CURRENT STATUS: ACE INTERNATIONAL LAB PHASE II

The Mason International Collaborative is currently in the second phase of the ACE Internationalization Lab. In this phase, the key objective is to collect and analyze data on current internationalization activities and perspectives. In Spring 2020, MIC will have an articulated plan with research questions and methodology for an institutional review. Data collection will be conducted both by the collaborative as a whole and committees based on their key areas of focus. Specifically the collaborative is organizing a survey for all faculty at Mason and preparing for benchmarking with peer institutions. Committees can compile data from a variety of sources including existing institutional records, focus groups with stakeholders, and hosting special events.

In this phase, each committee formulates data collection plans based on:

**Research Question/Scope for Committee:** Generate a research question and set the scope to be reviewed. What research question is most relevant for your committee to investigate? How do you define the scope for a committee review on internationalization?

**Methodology:** According to ACE, common strategies include surveys of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members; benchmarking peer institutions; focus groups; interviews; literature review; internal document analysis; reviews of institutional reporting and enrollments. What evidence is needed and how should it be gathered? What is the timeframe for gathering this data?

**Support:** Each committee has $500 in funding to support these efforts and can coordinate with the MIC project manager on specific operational needs. Considering your methods for collecting data, what support is your committee requesting?

For further information on data collection plans, please contact your MIC committee co-chairs or the MIC project manager at mic@gmu.edu
iWeek: Lightning Talks
The Research Committee will be organizing a lightning talk session during iWeek. Please mark your calendars for Friday, March 27, 10 am - 12 pm in JC Bistro. This session will highlight faculty who are involved with research, scholarship, and creative activities in international locations or on international topics. You are highly encouraged to present at this event and to widely share the online form with your colleagues. Online Form for Presenters:


QEP Top Proposals & Presentations
For accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, the QEP is five-year initiative that focuses on improving student learning and/or success. Mason is undergoing the topic selection process and the top proposals are: “Undergraduate Learning Assistants as Leaders for Active Learning”, “Strategic Skill Building: A Necessity for Graduate Student Professional Development and Career Readiness”, “From Campus to Community: Cultivating Civically-Engaged Leaders”, and “Closing the Gap” [between learning outcomes and career readiness].

All four proposals will be presented on: Tuesday, March 17, 2020, 3:00 p.m., Merten Hall 1201 and Thursday, March 26, 2020, 12:00 p.m., Research Hall 163 (WebEx viewing will be available).

MIC committee members are encouraged to attend and consider how internationalization fits within the frameworks of the top proposals.
The “Grace Note”: An Interview with Dr. Michael Nickens about Communicating Across Cultures by Michael Smith

Dr. Michael Nickens is an Assistant Professor of Music at Mason and Director of Mason’s celebrated Pep Band (Doc Nix and the Green Machine). Michael Smith, Internationalization Liaison and English Language Faculty for INTO Mason, sat down with Dr. Nickens in his office and asked his thoughts about music and communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Both are MIC curriculum committee members, and this is reprinted with permission from the INTO Mason Academic Division Newsletter Vol. 3 Issue 11.

Dr. Nickens: When I work with a new group of musicians, the first question I ask myself is, “How do we talk to each other” When we’re coming together to play music, we need to be able to communicate. But are we really understanding music in the same way? For example, not everybody has a background with, say, Mozart or Haydn, so they’re going to experience that music differently from someone who does. With the Green Machine, we’re able to create music that is accessible to a lot of people. People who experience us can tell that we’re having an authentic party. So student musicians can connect to the band quickly and play the appropriate notes. But even then, are they just responding to the visceral reaction of the “common rave”, or are they getting the nuance of the genre? Are they aware enough of the ensemble to be aware of the nuance? Are they just connecting to their own idea of what’s going on, or are they sharing a common meaning with everyone in the band, as much as is humanly possible?

I can assess students’ technical ability. Notated music is that. For example, “Do I have the ability to move my hands correctly?” But if you want to do an improvised solo, you can’t go by rote. You have to really understand what’s going on behind the notes. But how do we assess that people from different backgrounds can perceive the music in vastly different ways. In music, we have something called a “grace note”. A grace note is a musical notation that denotes different kinds of musical ornamentation, but the specific ornamentation is up to interpretation. Different styles treat that same marking a little differently. So if you’re playing funk, and a student has never encountered funk before, they might play the grace note the way they’ve played Mozart. But once I’ve played it for them, they get it. They weren’t familiar with the context before, so they were playing something very different. But now they’re there. Cultural expression is like a grace note; unless we understand the context, we’re making the wrong kind of music.

So how can I teach a group of musicians to truly communicate? I liken the different students in my group to a pyramid. At the tip of the pyramid, we have a few top professionals. They know a lot. For the sake of illustration, let’s say there’s one person on the top. Under that person, are two other people who know a few things less. Under them are three people who know even less. At the bottom might be four people who know very little. How can I get them to understand each other? Well, first I have to find out what they know. After I know that, I can find connections between what
people at different levels know. Once I can figure out the connection, I can figure out a way to connect people. The connection doesn’t involve just certain people learning from others. We all learn from each other. Everybody has something to teach us. It’s like you came in to do your one trick, then you see the other people’s tricks and you feel so lame. But you’re not there to compete. You’re there to learn. And you become a better artist in the process.

Like playing in a band, communicating with people from different backgrounds is a process. It’s never going to be perfect. But it’s like playing Blackjack: You only fail when you quit, and as long as you have enough to bet one more time, you can stay in the game. The fight is not about being right or being the best, it’s about your own ability to overcome your blind spots, your ego, your fear. Every fault, every weakness, has the opportunity to have the answer in it. You’re going to get through it. And then, with all you’ve learned, you can really make some music.

**MIC Network**

**ACE Internationalization Lab Adviser:** ACE Advisors guide participating institutions through the program. The assigned adviser for GMU is Dr. Susan Carvalho, Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, University of Alabama.

**MIC Tri-Chairs:** Rick Davis, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts; Karyn Kessler, Academic Director, INTO Mason; Pam Patterson, Associate Vice President for University Life.

**MIC Committee Co-Chairs:** Curriculum - Brian Platt and Ioulia Rytikova; Faculty Development - Supriya Baily and E. Shelley Reid; Student/Campus Life - Jessica Biddle and Lewis Forrest; Enrollment Management/Partnership - Nana Bonsu and Matt Sacco; Education Abroad - Marie Alice Arnold and Lisa Bellingham; Research - Aurali Dade and Padhu Seshaiyer

**MIC Program Manager:** Amy Lewis, Assistant Professor, INTO Mason Graduate Pathway Program