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## Introduction to the Special Issue on Global Citizenship in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This introduction to the special issue on Global Citizenship in Higher Education explores how global citizenship is understood and practiced in higher education. It reflects on the term's multiple meanings and how it is shaped by diverse cultural, political, and educational contexts. The articles in this special issue examine how global citizenship is taught, lived, and imagined—whether through study abroad programs, language education, or creative works. Together, they show how teaching and learning can prepare people to care for and act in the wider world.

### Keywords

**Global Citizenship; Higher Education; Intercultural Competence; Internationalisation; Social Responsibility**

This special issue begins from a simple but urgent observation: conversations about justice, sustainability, cultural diversity, and shared futures are no longer contained within national borders. Whether in a university classroom, a public square, a climate summit, or a work of fiction, the idea that we are connected to one another across vast distances shapes how people see their place in the world. Global citizenship has thus become one of the key ways to describe this sense of interconnected belonging, even as its meaning shifts across contexts and is contested by those who use it. The contributions gathered here take this conceptual fluidity as a starting point, showing how global citizenship is lived, taught, debated, and reimaged in diverse settings.

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The notion of citizenship is increasingly associated with internationalisation ([Prowse & Foresyth 2018](#)) and is often referred to in multiple and overlapping ways—international citizenship, global citizenship, intercultural citizenship, cultural global citizenship and so on ([Killick 2015](#); [Porto 2018](#)). International education scholar David Killick, however, argues that the term ‘global citizen’ is a highly ‘contested and confused’ concept ([2015](#): 29). Indeed, a study conducted by Trede et al. on how university educators understood this concept revealed that the notion of global citizenship appeared to not be ‘well-understood’ by many educators ([2013](#): 452), concluding that the global citizenship discourse within educational institutions is often ‘superficial’. Yet the term global citizen remains widely invoked by both individuals and educational institutions. In recent years greater emphasis has been placed on global citizenship to refer to notions such as active engagement and social action ([Trede et al. 2013](#); [Tarrant 2010](#); [Byram & Wagner 2018](#); [Mule et al. 2018](#); [Porto 2018](#)).

Studies on global citizenship reveal that the notion of citizenship is closely associated with intercultural capabilities ([Trede et al. 2013](#): 490). The intercultural citizenship perspective connects individuals with the community, whether local, national, regional, and/or global. Michael Byram and Manuela Wagner suggest that, with global and national challenges increasing daily and modes of communication across frontiers becoming more aggressive, effective cross-border engagement must be grounded in ‘social and political responsibilities’ ([2018](#): 141). In this view, individuals and communities must be equipped to negotiate the ‘complexities of today’s world’ as intercultural citizens (141).

In order to appreciate the complexities of the world, some scholars argue the need for a response to the various aspects of globalisation based upon the development of ‘global citizens’ (29). Killick, however, cautions that the ‘citizen’ construct is inherently problematic, as it remains tied to the framework of the nation-state ([2015](#): 17). In contrast, other scholars advocate for ‘a global conception of citizenship in which people will identify less with their own nations and more with the planet as a single entity’ ([Cogan 2000](#): 6). This literature suggests that the idea of citizenship extends beyond the local to an ‘increasingly interconnected and diverse globalizing world’ ([Killick 2015](#): 33).

Studies on global citizenship, particularly in educational contexts, emphasise three key dimensions: a moral dimension (students see themselves as part of, and responsible to, a global community), an institutional dimension (learning is framed around universal principles such as human rights), and a political dimension (learners take action to effect change) ([Porto 2018](#): 491). From this perspective, individuals are encouraged to develop critical cultural awareness in order to evaluate social realities and, where necessary, act as engaged citizens within their communities. The term global citizenship is therefore often defined as ‘awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act’ ([Reysen et al. 2013](#): 5; see also [Mule et al. 2018](#)).

In an international education context, there is broad consensus around the principles of internationalisation. The focus is often on how international education ‘entails a shift in thinking and attitudes to appreciate the complexities of the world’ and equips students with intercultural skills ([Killick 2015](#): 25). Internationalisation has become an integral part of tertiary education, particularly in study abroad programs, where it is closely linked to intercultural learning, foreign language acquisition, and the promotion of student mobility. Yet global citizenship extends far beyond educational institutions. It is increasingly embedded in creative initiatives, ecological movements, political debates, and other spheres of public life. Wherever cultural diversity, global connections, and a commitment to social justice are present, the idea of global citizenship remains relevant.

Hence, we attempt in this special issue to explore global citizenship from varying perspectives and examine how people might engage meaningfully with their community and the world. The papers in this special issue on global citizenship share, each in their different ways, an exploration of how global

citizenship brings with it a consciousness for some type of responsibility to act for social change or justice whether at a local or a global level. The purpose of this issue, then, is to bring to the forefront some of the ways global citizenship is understood and shaped by different contexts and landscapes.

In *Global citizenship: International Studies Students in the Latin American and Spanish majors at UTS*, Elena Sheldon highlights the significance of the International Studies degree at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in empowering study abroad students with a shared sense of responsibility to act upon global issues as global citizens. In the context of this program's thirtieth anniversary, Sheldon shows how students address in their study abroad assessments pressing issues such as human rights, social justice, inequalities, and environmental crises in the Hispanophone world. This study makes the close connection between global citizenship and intercultural communication competency (ICC). Using selected student case studies, it demonstrates how the program's aims enable students to build close relationships with Hispanic communities, engage with complex issues, and conduct enquiry-based research as a cornerstone of intercultural knowledge.

Similarly, Macarena Gordillo de Paz's article *A Lecturer's Perspective on Teaching in the Bachelor of International Studies*, also focuses on the International Studies degree at UTS, however, her study presents a teacher's perspective. This is a very personal reflection that illustrates the role of the teacher in supporting the learning journey of students in developing intercultural and citizenship capabilities. Gordillo de Paz reflects on the challenges of teaching in this context and how these shape the content she includes in her subjects, as well as the advice she offers to future students. This content is curated in her teaching practices with the aim of developing in students a strong sense of global citizenship that is shaped by the student's understanding of their responsibility in terms of how to contribute to a more equitable, sustainable, and just society.

Elaine Miller's article *A Humanities Approach to Medical English Can Foster Global Citizenship* is also set in the tertiary education context but examines the notion of global citizenship from the perspective of medical degrees in Spain, arguing for the need for English-language competence developed through a Humanities approach. Medical English is considered a highly valuable subject of study for undergraduate medical students from non-English speaking backgrounds, seen as the lingua franca of both medical scientific research and clinical practice. This approach, Miller argues, fosters global citizenship by providing opportunities to medical students to develop competencies in cognitive and socio-emotional domains. The paper, however, highlights the challenges faced in Spain where English as a curricular subject appears to have been overlooked by almost half of medical faculties.

Murray Pratt's paper '不要回答' ('Bu yao hui da', 'Do not answer'): *Reflections on Global Citizenship and Cheddar Swirlies in the Three 'Three-Body Problem' Problem (A Miniseries)* shifts from the education sector to fiction and examines how humans construct futures, and considers aspects such as responsibility, for humans, species and the planet. It argues that global citizenship becomes most meaningful when extended to the planet as a whole. The paper examines this sense of global citizenship through some of the science fiction experiments that permeate creative works such as Liu Cixin's novel 'Three Body' trilogy, *The Three-Body Problem*; the Tencent television series *Three-Body*, and the Netflix *3 Body Problem*. The paper poses thought-provoking questions about how writing and production can serve as acts of engaging with—and even enacting—global citizenship.

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that global citizenship is not a singular construct, but rather one that is interpreted, enacted, and contested across a range of cultural, disciplinary, and political contexts. They reveal how the idea of the 'global citizen' travels between higher education, creative practice, and professional training, and how it is shaped by questions of ethics, language, culture, and responsibility. By placing these diverse perspectives in conversation, the issue invites readers to consider the possibilities and limitations of global citizenship as both a guiding principle and a lived practice.

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