

Beyond Borders: International Partnership Creates Global Classroom

Published 6/1/2018 by [Ashley Ribbel](#)

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in the **June 2018 issue**

With the rapid advancement of technology and the opportunities afforded with digital tools to expand communication channels, corporations are facing new challenges. Given differing time zones, language barriers, or cultural norms, the importance of strong internal communication channels and consistency in the organizational culture is a lifeline to institutional success. In response to the changing professional landscape, I saw an opportunity for student collaboration on a global scale (capitalizing on the academic partnership between Seneca and Belgium's Artevelde University College). I worked with Artevelde Professor Els Van Betsbrugge to design a transatlantic collaborative pilot project that offered real-life experience by integrating students from each institution to complete course deliverables.

For over a decade, Seneca and Artevelde University College have worked in partnership, offering international exchange opportunities for students. Expanding on the partnership, Professor Van Betsbrugge and I launched the pilot project in the Fall of 2017. The joint project allowed an entire class of Seneca post-graduate Corporate Communications students to work together with Belgian partners for one semester, while remaining in their home country.

One Belgian student was "thrilled to work with people on the other side of the world. Just to see a glimpse of the people from Canada (who are very warm) was a wonderful experience. It made me value the whole project more because we also had to provide the Canadian students with information to succeed."

The success of the project was in the simplicity of the assignment design. It allowed students to lead task completion and put the theory of internal communications into professional best practice. Studying internal communications and forming five teams per institution, each Seneca student group joined forces with an assigned Artevelde University College student group to create one singular team. Each international joint team worked

together to meet course deliverables and study an external corporation, such as Weber Shandwick or Universal Music Group. The primary goal of the course deliverables was research to compare and contrast the professional internal communications in each office (Belgian versus Canadian) of an assigned international company. In addition to encouraging academic excellence, this international project offered students a competitive professional advantage on a global scale.

One participating Seneca student believed “gaining experience that I can put on my resume – saying that I was able to work with international counterparts – is a big deal with entry-level positions.”

Throughout the semester, the students worked together as a unified single entity. In an effort to diversify the student skill set, Professor Van Betsbrugge and I set up the project with varied assignment deliverables; these included both academic skills and professional tactics that the students can include in their portfolios. To determine standards of conduct and method of communication to maximize interaction and productivity, student tasks also incorporated the development of an internal communication policy. The learning outcomes were equally diversified to include understanding the function of internal communications within an organization.

The student enthusiasm was palpable, expressing a mixture of both excitement and trepidation to embark on a global project. Following the conclusion of the project, many students demonstrated an inspiring commitment to task completion, independently working with partners above and beyond the course requirements. In fact, some participants expressed great pride in the project completion and were moved by what they had accomplished. Professor Van Betsbrugge and I hope to continue utilizing technology in an effort to create a global classroom and expand this project in the Fall of 2018.

View the [June 2018 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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tags : faculty-reflections, june-2018, seneca-international