Teaching Brief

Subject Areas (or Key Words); Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning, Active Learning, Cultural Sensitivity, Cultural Awareness, Communication, English as a Second Language, Health Care Industry, International Business, Cultural Literacy

INTRODUCTION
Canadian campuses possess of a wealth of knowledge, with many opportunities for reciprocal culturally diverse learning experiences. Higher education years are the best times to prepare students for the demands of an ever diverse global society (Jayakumar, 2008). Educators have the opportunity to facilitate intercultural and cross-disciplinary learning without having to leave campus. Mixing different higher education discipline learning activities is not new and many global educators have shared strategies to impact peer learning through interaction related activities (Allen, 2010; Hou & McDowell, 2013). New curriculum delivery models supporting interdisciplinary learning are suggested to take advantage of collaborative opportunities on an ever diverse campus environment. Blending different cultures, different disciplines, and exploring diverse ways to communicate can be a source of enrichment and a challenging adjustment experience for higher education students. Internationalization strategies are a component of cross-cultural campuses, and learning activities comprising different disciplinary lens may be a way to invoke student encounters in developing new and raised perspectives of different linguistic and cultural knowledge. By using common group identities and mutual learning goals, exploration and raised intercultural competence is achievable while on campus. According to American nurse educators, Bednarz, Schim and Doorenbos (2010),
“Cultural competence changes in scope and depth over time based on individual and group experiences of cultural diversity, awareness or knowledge of ways in which groups and individuals are similar and distinct from one another, sensitivity or open attitudes toward self and others, and the acquisition and practice of skills” (p.257).

Learning Activity Background
Our two disciplines, the School of Nursing and the School of Business and Economics, came together to explore ways to raise our students’ awareness of cultural differences and influences in an experiential learning project. This was achieved by using the campus environment as a living lab.  As instructors, we recognized our objectives in the course and fuller program included a mutual appreciation of culture and a need to have skills to better communicate and understand those from different cultures. Both professions involve working in a diverse population regionally and globally, requiring skills to understand cultural differences.
We recognized that both of our degree student groups, Bachelor of Business and Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing, had common knowledge interests for skill development that would enhance intercultural communication and interdisciplinary communication; thus broadening their understanding of communication practices. We used Thompson Rivers University’s (TRU) diverse student cultures and academic diversity as an opportunity for experiential and interdisciplinary student learning.  In light of TRU’s multidisciplinary features and the range of international students on campus, it was realized this assignment offered a very good opportunity for an experiential communication exercise and a way to create greater student engagement with theoretical concepts.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The post-secondary learning environment strives to be inclusive and challenges educators to find ways to demonstrate cultural diversity −without having to travel− rather taking advantage of the living lab of different cultures on campus. International students have an added challenge to integrate with domestic students to maximize their intercultural experiences (Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Sovic, 2009). Summers and Volet (2008) believe there is an ideal social forum for enhancing intercultural competence for all students on campus. Culturally mixed group assignments are viewed as an effective way to enhance host and international student intercultural components. Denson and Zhang (2010) found that diverse student group projects influence a student’s respect for difference and enhances one’s team-work skills and problem solving. Domestic students have been found to not always challenge their awareness of language and cultural point of view by voluntarily interacting with international students (Harrison & Peacock, 2009); voluntary interdisciplinary interaction is also rare, as most students focus on their discipline unless facilitated otherwise. Strauss and Young (2011) postulate that this reluctance to interact with other cultural identities beyond a surface level in post-secondary education may be due to diversions of academic goals and simply an avoidance to uncertain academic stress.
Engagement of learning happens mostly outside the classroom where experiential learning allows students to work through processes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); however, this is more likely to happen with homogenous groups (Strauss & Young, 2011). Brown (2009) argues the challenge for multicultural campuses is to increase greater social cohesion, on campus and globally, through extensions of cross-cultural contact, transforming higher education students into intercultural mediators, and this raises awareness beyond their own culture. With facilitated or intentional learning activities, such experiential learning is possible with cross-disciplinary and intercultural student groups.  By doing so, educators bypass the unchallenged conceptions that most often isolate diverse students (Ippolito, 2007).  Knowledge of cultural attitude and intercultural competence transformation could occur during an interdisciplinary group project during the planning of the meetings, while working through communication dynamics, while explaining individual rationales to others for completing assignments, and while working through language barriers and cultural beliefs when attending to the learning activity itself.
Jyakakumar (2008) supports cross-racial interaction, through intergroup learning, as a powerful opportunity to understand another perspective, enhance leadership skills incorporating cultural awareness and understanding, and creates a space to think about one’s own social identity. Jyakakuma (2008) asserts that universities are responsible for producing cross-culturally competent citizens. The workforce is full of different worldviews, negotiating multiple cultural perspectives. Higher education is the ideal place for accomplishing a diverse experience and global citizenship. Campus environments offer a unique circumstance, where students can engage outside of their “racially homogenous friendship circles” (Antonio, 2001, p. 612).
Exposure to diversity on campus is of mutual importance to both the nursing education and business education fields as graduating students will find themselves associated with diverse interpersonal communication challenges, diverse global beliefs and ever changing intercultural workplace systems throughout their careers. Benarz, Schim and Doorenbos (2010) postulate that nursing schools desire to become more diverse to benefit the population graduating nurses will care for while appreciating differences between the cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions of caregivers and patients. Additionally, the nurse culture includes cross-cultural elements of communication, through a professional language and jargon that challenges relational practice building. The challenge for teachers is to work through strategies with students on how to work with a diverse population, addressing the human nature of working with cultural difference. Cross-cultural competency development is a crucial element to be facilitated while in the higher education arena.
Discipline Background
 Both discipline programs share mutual learning mandates, crossing over the role of relationship building and communication skills. The students from the International Business (IBus 3510) course are enrolled in the School of Business and Economics four year degree program. These students autonomously select their classes, class times, and instructors with a class size approximately 40 students. In broad terms the student composition of these sections is approximately 25-30% domestic Canadian with the remaining approximate 75% being from India, China, Saudi Arabia. This is a third year course made up of three different sections and not in a cohort environment. Due to the “non-cohort” nature of the School of Business and Economics, students may not have the opportunity, or need, to interact and to develop friendships with students from other disciplines and cultures.
In turn, the School of Nursing (SON) BScN is also a four year program. Classes in this program are made of a cohort of 80 students per year level; with students taking nearly all of their courses together have aligning assignment schedules.  Ninety percent of the SON are female with the majority domestic to Canada.  Students in the nursing program may also not have the opportunity, or need, to interact and to develop friendships with students from other disciplines and cultures.  Finally, as with most University students, there is a wide range of student engagement and commitment within the School of Business and Economics and the School of Nursing.

DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING ACTIVITY
Goals of Activity
The goals of the activity are to provide an opportunity for students to gain experience by engaging with individuals from other cultures. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to consider different perspectives of other cultures.  All the while, the educators hoped to see an increase in student awareness and knowledge of the health care industry internationally and country differences surrounding its management.
For nursing students, an additional specific goal was to provide them with the opportunity to organize, prioritize, and practice conducting face to face interviews with someone from a different culture, whether the culture represented a discipline, ethnicity or otherwise.  In the profession of nursing, the definition of culture is often utilized from nursing colleagues.  Doane and Varcoe (2015) stated culture can be viewed as, “a dynamic relational process of selectively responding to and integrating particular historical, social, political, economic, physical, and linguistic structures and processes” (p.139).  While considering this definition of culture nursing students were encouraged to view culture as a way of how other experience life differently. This allowed nursing students to reciprocally share their understanding of healthcare differences and practice differences in relating to others with the business students.
For students in International Business, while also developing their cultural literacy they also came with a more business lens, exploring different in ways the health care industry is managed internationally. Each student compared the extent their own home country health care industry is publicly or privately operated. For example, comparing the relatively publicly managed Canadian healthcare system, with an increasingly commercialized and privatized system in China and Saudi Arabia, offers the opportunity for students to see these practical  differences and the implications for both versions on the domestic population.
The Assignment
The assignments given to the International Business students and Nursing students were similar in many ways.  For example, assignments in both disciplines groups were due on similar dates.  This factor helped ensure all students were working toward the same timeline. Also, the interview for both disciplines all groups were asked to submit their completed Group Charter (see Appendix A) by the same date.  Of note, the Group Charter was used as a method to enhance Group member’s shared expectations, surrounding meeting times, and assignment goals.  All groups were also expected to meet at least twice. For both disciplines the assignment was also worth 20% of their course grade.
The assignments were also different in some ways. In particular, the International Business students were asked to write a group paper, while the School of Nursing students   had the option of writing an individual paper or group paper. Assignment questions were slightly different for the students in International Business than the School of Nursing, but following similar themes.
Instructor Preparation – Student Groups
A first step setting up this assignment involved assigning students into intercultural and interdisciplinary groups. Instructors predetermined the groups by polling the class to determine which country each student identified with. With their “home country” information, the instructor then set-up a spreadsheet that first organized students into groups comprised of International Business from at least two different countries.
Due to the number of Canadian students in International Business; approximately 30% of the class, each small group had one Canadian student. The instructor also ensures the groups were comprised of individuals from the same section of International Business. This enabled some “in-class” time for this assignment to be worked on by the international business students. Next, the business instructor allocated two nursing students to each of the International Business groups.
Ultimately, each of these groups had five students including two School of Nursing Students and three International Business Students.  Although these groups were larger than both instructors would have preferred, these groups where designed to ensure that all nursing students were included and each group contained a culturally diverse mix.

LEARNING ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION
Exercise Introduction - Intercultural Concepts Introduced
During the onset of the first classes, the assignment was distributed to students and the intercultural groups were announced to the students. This was achieved via a lecture focusing specifically on cultural difference and then the group charter was discussed.  On this assignment kick-off day, all students were also encouraged to share their contact information with their fellow group members.
Instructor Challenges
There were a number of challenges for teachers when setting up this activity. One challenge was effectively sharing students contact information without infringing on their privacy.  In particular, instructors did not want the students to share personal emails with other students. Eventually, the use of the University assigned email address was utilized.  Unfortunately, not all students regularly read messages sent to this email account. As a result it was sometimes necessary for instructors to follow-up with communication among some students.
Cohort versus Non-cohort Challenges
Challenges with scheduling interviews included the inability to meet due to family obligations, work obligations, and evening course times for all students. Most of the students enjoyed the process of meeting with other discipline students. However, for some groups, scheduling meetings was a challenge. The scheduling and time management challenge definitely reflected the most visible differences between a cohort and non-cohort structure. Of note, a characteristic of the International Business classes is an approximate dropout rate of 5% over the semester. Due to this phenomenon, the business instructor did have control over changes to the groups during the semester. Thus for a small number of groups (2-3)  re-assigning some students resulted in waiting at least three weeks as instructors re-assigned group members; creating some anxiety with the cohort discipline.
International Student Challenges
Of note, instructors facilitating this type of assignment need to be aware of the power dynamics and cultural barriers within the groups working together. The cultural diversity within the international business students posed some challenges during the group learning assignment, as language barriers, cultural expectations and gender expectations sometimes made student meetings strained.  Some international students struggled with the main campus language being English, and the written assignment in English. At times domestic students in the business program complained that they had to take on the assignment writing on behalf the ESL student. As well, some nursing students were concerned that the domestic business student took over the conversation blocking the international student from talking and at the same time offered assumed interpretation of what the ESL student might have wanted to answer. Interestingly, as a result, several groups reported meeting second and third times without the more domineering domestic business student to glean from the international student’s perspective more first hand.
ASSIGNMENT DEBRIEF – EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS
Students voluntarily gave feedback on an end of course survey specifically about the assignment.  Additionally, a number of observations were made by instructors over the course of the semester about student behavior, which can be attributed to this assignment. The following results are described below.
         A number of results drawn from student feedback completed post assignment support the success of this assignment. The majority of the students taking part in this assignment increased both their cultural literacy and awareness and knowledge of the health care industry.
Increased Cultural Literacy – Students from School of Nursing
For the nursing students, this assignment offered additional communication practice and further skill development of working through personal assumptions of other cultural understandings and empathy development.  81% of nursing students found increased awareness of communicating and interacting with others through a nursing lens.  On this topic, examples of statements made by nursing students in their assignment feedback included:
“I would not normally have met someone outside my program or approached an international student”,
“this forced me to meet others outside my comfort zone and it was an excellent experience”,
“I enjoyed meeting someone new, I have not talked to an international student yet, I most likely would have not if we didn’t do this activity”
“meeting international students and those in a different program really tested my prejudice…I really needed this experience”.
Moreover, 83% of nursing students stated the assignment increased their knowledge of other cultures.  From an end of assignment survey, quotes from nursing students reinforcing this theme include:
“I view healthcare as diverse already, but found individual perspectives in the meetings to be beneficial in testing my own personal bias”,
 “…to be a nurse, you must accept diversity exists”
“…the trick is discovering ways to communicate differently and effectively that counts, so keep using this assignment.”
 “I was able to dismiss biases and stereotypes I unfortunately had before and I was able to meet people I never would have without this opportunity”,
“It took me outside of my comfort zone, I didn’t’ have my instructor or a nurse to hold my hand as I went to meet complete strangers”
“I had a chance to openly discuss “random” question and driven questions I would not have felt comfortable asking an international student outside this context. I have more confidence now”
“I have an absolute better understanding of other programs and situations other cultures go through while away from home and also got a chance to practice using my communication skills in a safe way”,
“I learned so much more than I would’ve expected, not just about different cultural practices, but also the truths and falsehood of stereotypes. I just wasn’t’ aware about some of the small differences in cultural practices, and now I find myself more conscious of these differences.”
Increased Cultural Literacy and Increased Interdisciplinary Knowledge – Students from School of Business
Similarly, students in the international business course also increased their cultural literacy. Specifically, 90% of business students stated the assignment successfully increase their knowledge of other cultures.  For business students, this assignment also offered the opportunity for interdisciplinary knowledge, in particular, to become more aware of the health care as an industry and whether it is publicly or privately managed.  Specifically, 70% of the business students reported that this assignment increased their awareness and knowledge of the health care industry.  From their end of assignment survey, quotes from International Business students reinforcing these quantitative figures include:
“We got to know many things of different cultures.  In overall, it was a fun activity to do. We all learned a lot about each other’s cultures.”
“After this assignment, I learned a lot about China and Saudi Arabia that I didn’t know before. I really enjoyed it.”
“Before the assignment, I didn’t know much about Saudi Arabia. Now, I know it is quite the same in a lot of aspects to China. And I learned that family members get along with each other in Canada. Helpful!”
“The analysis required for the points we needed to discuss for this project were relevant to us to the perception we had about each country. It also broke the stereotypes we had.”
“It made me learn other aspects of the culture than stereotypes. It also gave me a better understanding as it came from an actual person, and not more generalizations.”
“I gained much knowledge of Chinese culture that I would not have gained without communicating first-hand.”
“I got to work closely with communities and cultures. I have not had the chance to with before.”
“It was interesting to hear first had examples from another’s country.”
“I have learned a lot more about life in Saudi Arabia from the first-hand account which was interesting.
I became friends with a group member. While the other [member] was leaving the meeting as fast as he could.  Had some very good conversations. “
“I learned a lot about the two other cultures. Hearing the perspectives from people that have lived it, really gives a greater understanding.”
“I actually got to know the people in my group. When we met we discussed our answers and really got to understand from each culture.”
“It was a good experience to get to know people from different backgrounds.”
“Created a chance for me to talk with people from other countries.”
“There were many customs I didn’t know about China and Canada that I came to know through this assignment.”
“By completing this project, I had a better understanding of different culture in Canada, India, and China. I think it’s helpful to my major, especially for business.”
“It lets me not only know more about other cultures, and also now my own culture as well.”
“This helped me gain knowledge of China that I never got to learning or looking up.  I though the social aspect was most interesting, and the major differences in our everyday lives.”
“Though I was only able to gain knowledge from a student from one other country, I found the conversations about her culture rather intriguing. I learned a vast amount about Brazilian culture.”
“It did help me to understand better about my group member’s country culture better. I was able to clear all my doubt about regarding certain countries.”
“For me as an international student it was really interesting to get to know Canada a bit better and learn from different perspectives.”
“Our discussions were very good, and definitely increased my knowledge of Burundi.”
“There were some interesting topics that I didn’t know much about. I feel like I learned a lot about the other countries.”
Moreover, at their end of assignment survey, International Business students were asked if the
“Group Charter” was beneficial to your group’s ability and willingness to cooperate? In response, over 75% of the business students responded yes the Charter was beneficial (See Appendix A).
Instructors Anecdotal Support for the Assignment
Discussions in the classroom and individual feedback on both courses included similar themes of surprise over the experience of the interview, such as what was learned about individual cultural perspectives on social etiquette and health care expectations, and how ESL challenges communication. Additionally, instructors observed instances when students from both disciplines learned how the concept of time is or is not different priority for different cultures. For groups that had scheduling difficulties, general feedback continued to be good although all wanted to have the assignment start earlier in the semester. As one nursing student stated, “It takes time to gain trust to answer and discuss some of the questions.”
The majority of the students from both departments stated or wrote that they liked the assignment and would do it again. Student expressed appreciation for the assignment and found new knowledge on different cultural perspectives. The activity had a theme of ‘fun’ and ‘seriousness’.
Educator Reflections
Transparency and clarity are paramount for the success of this assignment; instructors have more closely aligned their assignment questions and percentage marks across both disciplines, to assist with leveling equal investment in the academic energy going into the assignment. The educators recognize that ongoing support for students and ongoing communication needed between instructors is essential in pulling off the multi-dynamic assignment. Dr. Kyra Garson, our intercultural expert and consultant on campus, has observed that in some cases forcing intercultural groups together can serve as a further instill of negative perception of another culture. For the sake of pragmatics operation the groups will continue to be predestined by the educators but the consistent alignment of course objectives, assignment requirements, due dates, topic questions, and the group charter will be observed. The instructors are working on using a case study example for the students to work with to enhance individual perspective of business and healthcare utilizing the current consideration of the privatization of the British Columbia ambulance service.

CONCLUSION
All students broadened their awareness and knowledge of the impact of political policy through better appreciating political orientations towards the health care industry.
Building Intercultural Confidence
This activity provided the motivation for students from different cultures and disciplines to meet and talk about how their lives are different and similar. To this extent this assignment offered an opportunity for students to gain intercultural awareness and knowledge through direct personal interaction. One of the most rewarding aspects has been how the assignment has brought students out of their “cultural ghettos”.  This was especially noticeable later in the semester. The instructors witness and heard stories how individuals genuinely found ways to introduce their culture to their other group members. For example, several students brought pictures of their families, shared family food recipes, and discussed their political and ethical concerns regarding business and healthcare practices from both their home countries and Canada.
Interdisciplinary Problem Solving
The assignment involved a diverse and busy group of students and there were cross cultural group dynamic challenges. Some group members found they had to plan meetings creatively and problem solve ways to fairly distribute the written work, most using the charter tool at the beginning of the assignment constructively.  On the end of course survey, 75% of the business students agreed the group charter was beneficial to the group’s ability and willingness to cooperate. Specifically, the group charter was used at the beginning of the process as a tool to be proactive in scheduling meetings and attend to conflict between workload tension and differing views on assignment expectations. Some students requested the tool be discussed more formally in the beginning of the course, as there were some misunderstandings of the relevance, specifically from the business students.  This gave insight to the educators from both disciplines to spend more time on validating student understanding of the group charter tool.
Future Projects
Based on experiences with this assignment, a number of adjustments have already been made and others will continue to be made to improve the students learning experiences. This is an evolving experimental assignment guided by the student performance and strongly related to learning response.
The first significant adjustments were introduced during the second running of this assignment which included the use of the team charter. The introduction of the Team Charter and the requirement of completion and submission within two weeks have proven to be a positive change to this assignment. This has ensured the group members meet at least once early in the semester as it has given students the opportunity to discuss their group expectations and share communication information.

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Appendix A
Intercultural Literacy Group CHARTER
Introduction:
Groups work better when members have a common understanding of the group’s shared expectations, and goals for group activities. Each member of your group will have some idea how the group should operate. This is the opportunity to share your thoughts so “simple misunderstandings” are less likely to arise in the future.  The purpose of this Charter is therefore to help your group set some of these ground rules and goals.
Instructions:
Please make sure your answers are clearly stated. Also, it is important your Charter is agreed upon by everyone in your group.
1.        As a group (IB students and Nursing students), please complete the questions involved in this Group Charter.
2.        Appoint one member of your group to make a photocopy of this charter and give it to your instructor at the requested time.
Our group’s name (optional):
 What will be the name of your group? ....................................................................
 Our ground rules:
•        On average, how long should our meetings be?
•        Where will our meetings take place?
•        When is it OK to miss a meeting?
•        How do we inform each other when we can’t be there or are running late?
•        How will we deal with lateness to meetings?
•        What does “on time” mean?
•        What do we do with mobile phone calls & text messaging during meetings?
•        Can we bring food and drink to meetings?
•        How do we deal with members who don’t participate enough, participate too much or distract the group from its task?
•        How are we going to make decisions?
Our goals
•        What is our group trying to accomplish? Aimed % grade for the project?
•        The team charter should also include:
o        Timeline for work to be completed
o        Conflict resolution- steps/process & consequences of unacceptable behavior and performance.
    Our commitment to the charter:
•        We agree with the answers in our charter and will try our best to uphold them.
Printed Name:                 Contact information                                    Signature:            Date: