Global Awareness

Data say:

Assessment of global awareness from 2007 to 2011 revealed both improvements in institutional commitment to diversity and challenges to student interaction with diverse groups of people. From spring 2008 through spring 2013, Arkansas State expanded the number of well-qualified international students it serves from 127 in 2008 to over 1,000, students in 2013. The growth of international students has allowed Arkansas State to expand into new markets, taking the number of represented countries from 47 to more than 60. On the one hand, comparative analyses of NSSE data revealed increased institutional attention to student diversity. In 2007, 48% of first-year students and 41% of seniors said Arkansas State University encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds “quite a bit” or “very much.” In 2011, those percentages grew to 58% and 53% as reported by first-year and senior students respectively. Similarly, the percentage of first-year and senior students who said they were “quite a bit” or “very much” understanding of people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds grew from 53% (2007) to 59% (2011) for first-year students and 52% (2007) to 60% (2011) for seniors.

So What?

Although these findings are encouraging, reports of meaningful interaction between diverse groups of students is concerning. Specifically, frequency of serious conversation between diverse groups of students remained constant over the years, despite the increase of international students on campus. Both the 2007 and 2011 NSSE data indicated that 49% of first-year students and 52% of seniors said they had serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own “often” or “very often.” The ineffectiveness of mere exposure to diverse people to prepare Arkansas State students for global engagement was mirrored in a pilot study of global perspectives that used a different measure of global awareness. Data from a 2013 study using the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) indicate that, although Arkansas State students demonstrate respect and concern for others, they lack meaningful dialogue among diverse students.
How we Changed

To fulfill the goal of global awareness of graduates, Arkansas State University has increased the number of courses students take that address multiculturalism. According to student report, faculty have increased the inclusion of diverse perspectives in classroom discussions and writing assignments by 6% between 2007 and 2011 (NSSE).

What We Got

It appears that students from diverse backgrounds are not engaging in meaningful conversation as a result of institutional efforts to prepare students for a global marketplace. While Residence Life is attempting to address this gap through Global Engagement, a living-learning community that pursues intentional interdependence among diverse students, Student Affairs is expanding its Global Student Leader’s program in order to expose more Arkansas State students to the diversity of cultures.