

Covenant University shines in Global Partners in Education Conference 2012

Covenant University, Nigeria participated in the 5th edition of the Global Partners in Education Conference tagged 5th GPE 2012 held at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, United States of America. The University was represented by the Director, International Office and Linkages and GPE Program Coordinator, Dr. Nnamdi Tobechukwu Ekeanyanwu and the GPE Covenant University Resource person, Dr. Charles Iruonagbe.

While approving the University's participation earlier in the year, the Vice-Chancellor of Covenant University, Professor Aize Obayan acknowledged the need to expose our students to international platforms, peoples and cultures of the world because according to her, "we are training them to become global leaders and not local champions. The world is actually getting flatter and so every student and faculty member must have global competencies and characteristics to survive in a global competitive environment"

The Global Partners in Education (GPE) Conference is an annual conference organized by East Carolina University, Greenville, USA as part of its Global Classroom Network or learning beyond borders with emphasis on the benefits of virtual learning in education across cultures and societies. The 5th GPE Conference featured 45 Universities from 31 Countries. Covenant University is among the only two Universities in Nigeria that actively participated at the conference as a Partner institution and among the six so invited in Africa.



Dr. Nnamdi Ekeanyanwu introducing Covenant University at the Opening Ceremony of GPE held at East Carolina University, USA



The GPE Conference is an annual convocation of partner Universities of the Global Understanding Course/Project initiated by East Carolina University. The main purpose of the project is to provide direct, individual international experience for 95% of the students who do not have the opportunity to study abroad. A few benefits of the project include the fact that it complements traditional study abroad programs and helps recruit international students for partner Universities. In the long run, it can be expanded to discipline specific undergraduate and graduate courses and it will also provide opportunity for faculty research partnerships, exchange

programs for both students and faculty of partner Universities and allied institutions.

Some of the essential details of the Global Understanding Course which was the primary reason that 45 Universities gathered include:

1. Regular semester Global Understanding course team taught in real time with at least three other cultures around the world.
2. Partner institutions meet 14/16 weeks in a semester every Tuesday to Thursday or Monday to Wednesday with connection most days. There is usually 4weeks of connection per culture during each semester interaction.
3. Each university enrolls students locally and teaches the course without any money or credit changing hands.
4. Students must be committed and diligent throughout the duration of the course.
5. Student and faculty partnerships are formed before class and engage in e-contact throughout the course.
6. Collaborative projects teach students how to work with people from other cultures.
7. Small group discussion and live chat sessions during each meeting. Local sessions provide understanding of one's culture so as to be in the right position to explain your culture to others.
8. Topics such as college life, family, meaning of life, and stereotypes & prejudices are usually discussed with each culture.
9. Traditional world culture information and materials are also provided via lectures from each culture and handouts.
10. Each faculty mentors one or two other faculty in order to grow the program/project.

In her opening remarks at the conference, Prof. Marilyn Sheerer, Senior Vice Chancellor, East Carolina University (ECA) stated that the global classroom network is to help encourage people especially University Faculty and Students to visit other countries so as to be able to understand them and their culture while also giving opportunity to those who may not have the opportunity or resources to travel to other countries to have some knowledge of other countries and

their cultures as this will eventually promote peace and unity among people and Nations of the world. She further emphasized that no matter where one is in the world, it is important to have an international curricula because the world is not only a competitive one, but it is now a global village where cross cultural ideas have become imperative.

In her own contribution, Dr. Susanna Ortega, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, East Carolina University, (ECA), began by saying that with globalization, the world is smaller than we ever know and this programme helps to bridge the understanding among nations through the international experiences and opportunities that it affords all participants. In addition, the programme gives people the opportunity to study abroad, and having a relationship with things global, including enhancing peoples' awareness especially those whose working life will take them abroad and the fact that the more international exposure one has, the more intellectually engaged one becomes.

The Conference featured an Opening Ceremony which involved the top Management of the host University. The host University later made a presentation on Leadership and Leadership Development around the World with specific focus on ECU's strategic direction as a leadership University and the University's Leadership framework. Covenant University shined in the session with unique contributions on the platform of her unique leadership model which emphasizes spirituality as a core component of successful leadership. This was silent in some other leadership platforms across European and American universities that participated at the Conference.

Other highpoints of the Conference included Partner evaluations; the launch of the GPE Journal as the channel for disseminating research outputs of members and non members of GPE; possible areas of research collaboration for partner institutions; other collaborative projects; roundtable discussions; and a banquet with a keynote speaker who spoke on Leadership Challenges and Models.



The Conference also constituted a Best Practice Panel and some invited ECU faculty did a poster presentation on some relevant theme issues for the conference. Lectures were also held on new technologies for the Global Understanding project. There were group discussions on various aspects of the project. The teaching and ICT support staff had separate sessions on core issues of the project while the Administrative personnel in the institutions' representative teams also had a separate session where the way forward was marked out for general discussion. At the end of the proceedings, the Charter for the GPE was finally approved by all member institutions

represented. This was later signed by a designated representative from each institution.

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