many different priorities, and their legitimate priorities. We have entrepreneurship is one of the priorities for the university. So, one of the challenges, which I think we've done a good job at addressing, is how does internationalization connect with some other priorities of the university? So for instance, in the strategic plan that we're about, in year three or four of our strategic plan, one of the key items is called enhanced global experiences in learning. And under that general category, we've included participation in the Global Citizenship Certificate, participation in study abroad, certain courses that have intercultural content, our Garnet and Gold Scholar Society has an international component. So, we've picked up about 17 or 18 metrics to try to track, but the overall umbrella there is student success. We believe that intercultural learning and intercultural expectation enhances, as you pointed out, the student's ability to succeed as a citizen in their careers and understand the world and work more effectively with others. And it contributes to what we find in a national study called the Consortium to Advance Student Success through International Education, or CASSIE is the acronym. They've looked at the record of students from 2010-2011 in terms of graduation time, successful graduation and found that international education engagement, whether through study abroad or through languages, actually contributes to on-time graduation and fewer courses, not taking a lot of extra courses during their graduation. So, that's a national study, including about 30 universities, but it confirms what we believe is the connection between global education and why we do it is because it's important for the students. It helps prepare them for their world, and as a kind of a student

success metric, we're looking at are they getting to graduation successfully, and are they prepared for graduate school and careers after that?

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely, I wholeheartedly believe in what you just said, the purpose of education cannot be just providing technical skills, but also helping students fill in the gaps in their learning by providing these really essential soft skills of working together effectively and efficiently to be able to relate, understand, and empathize with each other's perspectives. Because when we are talking about issues of racism, or ethnocentrism, or a stereotyping, I mean these are global issues, and I think that when we are tackling global issues, we need to have global solutions. And for that students need to have these skills of global-mindedness, and everything that you mentioned does provide students with these experiences, and I think they are so, so, so essential and they're adding real value to be applied in the workplace and in real life, and essentially it makes them better human beings, in my humble opinion.

Steve McDowell: I'll mention a couple of other examples is the Undergraduate Studies Office has a program called Global Scholars, and they're specifically identifying and including students who don't have maybe the kind of background of more privileged students, but trying to get them into international experiences or intercultural experiences, and supporting them through assistance in writing applications to get Gilman scholarships or get other types of scholarships. So that's really important to make sure that our internationalization strategy, or at least the international mobility part, doesn't just fall to the students who already have some advantages in terms of family financial support. Secondly, we have an Office of National Fellowships that helps students across the university, including more upper division students, seek out fellowships. Again, meeting the students where they're at, listening to their needs, and then designing program support, in this case, to kind of enhance global learning that really does help move those students from where they are, and not just assuming that they have a certain background or a certain level of preparation.

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely, I think it's really important because when you're talking about students going abroad, whether they're studying abroad, or interning abroad, or volunteering abroad, we see that there are some students with specific challenges. Specifically, under-represented groups such as students of color, students of disabilities, and those students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. They are less likely to participate in studying abroad, interning, or volunteering abroad. So to you, to ensure that going abroad is accessible for all students, but especially for these students that I just mentioned, what are some of your recommendations? I know that you mentioned the fellowships and the scholarships, what are some other ideas that you would recommend?

Steve McDowell: I work with our university international travel safety and risk managers, so we're looking at making sure that our experiences are safe and we're providing information to students about what potential risks are. But one of the conversations we've had is with our disability office and trying to find out what would be the ways where we could make accommodations. Now students have a range of conditions and abilities, and so it's not something you can do one size-fits all, but we do have information to say, "Okay, in London, these types of facilities are available? Does public transportation have accommodations?" Whereas if you go to another country, maybe it'd be harder to get those types of services because of national conditions and laws. And so, there's

an organization called Mobility International that specifically focuses on that, including people with disabilities in international experiences. And so, sometimes this might be mental health issues, or things that you can manage at home because you've gotten a network of providers and a network of support, but how do you then feel confident to go outside of that network and participate in international experience? But then also ensuring that people have access to the supports they need. So, it's additional work for the students and for their advocates, but that's an area where we have, I think, some good partnerships and our international programs can work with students to help provide them information about what's available in those different sites.

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely, and one thing that you were saying is that, in a lot of the meetings that you know I attend with you, is that students do not have to go abroad in order to be cross-culturally competent or learn these really essential skills. This is why we focus on internationalization at home and try to bring the international and domestic students together, although there are some challenges to that as well. And when you are thinking about, or when you are explaining the role of campus internationalization to somebody, to an outside audience, that doesn't necessarily know about this field, what would you say about the role of campus internationalization and diversity, equity and inclusion, and its importance?

Steve McDowell: As educators, I think it's part of the same project that is we may forget parts of the project, sometimes I say we're primarily here to learn technical skills to do professional preparation, but even that requires understanding the field that you're in, if you're in the field of healthcare or your field of education, or engineering, you're going to be working with people, colleagues from different backgrounds or clients from a range of backgrounds, so having that preparation is really important part of that. And similarly, the understanding of respect for people, understanding of other cultures, the elements that make up for a strong approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, are also the elements that make for a good approach, internationalization. And I think as educators, we're trying to encourage students to be critical thinkers, to examine their assumptions, to examine their values, to think about evidence, think about how do they make decisions, how to think critically, how do they be responsible for their own decisions. And those two, internationalization and diversity, equity, and inclusion, are both very important parts of that overall project of higher education.

Elcin Haskollar: Is there a particular story that you can share with us, perhaps that made you realize that, "Man, this is why I do what I do, this is why I work so hard on trying to internationalize our campus, trying to integrate a form of global learning into the university education curriculum, and provide students with these really essential skills." Is there a particular story that you can share with us?

Steve McDowell: I've been privileged to work with students from different parts of the world, especially in our graduate program. And so for instance, this year, our partnership with the South Asia Conference is facilitated by one of our graduates who works at Christ University in India, Bangalore, and so that was, in a sense, the work that we do over time to connect with people from different countries and involve them in our educational programs and support their professional development. Now we can be partners on this transnational project. And similarly, we've had a number of students from South Korea, and I decided about 20 years ago to start hosting South

Korean scholars and journalists as visiting scholars at FSU, and as a result, now we have a good network of alumni and former visitors. We were trying to make some initiatives this past year to build on those relationships and do a reception, but we have to put that on hold for now with COVID, but those are kind of networks of relationships that over the long term really enhance our life at the university, really enrich our lives here, and I think provide examples for students. We've done panels on Korean journalism, for instance, for the last couple of springs that again, allow us to draw on the strength of those networks.

Elcin Haskollar: Do you think that you'll ever come to a point where you'll say, "I'm done, the FSU campus is internationalized. My work is done. It looks amazing. This work is done." Do you think we'll ever get to a point like that?

Steve McDowell: I think it's like other core values, like democracy, or human rights, or research learning, the core values that orient a university is that you may have put programs in place that allow you to deliver certain types of outcomes for students and faculty, but then you'll discover as part of that process, other needs and other opportunities, so that it's one of these things that you'll always gonna have more opportunities, and you're always gonna have more challenges, even with, I think some of the successes that we've had at Florida State University, and we've been recognized by a couple of our large national organizations with awards for our campus internationalization. But at the same time, having achieved and documented some of those things that we've been doing, helps us recognize additional opportunities.

Elcin Haskollar: Absolutely, the challenges always bring new opportunities, like in the case of COVID-19, it put a pause on a lot of the international initiatives, but really force people to think outside of the box and come up with innovative ways to still engage their students cross-culturally and internationally. I have a final question for you. You are a teacher, you're a mentor, you're an advisor to many undergraduate and graduate students, let alone for faculty members like myself, and what would you recommend to newcomers who want to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in that work?

Steve McDowell: A lot of what we do is built on relationships, and we don't realize that... So, at a university, for instance, as a faculty member, you might say, "I really have to focus on my courses and really have to focus on my research program." And there's a lot of incentives that seem to encourage you to go in that direction, but what you're missing there is the diversity that's on a university campus. So, as a faculty member or as a staff member... I started going to, for instance, I knew someone in geography when I came here, and so I started going to the geography brown bag lunches, and I met a guy who we collaborate in a bunch of papers and on a book, International Communication, and I've had great colleagues in education in other units around campus. So, I would say that's part of getting the benefits of a campus life, but it's also the part of the diversity, is making the effort to get out, and meet people, and develop relationships, 'cause it makes our jobs much more enjoyable to get to know people around campus. And I know we're all very busy, and we all have a lot to do, but that's... And for students too, I encourage them to say, if you have the opportunity to go to a talk and go introduce yourself to somebody, it's good practice. We tell students.... networking, get to know people, talk to people. And we're in a unique situation at a university where many other people don't have that opportunity at the workplace. There's not a lot

of people there, there's not a lot of diversity, whereas we have the opportunity to meet people from different countries, from different groups within our own country, and from different academic disciplines on the university. So, that's some really unique things happening here that we sometimes forget about because we're all busy and were focused on the things that we need to do.

Elcin Haskollar: Definitely, there's so many talented people who work at FSU, and as you were saying, sometimes we're just working in silos in our offices, and sometimes without talking to anybody. Just making an effort to network and try to collaborate with people is really, really a great idea. I think that our discussion today, and what we talked about campus internationalization, and global learning, and your own personal background, and interest in international education, is really important because people can see how the domestic and international issues are connected with one another. This can then help us understand the intersectionality of a lot of the issues between the local and the global, and even issues like race and gender and sexual orientation, and so on and so forth, and I do think that these conversations are really important in creating international environments that's really diverse, but at the same time, create narratives of learning that is mindfully inclusive. So, I would like to thank you for your time, and being here with me today, and talking about all of these things that we just talked about. So, thank you so much.

Steve McDowell: Great, well, thank you for having me and for putting together this series.

Elcin Haskollar: And that concludes our interview with Dr. Steve McDowell. You can find all of our episodes, transcripts and lots of resources on our website at cge.fsu.edu/diversitytalks. Thank you for tuning in and thank you for listening to folks who make diversity and inclusion possible. We hope that these episodes will help you honor diversity and practice inclusion. See you next time!