

# Improving Intercultural Intelligence for Students in Higher Education: The Global Perspectives Digital Badge

## Introduction

As global workplaces become increasingly diverse, it is essential that higher education graduates are equipped with the skills necessary to work within environments and groups with a variety of perspectives, values and beliefs (Alton, 2018; Gerstein & Friedman, 2016; Majhanovich, 2021).

Intercultural intelligence is a crucial transferable skill that provides learners with the ability to adapt, function and thrive across diverse industry settings (Gerstein & Friedman, 2016). It encourages the adoption of intercultural knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that inform how individuals interact with and work alongside colleagues from cultures and communities distinct from their own (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Despite the importance of intercultural intelligence for graduates entering the labour market, scholars report that higher education institutions are not adequately preparing students with these essential skills (Yarosh et al., 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2019).

Centennial College's Global Perspectives Digital Badge program (GPDB) is designed to support students in acquiring intercultural intelligence. The GPDB is a single-semester, co-curricular program consisting of an interactive workshop series focused on equity, diversity and inclusion topics; three to five hours of experiential learning in the form of concrete social justice action; and a self-reflection submission in the format of the students' choice. Upon completion of the program, students receive a digital badge to be displayed on their virtual employment portfolios.

Centennial researchers posed a direct question: to what extent does participation in the GPDB help students develop intercultural skills? Four different cohorts of students were monitored for intercultural intelligence skills over the course of four college semesters (winter 2022 to winter 2023) and at three points during each semester.

## Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used to assess Centennial College students' acquisition of intercultural intelligence:

- Guided by the Global Competence Framework from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the research team created a 26-item Likert scale survey that assessed students' intercultural knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018). The same survey was administered to students at three points: prior to beginning the GPDB, one week after completing an intercultural intelligence workshop series, and after completing the self-reflexive components of the GPDB (see Appendix A for the survey questions).
- Students' self-reflections were also collected and analyzed using an anti-oppressive lens (Ocean et al., 2022).

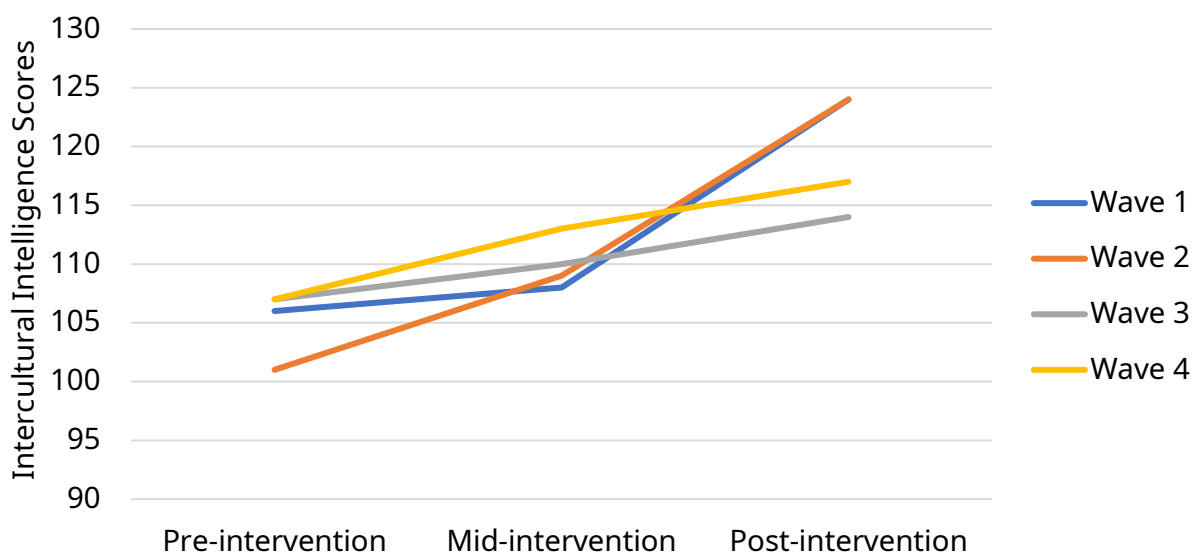
Thirty-five participants completed the GPDB and participated in pre-, mid- and post-intervention surveys and self-reflections. A total of 262 participants participated in some aspect of the study.

## Findings

Students reported a positive change in intercultural intelligence skills after participating in the GPDB. Students indicated an increase in their intercultural intelligence between the pre-, mid- and post-intervention surveys. The average total score per survey increased across all four waves, from pre- to post-intervention (see Figure 1). Differences across the waves could not be explored with available data. Scores range from 26 (“all strongly disagree”) to 130 (“all strongly agree”), with a higher score indicating stronger skills.

Figure 1

*Students’ Average Self-assessed Intercultural Intelligence Scores During the Global Perspectives Digital Badge Program*



*Note:* Figure 1 shows four cohorts of students’ average self-assessed intercultural intelligence scores at three points during the GPDB: pre-intervention, mid-intervention and post-intervention.

These survey findings indicate that students self-reportedly increased their knowledge of critical social justice topics, gained an appreciation for diverse perspectives and modified their behaviours. Participants also reported an increase in skills in their self-reflections, including listening to, appreciating and incorporating diverse perspectives; showing empathy; being open-minded; and withholding judgment. Participants shared some tangible ways they changed their behaviours as a result of the GPDB, including paying more attention to the corporate social responsibility practices of the brands they purchase, implementing consent in their personal relationships, refraining from using ableist language and practicing active listening.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The GPDB played an important role in improving and heightening students’ intercultural intelligence skills and knowledge, raising their awareness of previously unstudied topics, increasing their self-awareness and boosting their understanding of critical social justice issues. Participants described positive changes to their intercultural knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in their self-reflections. These results echo prior research demonstrating that students can indeed enhance their intercultural attitudes and develop a greater appreciation for diverse perspectives, a deeper sense of empathy and more open-minded perspectives (see

Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Like other successful interventions, the GPDB motivated participants to act, communicate effectively and adopt concrete behavioural changes.

Some contradictions in the participants' skills acquisition emerged, however. While bolstered confidence is a key component of intercultural intelligence, several participants appeared overly confident in their self-reflections about their personal capacity to make long-lasting change as well as overly confident in their role as individual actors within complex and deeply engrained systems of oppression. As one student shared, "I believe that I will be able to be the change. I will be able to influence stakeholders." These types of responses suggest a perpetuation of the "saviour complex" (Kherbaoui & Aronson, 2021). There are also various challenges in relying on self-reporting when measuring intercultural intelligence due to social desirability bias (Larson & Bradshaw, 2017), the Dunning-Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), and survey fatigue (Adams & Umbach, 2012). In some cases, the GPDB may have enacted superficial rather than complex changes in participants' intercultural attitudes. These challenges speak to the complexities of intercultural intelligence skill development and should be considered when developing and assessing skill programming.

To fully transform students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to intercultural interaction, and to avoid such biases and contradictions, future iterations of the GPDB should shift away from cultural competency and towards cultural humility (Brottman et al., 2020; Deliz et al., 2020). A focus on cultural humility will allow individuals to learn about the cultures of others while simultaneously examining their own cultural beliefs and identities (Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013). Fostering cultural humility would shift focus from marginalized communities to students' assumptions, biases, beliefs and perspectives, and encourage students to understand how their social locations have shaped their experiences, recognize that they will never be the expert of another's experiences, redistribute or share power, and learn continually from others, particularly those with less institutional or systemic power (Lekas et al., 2020; Solchanyk et al., 2021).

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## Appendix A: Intercultural Intelligence Survey

In reflecting on your knowledge about cultural diversity, please select the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following nine statements. In these questions, culture refers to the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.

1. I am informed about current world issues.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. I intentionally involve people from many cultural backgrounds in my life.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I can recognize cultural biases and stereotypes when I come across them (e.g., in the media, in textbooks, etc.)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. I am aware of how my own cultural identity positions me in relation to others.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I am conscious of how power and privilege can influence interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I understand the concept of intersectionality. I recognize that some people have many overlapping identities and consequently experience multiple forms of oppression.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. I view social issues from multiple viewpoints, including those that are not my own.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. I can discuss cultural differences from an informed perspective.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. I can explain my own personal values to people who are different from me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

In thinking about your attitude towards cultural diversity, please select the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following eight statements.

10. I am interested in learning more about cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Pressing global problems require cooperation among diverse groups of people with multiple cultural values and religious beliefs.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. I have empathy for people who experience forms of discrimination or oppression that I do not experience.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13. I do not feel threatened emotionally when presented with multiple perspectives.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. I approach learning about new and unfamiliar cultures from a place of humility and know that I am not an expert.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
15. I am open to interacting with people whose lives and perspectives are very different from my own.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
16. When I am interacting with people who are different from me, I try to imagine the situation from their point of view.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. I recognize when I hold cultural biases and stereotypes and am able to adjust my thinking.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Being mindful of your behaviours and practices related to cultural diversity, please select the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following nine statements.

18. I can adjust my behavior to meet the needs of new and culturally unfamiliar situations.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. In conversations with speakers of other languages I avoid unclear or ambiguous words.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
20. Contributing to positive social change is	Strongly	Disagree	Neither Agree nor	Agree	Strongly

an important part of my life.	Disagree		Disagree		Agree
21. When working to address social problems, I ensure that people from multiple cultural, religious and social backgrounds are involved.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. I am capable of overcoming my difficulties in interacting with people from other cultures.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
23. I am aware of how my behaviors can impact people in other areas of the world (e.g., the purchases I make, my impact on the environment, etc.).	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
24. I am actively involved in initiatives which aim to solve pressing global problems.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
25. I challenge cultural biases and stereotypes when I come across them (e.g., in the media, in textbooks, etc.).	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
26. I am confident that I can cooperate and engage effectively in complex situations across diverse groups.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree