

Creating Cross-Cultural Learning Experiences for My Students

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by **Peter García Sjögrim, School of Management and Entrepreneurship**

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Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) connects students and professors in different countries for collaborative projects as part of their coursework. To learn more about COIL, see the [COIL: Internationalization through Technology](#) article from the June 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

I have had the pleasure of being involved in this new COIL initiative for Seneca over the last year and I would like to share my experience for those that may find it helpful.

Shortly after the pandemic began, I was researching innovative ways to engage students in an online environment, when Shahrzad Farzinpak, who at the time was Academic Program Manager in the School of International Business and Management, met with me to discuss a new project. She described COIL and introduced me to Monica Kronfli, Director of International Academic Pathways and Mobility, who is leading this initiative at Seneca. I was instantly intrigued as I grew up in a bicultural household in Spain and had the pleasure of working in six different countries, including nine years at the International Olympic Committee. Also having been an international student myself, I engaged in cross-cultural learning and know firsthand the benefits that such an experience represents for our students.

In setting up a COIL with the partnering faculty member at Tecnológico de Monterrey in México, we designed a simple collaborative group project. The way a COIL is designed, there is no need to change any of the curriculum or course learning outcomes. The end result was a collaboration lasting five weeks and composed of three sections. Firstly, an icebreaker where students got to know each other by submitting videos online and commenting on peer's videos. Secondly, a collaborative activity where students from both schools teamed up and engaged in virtual negotiations. Finally, in the last week, students reflected upon the experience.

The results of the program and feedback from the students was incredible. In each class, the students would share their highlights and challenges, including how they overcame these challenges. It was clear that the COIL experience was providing students with a unique and valuable learning opportunity. They were problem solving through meaningful online engagement by working with students with diverse perspectives, enabling them to foster their global citizenship competencies and having fun developing new relationships in the process. The biggest didactic asset COIL provided for my students was serving as a guide to the social process of grasping the course learning outcomes by engaging the students, inspiring and challenging them to learn practical and measurable information with real world applications.

Here are two quotes from my students on their COIL experience:

"The Global Classroom objectives include critical thinking, decision making, ethics, global perspective, effective communication, and collaborative work. I can say that COIL definitely touched on every single objective in this list. Critical thinking and decision making were challenged in every negotiation. The issues covered during the negotiations required a global perspective and a look into the ethics of the tangibles and intangibles being negotiated. And finally, our team did an excellent job in keeping our communication effective which translated into great collaborative work between all of us."

—Micah Limpin, Business Administration – Management student

"The value that the global classroom experience has provided me with is unmeasurable. I have developed friendships with people from another place in the world that I thought I would not have otherwise. In fact, we have agreed to not break up the group and continue staying in touch with each other over WhatsApp. Furthermore, we have planned [another] video chat to discuss how people felt doing these negotiations and see how they are doing."

—Oleksandr Vlasov, Business Administration – Management student

During the fall 2020 semester, I partnered with a faculty member at Florida International University to develop another COIL for this current semester. I am grateful to have the opportunity to add COIL to several of my courses at Seneca, a global experience for my students to enjoy and bring forth into their careers as they step into a globally-connected world.

During February and March 2021, over a dozen faculty at Seneca participated in a series of workshops designed to support them as they prepare to incorporate COIL into their courses. More about this in the next issue of the Academic Newsletter!

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March 2021 issue

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