

# Forestry Students' Global Perspectives and Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This research measured the level of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among forestry students in Alabama. Established survey scales were used for these constructs. A descriptive, census survey occurred to collect the data at the Forestry, Ecology and Wildlife Program at Alabama A&M University and at the Department of Forestry at Auburn University. The objectives were to assess the international experiences, level of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among Alabama's forestry students. Descriptive statistics of means, standard deviation, ranges and frequencies were the main analysis approach. Students had a moderate global perspective and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Students who had more contact with international people and overseas experiences scored slightly higher on the global perspectives and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs. Students obtained most of their information about other countries from television, family/relatives, friends and radio news. Significant correlations occurred between global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity and between global perspectives and mother's and father's level of education. Also, significant correlations occurred between attitudes toward cultural diversity and college GPA. The global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs and home origin had several significant relationships.

## Introduction

United States' higher education system and employers, both private and public sectors, are paying increased attention to issues of globalization and cultural diversity. As international communities move increasingly toward greater interdependence of cultures and economies, an explosion of globalization is occurring in the nation's institutions of higher education, colleges and universities. Torres (2002) stated that the transition is driven by the demands to prepare a workforce for the global marketplace and to prepare our citizenry to participate in global polity.

The U.S. citizenry and policymakers have concluded that for the economy to compete and win in the global marketplace of the 21st century, schools, colleges and universities must prepare the workforce to meet the demands of a global market (Artiles, 2003). Advances in technology, politics, culture, economies and ecological systems give rise to connections among diverse people and cultures worldwide (Hutchins, 1996; Kauffmann et al., 1992; Carlson et al., 1990). However, with advances in globalization, interdependence and diversity, there must also be cross-cultural competencies for U.S. forestry students and subsequent forestry graduates.

Coupled with globalization changes, society is experiencing a shift in demographic trends and an increase in cultural diversity (Galambos, 2003). One only has to examine the educational institutions to see increased diversity in schools and the diverse workforce

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of the future. Higher educational institutions' ethnic undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase to 41.73% by 2021, up from 26.17% in 1996 (Hussar and Bailey, 2013). All of the nation's institutions, primary, secondary, post-secondary and industries, are impacted by the changing ethnic character of the U.S. population.

For this paper we will use the following definitions of culture, diversity, global perspective and attitude toward cultural diversity: 1) culture is the knowledge, experience, values, ideas, attitudes, skills, tastes and techniques that are passed on from more experienced members of a community to new members (Prevention by Design, n. d.); 2) diversity is the acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice and public assistance status (Green et al., 2014; Amadeo, 2013; Dike, 2013; Cunningham and Green, 2007; Esty et al., 1995). Other elements are religious beliefs, life stages, education, career responsibilities, personality and marital status (McLaren, 2009); 3) *"global perspective reflects a global and holistic view of student learning and development and the importance of the campus environment in fostering holistic student development. ... measures how a student thinks, views herself as a person with a cultural heritage and relates to others from other cultures, backgrounds and values"* (Braskamp, 2014); and 4) attitude toward cultural diversity is one's feeling, thought, or disposition about the differences among people with respect to race, class, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, age, language, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation and other human attributes (Grogan and Eshelman, 1998; Stanley, 1996).

Objectives of this investigation were to assess global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among Alabama's undergraduate forestry students. The research questions were:

1. What are the international experiences of forestry students in Alabama?
2. What is the level of global perspective among Alabama's forestry students?
3. What are the attitudes toward cultural diversity among Alabama's forestry students?
4. What are the relationships between major demographics and, students' global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity?
5. Do scores of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs differ by home origin and number of completed college courses related to global issues?

## Methods

Data collection occurred via descriptive, census survey research. Study population was all undergraduate forestry students (sophomores, juniors and seniors) enrolled in the Forestry, Ecology and Wildlife Program at Alabama A&M University and in the Department of Forestry at Auburn University during the 2013 spring

semester. There were three constructs in the instrument and a total of 71 variables. Construct I covered background and/or demographics, construct II consisted of attitudes toward global perspectives and construct III covered attitudes toward cultural diversity.

Overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for constructs II and III combined was 0.83, construct II was 0.80 and construct III was 0.70. Global perspectives and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs were after Zhai and Scheer (2004) and they adapted them from Hett's (1993) "Global Mindedness Scale" and from Stanley (1996) "Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity and Pluralism Scale", respectively. Content and face validity of the instrument occurred via a panel of experts and a field test of six students. No revisions were necessary following the pilot test. Test surveys were omitted from this analysis. Eighty-six surveys were distributed to Alabama's undergraduate forestry students. Thirty-seven useable surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 43.02%. Data analysis occurred as:

1. The main analysis approaches were descriptive statistics of means, standard deviation (S.D.), ranges and frequencies;
2. Correlations were computed between selected socio-demographics of students and their global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity;
3. Following each solicitation (to control for non-response error), the returned questionnaires were kept separately and analyzed via t-test to see if there was a difference between the overall means of the early and late respondents;
4. T-test, by gender and race, were conducted of each variable of the global perspectives and attitudes towards cultural diversity constructs;
5. Categorical analysis of means for constructs II and III occurred using the following scale: 1 very strongly disagree (M = 1.00 – 1.83); 2 strongly disagree (M = 1.84 – 2.67); 3 disagree (M = 2.68 – 3.51); 4 agree (M = 3.52 – 4.35); 5 strongly agree (M = 4.36 – 5.19); 6 very strongly agree (M = 5.20 – 6.0);
6. T-test measured the differences of overall mean scores for global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs between gender and overseas experiences; and
7. One-way ANOVA tested the differences of level of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity in terms of home origin and number of completed college courses related to global issues.

## Results

A t-test revealed a significant difference between the overall mean scores of the early and late respondents. According to Lindner et al. (2001), the late respondents sample size should be at least 30 in order to be meaningful practically and statistically. However, our late sample size is, 9, too small to make a meaningful statistical test. To control for non-response bias, the sample was divided into halves and t-tested. One-half,

19, of the sample is not large enough either to make a meaningful statistical test. Thus, the results can only be generalized to the Alabama forestry students' population.

Respondents' indicated gender was 16.22% females and 83.78% males. The reported mean age was 23.25 years old, n = 32, S.D. = 4.27. The majority of the respondents, 81.08%, reported Caucasian as their ethnicity and 13.51% reported African American. Two students or 5.41% did not report an ethnicity.

A total of 83.78% of the students stated that they have or had an advisor or instructor who is of international origin. Due to the small sample size, not one of the respondents had participated in the U.S. Study Abroad Program (U.S. SAP), 2.70% stated that they planned to participate in the U.S. SAP and 18.92% stated that they were undecided as to whether they will participate in the U.S. SAP. When the respondents were asked "if they had overseas experiences, work, study, or travel," 24.32% indicated "yes" and 75.68% indicated "no." A total of 10.81% of the students indicated that they stayed abroad one week, 8.11% indicated that they stayed abroad one month or more and 5.41% indicated that they stayed abroad two weeks.

Table 1 shows the students' reported international related experiences. The reported major sources of information about other countries were television 81.08%, family/relatives 59.46%, friends 59.46%, radio news 51.35%, books 45.95%, newspaper/magazines 37.84% and other 37.84%. One-half of the "other" responses consisted of the internet. A total of 45.95% of the respondents indicated that they completed one to two courses related to global issues, 10.81% indicated that they completed seven to eight courses related to global issues, 8.11% indicated that they completed five to six courses related to global issues and 2.70% indicated that they completed three to four courses related to global issues. The mean score of students' "general contact with inter-

**Table 1. International experiences of the responding forestry students. Sources of information about other countries, number of completed college courses related to global issues, overseas experiences, and general contact with international people.**

Sources of information about other countries				
Variables	Freq	% <sup>1</sup>	Mean	S.D.
Newspaper/magazines	14	37.84		
Television	30	81.08		
Radio news	19	51.35		
Books	17	45.95		
Family/relatives	22	59.46		
Friends	22	59.46		
Other	14	37.84		
Number of completed college courses related to global issues				
Variables	Freq	% <sup>1</sup>	Mean	S.D.
None	12	32.43		
1-2 courses	17	45.95		
3-4 courses	1	2.70		
5-6 courses	3	8.11		
7-8 courses	4	10.81		
More than 8 courses	0	0		
Prior overseas experiences and contact with international people				
Variables	Freq	% <sup>1</sup>	Mean	S.D.
Yes	9	24.32		
No	28	75.68		
General contact with international people <sup>2</sup>			2.19	1.29

<sup>1</sup>Percent = percent of total respondents (n = 37)

<sup>2</sup>Scale is based upon: 1 = none, 2 = occasional to 5 = constant

**Table 2. Mean scores, n, and S.D. of the students' attitudes toward global perspectives.**

Variables	n	Mean	S.D.
Generally, an individual's actions are too small to have a significant effect on the ecosystem.*	37	3.03	1.34
Americans have a moral obligation to share their wealth with the less fortunate peoples of the world.	35	3.11	1.55
It is not really important to me to consider myself as a member of the global community.*	37	3.16	0.99
I feel a strong kinship with the worldwide human family.	37	3.24	0.83
I am able to affect what happens on a global level by what I do in my own community.	37	3.35	0.98
American values are probably the best.*	37	3.37	1.16
Really, there is nothing I can do about the problems of the world.*	36	3.42	1.16
When I see the conditions some people in the world live under, I feel a responsibility to do something about it.	36	3.50	1.13
I have very little in common with people of underdeveloped nations.*	36	3.53	0.91
Americans should be permitted to pursue the standard of living they can afford if it only has a slight negative impact on the environment.*	36	3.53	0.94
I sometimes feel irritated with people from other countries because they don't understand how we do things here.*	37	3.59	1.07
I sometimes try to imagine how a person who is always hungry must feel.	36	3.61	1.02
I think of myself, not only as a citizen of my country, but also as a citizen of the world.	36	3.75	1.44
The present distribution of the world's wealth and resources should be maintained because it promotes survival of the fittest.*	36	3.75	1.16
I think my behavior can impact people in other countries.	37	3.89	1.07
My opinions about national policies are based on how those policies might affect the rest of the world as well as the United States.	37	3.92	1.13
When I hear that thousands of people are starving in an African country, I feel very frustrated.	37	3.92	0.98
It is important that American universities and colleges provide programs designed to promote understanding among students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.	36	4.00	1.22
I generally find it stimulating to spend an evening talking with people from another culture.	36	4.00	1.29
I feel very concerned about the lives of people who live in politically repressive regimes.	36	4.00	1.12
In the long run, America will probably benefit from the fact that the world is becoming more interconnected.	36	4.06	1.07
The United States is enriched by the fact that it is comprised of many people from different cultures and countries.	37	4.08	1.23
I enjoy trying to understand people's behavior in the context of their culture.	37	4.16	1.14
The fact that a flood can kill 50,000 people in Bangladesh is very depressing to me.	37	4.16	1.26
Americans can learn something of value from all different cultures.	37	4.38	1.09
The needs of the United States must continue to be our highest priority over needs of other countries.*	37	4.43	1.09
I feel an obligation to speak out when I see our government doing something I consider wrong.	37	4.43	1.21
I often think about the kind of world we are creating for future generations.	37	4.59	1.09
It is very important to me to choose a career in which I can have a positive effect on the quality of life for future generations.	36	4.67	0.96
It is important that we educate people to understand the impact that current policies might have on future generations.	36	4.81	0.92
Overall mean score		3.83	1.22

(very strongly disagree = 1, strongly disagree = 2, disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5, very strongly agree = 6). Negatively worded variable (indicated by \*) scores' were reversed when calculating the overall means.

national people” variable was 2.19, S.D. = 1.29, n = 37; based on a scale from 1 = none to 5 = constant.

Table 2 shows the overall global perspectives mean score is moderate at 3.83, S. D. = 1.22. Table 3 shows the overall attitudes toward cultural diversity mean score is also moderate at 4.20, S. D. = 1.27. A t-test, by gender, of the variables of the global perspectives and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs revealed no statistically significant variables. However, a t-test, by ethnicity, of the variables of the global perspectives and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs revealed two statistically significant variables. The significant variables are “they helped me set goals for my future”, t value=3.41 and they helped me achieve

my personal goals, t value=3.02.” Both variables are significant at the 0.002 level, Bonferroni 0.05/18 and are from the attitudes toward cultural diversity construct.

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation analyses of the overall rating of global perspective and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs, student age, college GPA, contact with international people, parents’ educational level, number of completed college courses related to international issues, overseas experiences and students’ level of education sought. We used the description outlined by Hopkins’ (2000) to interpret the correlation coefficients. Only significant moderate associations,  $r > 0.30$ , are discussed here. Students reported a high relationship with global perspectives,  $r = 0.74^{**}$  and attitudes toward cultural diversity. College GPA had a significant relationship with attitudes toward cultural diversity,  $r = 0.42^{**}$ . The students’ mother’s and father’s level of education had a moderate, negative, relationship with global perspectives,  $r = -0.34^*$  and  $r = -0.38^*$ , respectively.

A t-test, of the overall scores of the global perspectives and the attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs, revealed no significant differences among gender and overseas experiences. Table 5 shows the one-way ANOVA results of global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity and home origin. Global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity and home origin had several statistically significant items. No statistically significant items occurred when we tested, via one-way ANOVA, the global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity constructs with number of completed college courses related to global issues.

### Discussions

A total of 45.95% of the respondents indicated that they had completed at least one to two courses that related to global issues. This is a positive finding, as Henderson-King and Kaleta (2000) concluded that

**Table 3. Mean scores, n, and S.D. of the students’ attitudes toward cultural diversity.**

Variables	n	Mean	S.D.
Students should give up their cultural beliefs and practice to fit in with other students of the dominant culture.*	36	2.11	1.04
There is really nothing that educational systems can do for students who come from lower socio-economic groups.*	34	2.50	1.02
I am uncomfortable around students who ethnic heritage is different from my own.*	37	2.70	1.27
Cultural diversity is a negative force in the development of the U.S. society.*	35	2.89	1.30
Minority students are hard to work with.*	34	3.32	1.15
The perspectives of a wide range of ethnic groups should be included in the curriculum.	35	3.49	1.07
Minority individuals should adopt the values and lifestyles of the dominant culture.*	37	3.59	1.12
Educational activities should be representative of a wide variety of cultures.	37	3.81	1.05
Educators should plan activities that meet the diverse needs and develop the unique abilities of students from different ethnic background.	37	3.84	1.12
I enjoy being around people who are different from me.	35	3.94	1.28
Each minority culture has something positive to contribute to U.S. society.	37	4.00	1.37
Cultural diversity is a valuable resource and should be preserved.	35	4.03	1.04
All students should learn about cultural differences.	35	4.34	1.11
Students should be taught to respect those who are different from themselves.	35	4.51	1.44
Each student should have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in education.	35	4.54	1.42
In education, it does not matter if a student is rich or poor, everyone should have the same chance to succeed.	35	4.60	1.19
Education should help students develop respect for themselves and others.	36	4.69	1.19
Students should feel pride in their heritage.	37	4.97	1.14
Overall mean score		4.20	1.27

(very strongly disagree = 1, strongly disagree = 2, disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5, very strongly agree = 6). Negatively worded variable (indicated by \*) scores’ were reversed when calculating the overall means.

**Table 4. Pearson correlations analysis between selected demographics variables and, global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity scales.**

Variables	Global perspectives		Attitudes toward cultural diversity	
	Coefficient	Description	Coefficient	Description
Attitudes toward Cultural Diversity (n=37)	0.74**	Very large		
Age (n=32)	0.26	Low	0.21	Low
College GPA (n=37)	0.30	Moderate	0.42**	Moderate
Contact with international people (n=37)	0.08	Trivial	-0.04	Trivial
Mother’s education (n=37)	-0.34*	Moderate	-0.09	Trivial
Father’s education (n=37)	-0.38*	Moderate	-0.19	Low
Number of international courses (n=37)	-0.10	Trivial	0.12	Low
Overseas experiences (n=37)	-0.09	Trivial	-0.08	Trivial
Education level sought	0.07	Trivial	0.19	Low

\*Correlation is significant at the  $P=0.05$  level  
 \*\*Correlation is significant at the  $P=0.01$  level

**Table 5. One-way ANOVA analysis results of, means and standard deviations, global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity, and home origin.**

Global perspectives and home origin			
Home origin <sup>1</sup>	Means	S.D.	n
I	4.22 <sup>a</sup>	0.35	8
II	3.79 <sup>b</sup>	0.37	9
III	3.72 <sup>b</sup>	0.35	8
IV	3.50 <sup>b</sup>	0.95	2
V	3.91 <sup>ab</sup>	0.35	4
VI	3.74 <sup>b</sup>	0.35	6
Attitudes toward cultural diversity and home origin			
Home origin <sup>1</sup>	Means	S.D.	n
I	4.26 <sup>a</sup>	0.43	8
II	3.62 <sup>b</sup>	0.38	9
III	3.75 <sup>b</sup>	0.57	8
IV	2.76 <sup>c</sup>	0.58	2
V	3.77 <sup>ab</sup>	0.23	4
VI	3.68 <sup>b</sup>	0.52	6

<sup>1</sup>I=rural, farm and nonfarm; II=rural town (<10,000 residents); III=small town (10,000-20,000 residents); IV=moderatesized city (20,001-60,000 residents); V=large city (60,001-100,000 residents); and VI=urban area (> 100,000 residents).

<sup>abc</sup>Means without a common superscript differ significantly ( $P=0.05$ ).



female students who participated in a university diversity course exhibited sustained feelings at the end of the semester toward minorities and men. They further concluded that the course did not improve intergroup tolerance but acted as a buffer against diminishing intergroup tolerance. However, other researchers (Henderson-King and Stewart, 1999; Musil, 1992) reported that women's studies courses influenced students' sociopolitical views, feelings about various groups and the way students think about human differences.

When we tested the ethnicity differences of the global perspectives and cultural diversity constructs, the t-test showed the attitudes toward cultural diversity construct had two statistically significant variables, "they helped me set goals for my future and they helped me achieve my personal goals." The above statements are in agreement with the findings of Green et al. (2014), they stated that the benefits of diversity in an organization include: reduce lawsuits, increased marketing opportunities, increased recruitment, increased creativity and increased business image.

Although the above relates more towards corporations, Hampton and Lee (2014) outlined a few individual benefits of diversity. They stated that the individual: 1) achieves his/her full potential as a human; and 2) contributes his/her fullest to society. Age, number of completed college courses related to global issues and prior overseas experiences were not related to global perspectives and/or cultural diversity. This finding is in contrast to those findings of other researchers (Odel et al., 2002; Zhai and Scheer, 2002; Herm, 1996). The above researchers suggested that participation in overseas programs tended to have a positive influence on students' global perspectives and/or cultural diversity.

The students' parents' level of education had a significant, negative, moderate relationship with global perspectives. As the mother's and father's level of education goes up, the students' global perspectives go down. One interpretation of this finding is that the more affluent the student is the more isolated he/she becomes. The above finding is in contrast with the conclusions drawn by Simon and Answorth (2012) in a study of study abroad participants. They concluded that differences in attitude towards study abroad participation were related to past international exposure, social class and race. Further, students who had lived or traveled abroad were more likely to value a study abroad experience. Additionally, socioeconomically advantaged students tend to participate in study abroad programs because their families cultivated that experience (Lareau, 2000).

### Summary

Forestry students obtained the most information about other countries from television, family/relatives, friends and radio news. About one quarter of the students reported that they have had an overseas experience. The students reported a moderate global perspective and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Students who reported a higher level of global

perspective tended to also report a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Students' age, number of completed college courses related to global issues and overseas experiences did not correlate well with global perspectives and/or attitudes toward cultural diversity. College GPA had a significant relationship with students' attitudes toward cultural diversity. The students' parents' level of education had a moderate, negative, relationship with global perspectives. As the students' mother's and father's education level increased, the students' global perspectives go down.

### Recommendations

Thus, forestry administrators, advisors and instructors should: 1) encourage forestry students to participate in global perspectives and/or cultural diversity related activities. That is, whether it be formal classes, university sponsored extracurricular activities, or students sponsored extracurricular activities; 2) maintain and even develop programs that foster contact with international people and overseas experiences; 3) develop programs to expose forester students, who tend to be middle class students, to global perspectives and/or cultural diversity related activities; 4) the robust relationship between global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity suggest that these two items should be incorporated into student development programs; 5) the data revealed that the forestry students had an occasional contact with people from other countries. The departments of forestry need to promote, enhance and/or develop programs that facilitate interactions between U.S. students and international people. 6) expend more resources and energy in the recruitment of minority students, staff and faculty. By increasing diversity of the student body, staff and faculty, students will potentially be exposed to a culturally diverse learning environment. Such exposure will provide the students' opportunities for positive interactions among diverse groups of students, staff and faculty; 7) encourage students to participate in MANRRS in an effort to expand their multicultural horizons. The goal is to educate and help the students transform into employees who can function in diverse and/or multicultural teams.

### Study Limitations

Due to distributing and collecting the survey in a classroom setting caused the following: 1) the fraction of responses was not randomly selected; 2) some students may have felt forced to take a survey, complete it and return it; and 3) assumed all units would be present on the day the survey was distributed. Due to a host of reasons, students may have refused to participate in the survey and caused self-selection bias. Due to a small response number, the survey results are subject to unit non-response bias. Some questions appeared leading and the result is some students may have guessed a perceived correct response, or determined a perceived correct "moral" response. This makes the survey results subject to response bias. Due to the limited number of

unit responses and the apparent non-response bias, the survey results can only be generalized to Alabama's forestry students.

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