

## Wayfinding as a Universal Language for Inclusivity in Hospitality and Tourism

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**Keywords** | Virtual Exchange, Intercultural and Global Competence, Experiential Learning, Wayfinding, Inclusivity, Universal Language

**Objectives** | This experiential activity expands upon the intercultural and interdisciplinary exchanges between students from H-BRS in Germany, IPV in Portugal, Fanshawe College in Canada, and Middle Tennessee State University in the USA during the ProGlobe virtual exchange project and focuses on visual language as the universal language. The objective was to promote graphic and visual cues as a method for intercultural and global communication within the context of tourism and hospitality via Wayfinding to remove typical language barriers and associated stress that may occur due to a lack or minimal fluency in multiple languages.

**Methodology** | Expanding upon the student learning and experiences from the ProGlobe virtual exchange project focused on Promoting the Global Exchange of Ideas on Sustainable Goals, Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity, four student teams consisting of both Interior Design students and Tourism and Hospitality students from USA and Canada collaborated virtually through an online experiential learning activity to develop wayfinding solutions for hospitality and tourism spaces. Student teams were given a hypothetical scenario of a hospitality space and were tasked to review and evaluate the communication and navigational challenges presented to a diverse set of patrons within the space. Each group addressed the scenario through the lens of a different wayfinding cue (literal, contextual, graphic or textural) as well as through their program discipline to develop solutions for obstacles observed, using visual language. Each team then presented their solutions to all participants for additional feedback.

**Main results and contributions** | Post-activity reflections from students who participated in both the virtual exchange project and experiential activity shared their perspectives on their experience and discussed how their awareness of universal language was strengthened, how they further developed visual communication skills and gained cultural competence for diverse tourists

in local and global communities. Student outcomes observed by Faculty included the understanding that the integration of visual language for intercultural communication can be transferred to scenarios universally, beyond tourism, which was evidenced in subsequent projects wherein students demonstrated their ability to transfer this learned knowledge and skills.

**Limitations** | Due to time zone and school schedule differences, the experiential activity had to be scheduled outside of regular school hours making attendance voluntary rather than mandatory. Earlier course integration could permit scheduling at a time when all students can attend. Also, each student team focused on one Wayfinding cue. Although this discussion and solution development was shared with all participants, additional time for each student team to evaluate all four wayfinding cues could promote a more robust evaluation and solution from each team.

**Conclusions** | This activity's emphasis on wayfinding as a universal language for inclusivity further reinforced the importance of the inter-dependence of multiple contextual elements related to global solutions and their holistic, potential impact on the user. The team and group dynamic served to set the methods of communication, performance expectations, conflict resolution and foster a space for mutual respect and the accommodation of each team member's needs. Students learned how regional and global contexts and applications affect hospitality and tourism such as practice collaboration and workplace practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The experiential component provided a vehicle for the design students' role in community engagement and support, and human and environmental health and wellbeing. Students learned the way in which language and communication varies widely around the globe and reflects varying cultural expectations related to age, gender, religion, status, and behavioral norms. Students reviewed and evaluated how typical barriers for visual communication affect populations including social and cultural impacts as well as determined how they might be feeding the problem in order to create a platform for creating global solutions. The activity showcased the student ability to become more globally competent and interact in an interconnected world using wayfinding as a universal language.

## References

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