

Transcript- Go Global ED Podcast: Episode 7 – David Flaten, PhD Professor of History at Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) discusses TC3’s collaboration with Cornell University on a 2018 Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) Title VI Grant

[Host Intro/Amy] Welcome back to Go Global ED Podcast brought to you by the International and Foreign Language Education team, also known as IFLE, in the Office of Postsecondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. My name is Amy Marrion and today I'll be your host.

On the last episode of the podcast, we spoke to Cornell’s Bill Phelan about the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program, also known as UISFL, which is a Title VI grant administered by IFLE. The grant has supported Cornell’s international and foreign language instruction on their campus and at several partners school’s within the New York Community College consortium. To build on that conversation, today on the podcast I speak with Dr. David Flaten, a professor of history at Tompkins Cortland Community College also referred to as TC3. Located in upstate New York, TC3 offers degrees and certificates in more than 40 academic programs. On the podcast, David tells me about his experience working with Cornell on the UISFL grant and how their collaboration has supported various internationalization efforts TC3.

[Amy] Dr. David Flaten, welcome to the podcast!

[David] Oh, thank you very much Amy.

[Amy] Could you tell us a little bit about your background?

[David] I have been teaching in higher education in three different states for over 20 years, but I've just had the ability working with Cornell University, in the last few years, to get deeper involved in some international study affairs curriculum development. To try and bridge some ideas whereby we could have students at my State University of New York system Community College work with Cornell students potentially on some joint programming and the UISFL grant, it was one of the components that was brought to me from Cornell as a way for us to try and make those dreams come true, to go from conversations about, “gee, wouldn't it be nice...” to actually deploying some significant efforts in coordinating some things between my institution and Cornell. And that's how I came to this grant opportunity.

[Amy] So I spoke with Bill Phelan who is a program manager at Cornell University, and he told us about the connections with Tompkins Cortland Community College UISFL I grant and the Community College International Fellows Program, could you tell me about your involvement with that?

[David] Yes, one of the things that we've been looking for at my Community College is to be able to expand our curriculum and to take it in different directions, where we really haven't been able to do so before, and the UISFL grant through Cornell was very instrumental in putting together some curriculum development ideas that I had, as well as some other faculty members, both full and part time at TC3. In my case, what I was looking at was I was trying to kind of reinvigorate some of the aspects of how I teach western civilization as well as modern American history and I've been relying on some significant sources again and again for the Cuban Revolution. For example, some passing glances at the U.S. intervention in Chile and when I was speaking with Bill about the UISFL grant I saw it as a wonderful opportunity for me to take some of those ideas - and So what I did was - I created some different curriculum units. I worked with several different professors at Cornell who were very instrumental in giving some ideas and concepts of directions to take my ideas in transforming my curriculum. And then I was able to, in many ways, take some of the conversations and put them into some more concrete form and we were able then to go back and create some significant curriculum development area changes. And then, also as part of that, I've had both Cornell advanced graduate students as well as Cornell teaching faculty come and be guest speakers and lecturers in my courses to really invigorate and take the information in different ways. So, I have I found this cooperation in regard to the grant to be very instrumental and not only bridging some gaps to Cornell but also being able to take those sort of curriculum ideas from, "Gee wouldn't it be nice again...." and then be able to have some reinforcement and be able to get some resources. I was able to purchase a significant number of books as well as some access to various things like the Cornell library and then of course the extensive field of their electronic contacts and that was presented to me as an option through the UISFL grant and I found it very enriching. I think my students were very happy with the changes and I have kept them in my curriculum, and I continue to use them to this day.

[Amy] That's wonderful. So, you are really looking to reinvigorate and transform the classroom experience.

[David] Yeah. And that was that was where the UISFL grant could be that sort of like 'shot in the arm' to kind of push you over the top from the armchair, 'gee, wouldn't it be nice... I should talk about, and do this...', to actually then going ahead and doing it. So, I had both, for example, Professor Kenneth Roberts and Professor Ray Craib from Cornell come and give lectures to my students and take that to the next level in terms of they were able to bring in expertise way beyond anything I could do and that that was courtesy of the grant, as well, as we were tying the university and the Community College together.

[Amy] That's great. So, were you able to travel to Chile?

[David] Yes. One of the things that working with professors Roberts and Craib is that each of them has been involved in a Chile history and political science for many numbers of years and they have of course publishing records, but for me, the ability then was I could come into Chile and go down there with the Cornell umbrella to assist me. I was working on behalf of my institution which has its own global study abroad office and I didn't have this the support there

because we just don't, we don't have that kind of finances, but I was able to go down as an honest faculty member deeply involved in Latin America, going back to my service in the Peace Corps back in the in the late 80s all the way through the 10 different courses that I've led to Latin America especially Guatemala and to Colombia, and the hope was that using sort of the 'good offices' as it were of Cornell to open some doors I was able to meet some people and have some significant meetings with people inside the Santiago at places like the Diego Portales, one of the major universities in the city, as well as speak with some other people, either just electronic email or some phone calls with the places out like a vineyard Delmar and Intercap Inside the city. I really felt that Cornell, what they could offer me was that they could open doors and sort of vouch me that, you know, here's this professor he's not down here on vacation he's down here to try and make some significant connections. You may be a Chilean Technical University, for example, that is not really easily compatible with the programming at Cornell, but you could be with a 2-year Community College that I represent in terms of, you know, the AA degrees, the degrees that are two years and then lead to employment in hospitality industry, in business in accounting... So, I found that the Cornell assistance I had with meeting people and making connections and sort of vouching for me was what I needed and then I had the impetus to go out on my own and visit these people and they knew they were not wasting their time with some visiting professor, they knew that I was representing something larger. And of course, unfortunately, in the meantime we had of course COVID intervened, and a lot of our plans have gone off track, but they are then ready for revival as I go back into the you know the spring of 2022 thinking about how I can revitalize some of the aspects of study abroad at my institution and I really am looking forward to that that's one of my sorts of dynamics I got to do this kind of thing's on my list for 2022.

[Amy] Okay. Yeah, so that's it sounds like the Cornell connection really helped kind of add structure to your time abroad. Clearly, you've traveled to Latin America before but just having those additional connections really helps you pull out what you needed while you were there and bring that back to your institution.

[David] Absolutely.

[Amy] Are there any particular, like maybe one example, of something that you learned when you were down there, a connection you made you mentioned like the Technical College... how that might mesh well with the TC3 community...

[David] Yes, uh we have had at my Community College here in New York State, we've had a long track record working with educational institutions in the Dominican Republic also in Peru and in Colombia and the difficulty has always been of course the exchange rate between those currencies and the dollar is always very difficult, but also the idea that we can offer programming, whether it's reinforcing English language, or say like 'Farm to Bistro' kind of programming, where they say the hospitality industry or even like things like international business we have seen those programs kind of hang in there in the last couple of years but they have not been thriving. So, we did have connections with Chile years and years ago, but the institutional memory had lost track of that and one of my goals was to try and reinvigorate that,

so I was thinking in terms of, especially some of the technical colleges that I was looking at in Chile, they're looking more and more, especially at the hospitality industry. Chile has become a really major player in trying to bring in tourism and has really created a significant support mechanism for that in terms of infrastructure advertising and things like that. But one of the key elements that I thought I could bring in was that my institution does have a significant hotel restaurant management industry certification. We also worked with the Farmer Bistro Program where we have our old farm and we, you know, grow products for our restaurant and then of course general business and things like that. So, I was thinking that there could be some natural connections there of mutual interest back and forth and I was just kind of setting the table I wasn't going to be able to dictate who was interested or whatever. But I thought that I was really you know, an adequate ambassador to say well, you know you may not know about it but check this out. And then actually when I did go to one of the technical universities in Santiago I sit down and we're kind of going around the room doing introductions and I say where I'm from and I explain that I'm from upstate New York and this guy kind of in the back starts chuckling. Well, he had actually been to New York. He'd been the university at Binghamton as a student years ago and he was very familiar with everything I was talking about and you know we had started a full circle kind of moment here that you know he had been as a student from Chile in New York and now we're talking about trying to get New York and Chilean students back in communication. It was it was kind of a laughable moment it was it was funny just to see that kind of, you know, 'yeah you've been there' and then of course the first comment was man it's still cold there, of course [laughs].

[Amy] Well, that's great that you're able to tease out those various connections down there and bring it back to your home institution. So, believe it or not, it's almost 2022. So where do you see this going in the future? I know COVID is definitely a factor, that's a challenge for everybody, but what does the future hold for internationalization at TC3 and beyond and with the UISFL grant?

[David] Yeah, I suspect as an academic, and also as somebody who is a tourist who has traveled widely, I think there's a significant pent-up demand amongst not only parents but also students for international experiences, cultural exchanges, improvement of language skills, you know potential for internships. Now I'm not I'm not the magic guru who can wave a wand and make those things happen but I suspect, if I'm correct, and many people are saying same thing that with that pent-up demand I think there will be a significant element of different universities at all levels two and four year to really start to think about what's best for their students and that those opportunities could potentially lie with overseas partners and work some kind of arrangements that maybe at one point, it's always easy to say 'no – oh, it's too hard to do that ...' but if there is a pent-up demand, and if there is a significant economic element where people can see, for example in Chile more and more Americans are coming and they are looking at improving services for the tourists and get them in many ways to be you know, not just in tourism sites but to travel more widely in the country, I think there will then be a political and economic support for the idea of exchanges of various kinds. Now, I don't have any like I said magic wand, but I suspect that we are on the cusp of a significant explosion in not only

international tourism but also with the idea of international academic exchanges of various kinds. For example, I was awarded a Fulbright to be in Colombia and unfortunately COVID has intervened and the first thing I'm thinking about now is when I'm going to reapply and get back down there and try to help build some bridges, not only for my university, but also for the larger cohort of people that I know across both the United States and Colombia who are looking for those connections. And sometimes it's just a matter of OK well you should really talk to XY and Z and then those people turn out to know somebody and then the conversations role and they never know where they're going to land but I suspect that there is a pent-up demand and that we are on the cusp of that exploding.

[Amy] This has been really great. Thank you, David, for joining us on the podcast

[David] Thank you for talking to me, Amy.

[Amy/Outro] Thanks for listening to the Go Global Ed podcast, a production of the International and Foreign Language Education office at the US Department of Education. Be sure to follow us on Twitter @GoGlobalEd and subscribe to our newsletter to learn more about upcoming podcast episodes and other IFLE updates.

Guest Bio – David Flaten:

A native of Minnesota, Dr. Flaten earned his BA in History and Russian Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College (1987), then his MA in Medieval History (1992) and Ph.D in Early Modern History (1999) at Fordham University. After teaching at Caldwell College in New Jersey and Plymouth State in New Hampshire he joined the SUNY system with his appointment as Assistant Professor of History/Political Science at Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) in 2003. Professor Flaten teaches a variety of SUNY General Education courses in categories 3 (POSC 103 American National Government), 4 (HSTY 201/202 American History), 5 (Western Civilization: I and II), and has a continuing interest in teaching SUNY General Education #6 (International travel courses). He was honored with the SUNY Chancellor's/Trustees' award for Excellence in Teaching 2009 as well as the TC3 Award for Excellence in 2015.