COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities Course Development and Implementation Case Study

15. Lebanon – USA: Human Rights

Abstract

Dr. Alexandra Moore and Dr. Alexander Hartwiger partnered to offer a globally-networked course on human rights for students at UNC-Greensboro and American University of Beirut. The course was successful in providing a rigorous academic experience and offering a meaningful cross-cultural engagement. The topic of study, the intellectual history of human rights, allowed us to discuss global issues in a global environment. At times there were technology related issues, but for the most part, the course objectives were met. The non-traditional learning environment promoted inter as well as intra class discussions as the presence of an outside audience often lead to important self-reflection. The course culminated with a collaborative project in which the students had to present about a current human rights issue, its history, and possible solutions. This final project, presented synchronously in the classes, brought to fruition the partnerships that were started at the beginning of the semester. The students walked away with a transformative experience that we think will shape their future cross-cultural interactions.

Contents

Section 1: General Course Information

1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level (e.g. freshman, 3rd-year, graduate, etc.)
What are Human Rights?	American University of Beirut	Civilization Sequence Program	open to all levels
Human Rights for Whom?	The University of North Carolina at Greensboro	Lloyd Honors College	open to all levels of Lloyd honors students

2. The team

Team Member #1	
Name:	Alexander Hartwiger
Role on Team:	faculty
Institution:	American University of Beirut
Position at Institution:	Assistant Professor of English
Department and/or Program:	English Department
Team Member #2	
Name:	Alexandra Moore
Role on Team:	faculty
Institution:	University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Position at Institution:	Associate Professor
Department and/or Program:	English Department

3. When?
Spring 2012
4. Number of students enrolled from each institution
American University of Beirut: 18 students; University of North Carolina at Greensboro: 12 students
5. Is this typical for classes of this type?
Yes, at both institutions.

Section 2: Issues of Language

6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution
English
7. Primary language of most students in each class
At institution #1 most of the students have Arabic as a primary language but are completely fluent in English. At institution #2 the primary language for students is English.
8. Language of the course collaboration
English
9. Language fluency
All of students were fluent in English
10. Language proficiency difference
There was minimal difference in English skills in most cases and only one student at AUB struggled with being understood.

Section 3: Curricular Information

11. Online or blended?
The courses were not offered online. Each location required regular face-to-face meetings with virtual meetings frequently between the two sites.
12. Duration
11 weeks
13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period
Since the courses had staggered start times there was opportunity for students at UNCG to discuss collaboration prior to the collaboration period and students at AUB conducted follow up work on collaboration once UNCG completed its semester. The most significant work in this process stemmed from the ability of Dr. Hartwiger to travel to Greensboro to address questions students at UNCG might have about the collaboration and for Dr. Moore to travel to AUB at the end of the collaboration to assist in follow up conversations. One assignment that UNCG students conducted was establishing terms for successful online engagement prior to the collaboration. AUB students produced a reflection essay that enabled them to think critically about the collaboration.

Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

14. Tools
We used Blackboard as our shared site. We also used VoiceThread and Prezi for collaborative assignments.
15. Server location
Blackboard was provided by UNCG
16. Technical problems
There were a few small technical problems. Dr. Hartwiger was unable to receive emails through the site. For students at AUB the uploading speed for images was very slow. VoiceThread caused some problems for students at AUB. They were unable to log in.
17. Frequency of use
Students used Blackboard on a weekly basis. Blackboard was the primary space for the dissemination of ideas and the space for online discussion so students would log in several times a week.
18. Informal communication
The discussion forum in Blackboard provided a space for students to share images from their daily lives. In general we found it was less helpful at engaging at informal levels.
19. Re-use
We would use Blackboard to house the course and for the formal assignments. When eliciting feedback from students we were informed that a Facebook group might be helpful for building informal relationships.

Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

20. Tools
The two primary synchronous tools we used were Skype and FaceTime. The decision of which video resource to utilize depended on technological compatibility. Skype tended to be the more frequently used tool. On occasions when we had joint presentations or guest speakers we used video conferencing. The percentage was 75% Skype and FaceTime and 25% video conferencing.
21. Server location
These were cloud based.
22. Technical problems
Lebanon has very slow internet speeds and AUB has trouble with bandwidth so Skype and FaceTime often were unreliable. In those situations students often relied on text based chatting.
23. Frequency of use
We connected as classrooms approximately every other week. As the semester progressed, students had increasing contact synchronously outside of class. In the last few weeks of the course students were in contact at least once a week if not more.
24. Informal communication
While we did not monitor all of the informal communication, we heard stories of students chatting online or having casual conversations in addition to doing their work.
25. Re-use
We would use these same technologies again but only because of the lack of better alternatives. If video conferencing was a consistent option (AUB does not have video conferencing in classrooms) we would use that more often.

Section 6: Assessment Information

26. How?

Both Dr. Moore and Dr. Hartwiger administered pre-collaboration and post-collaboration intercultural awareness surveys. Both teachers assessed their classes independent of one another. Evaluation of disciplinary learning was conducted through assessment of informal assignments (journals, discussion boards, participation) and formal assignments (essays and presentations).

27. Common assessment rubric

We did not create any formal rubrics for common academic assessment but we did have informal conversations. AUB and UNCG have different grade distributions and expectations which made joint assessment more difficult.

28. Assessment outcomes

A common understanding of the expectations of students work and a shared view of what was valued as a disciplinary outcome.

29. Peer assessment

Since the institutions have different grading expectations, we did not utilize much peer assessment. As a part of student final projects there was a space to discuss group dynamics and workloads.

30. Charter or guidelines for student interaction

Both classes established independent guidelines for student interaction and then through a collaborative effort worked to blend those two sets of guidelines into one shared document. This process worked well and we would probably not change it in the future.

31. Attrition

At AUB there was a little bit of turnover during the first week of classes which is the traditional drop/add period. UNCG stayed consistent.

32. Is this typical for similar classes at your institutions?

Both Dr. Moore and Dr. Hartwiger tried to notify students in advance of the globally networked component of the courses the minimal turnover was normal.

Section 7: Institutional Support

33. Type of support

Financial - AUB provided support for Dr. Hartwiger and Dr. Moore to travel to each other's class. This was incredibly helpful as it made the collaboration "real" for the students.

Administrative – For the most part this initiative was undertaken by Dr. Moore and Dr. Hartwiger and so there was not much request for administrative support. We were, however, fortunate that both the CVSP (which housed the course at AUB) and the Lloyd International Honors College (UNCG) were extremely forthcoming in helping to make the courses available, assigning premium classroom space, etc.

Pedagogical – COIL was instrumental in helping think through the development of the syllabus but there was not much pedagogical support sought at UNCG and AUB.

Technical – There were varying amounts of technological support. UNCG was very helpful in maintaining Blackboard. Both institutions helped with the specifics of video conferencing and the initial setup of other synchronous technologies.

34. Engagement with the international programs office

Specific engagement with the International Program Office throughout the course was minimal. However, updates on course progress were shared throughout the term.

35. Importance given to globally networked learning

Yes, the international programs center finds globally networked learning as relevant to our internationalization efforts. In 2010, our Provost appointed the UNCG Internationalization Taskforce (ITF) to serve as the campus leadership team for UNCG's participation in the American Council on Education's (ACE) Internationalization Laboratory, to carry out the directive of the 5.3 Strategic Planning Committee, which called for a university-wide assessment of the level of internationalization at UNCG and to make recommendations to broaden and deepen internationalization at the university. Supporting and developing globally networked learning opportunities is of specific interest to the university.

36. Commitment

Both institutions are eager to continue to develop globally-networked learning environments as they see it as an important development in globalizing their respective institutions. That being said, this specific course stems more from a singular commitment on the part of the participating faculty Fellows and if it is run again, it would be at the initiative of the two Fellows.

37. Future iterations

There is talk of running the course again in the spring of 2014.

38. New globally networked courses

At this point, there are no plans for other globally-networked courses to be offered by the Fellows outside of the current one. Both institutions seem interested in continuing to foster this type of

learning environment and this partnership course has aided in solidifying that commitment.
39. Response of chairs, deans, provosts or other administrators to the possibility of expanding this pilot course(s) into a broader program of globally networked courses
There has been no specific statement by either administration about expanding plans for globally networked learning. The Lloyd Honors College at UNCG does seem interested in recruiting more partnerships but this appears to be happening at an informal level.
40. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses
There is no question that both institutions would support future collaborations but this would happen through the initiative of the Fellows and not at the institutional level.
41. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning
At AUB a classroom with appropriate technology for globally networked learning would increase the development of these type of courses. At UNCG increased funding for face-to-face meetings in support of networked courses would help.

Section 8: Reflections

42. Goals set
- maintain substantive course content   - foster cross-cultural learning   - better understand what globally networked learning environments offer beyond the traditional classroom experience
43. Goals achieved
There is a shared sense that these goals were achieved, especially in a pilot course.
44. Most unique aspect for students
The most unique part of the experience for the students was learning to learn from others as opposed to learning only about others. Additionally, the destabilization of the traditional notion of what a classroom looks like helped students erase the false dichotomy between the classroom and the world. As such, learning was understood to occur through their interactions with their counterparts across the globe not just from their teachers.
45. Most successful aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
The subject of the course, the intellectual history of human rights, was greatly enhanced by the networked learning environment. The course was scaffolded in a way that traced the development of human rights which was great, but the real success occurred in having several of the tensions of human rights, especially the complex relationship between the universal and the particular, play out through the experience students had in working with each other.
46. Most problematic aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
One of the most difficult pedagogical challenges was establishing shared expectations of deadlines. Since the semesters were staggered, students at UNCG felt the pressure of the final presentation as a last task for completion of the course whereas students at AUB still had a month left after the final presentations. The discrepancy between these two perspectives caused some challenges for groups that could not find a common understanding of the level of urgency needed in that project.
47. Changes for future iterations
In general the course was deemed a success, but in the future there might be more explicit discussions about deadlines and shared responsibility in collaboration. Additionally, there could be changes to the types of technology used based on the previous experience. We also faced pressure to provide an intellectual history of human rights in addition to all of our case studies, interactive work, and final projects. We would be interested in narrowing the historical focus of the class.
48. Technical support
Anita Warfford at UNCG set up the Blackboard platform for the course, and then the instructors made day to day adjustments and changes.

49. International programs person
While there was initial consultation with international programs at each institution, there was no direct involvement in the course.

50. Time commitment
There was a significantly larger time commitment necessary for successful implementing this course as compared to a traditional classroom setting. In fact, it was probably double the amount of preparation mostly due to the amount of communication necessary between teachers and with students. In order to maintain the same pace of the courses and to ensure that parallel discussions were taking place when the classes were not engaged in direct contact, the Fellows were in constant, almost daily contact.

51. Was it worth it?
Yes, there is joint agreement that it was both worth it and that it would be significantly easier to implement the same course again. One of the observations both teachers had was the importance of having a positive working relationship with a collaborative partner. In fact, this one aspect might be the most important component in running a successfully globally networked course. Both Fellows would consider other partnerships in the future but with strong consideration of the partner faculty member. In general, the course was influential in helping both Fellows expand their perspectives on teaching human rights and pedagogical approaches in general. It proved to be a very important learning experience.

Section 9: Course Collaboration Narrative

In the spring of 2011, we (Dr. Alexandra Schultheis Moore and Dr. Alexander Hartwiger) were presented with the opportunity to teach a collaborative course that explored the intellectual history of human rights. We partnered with the Center for Online International Learning (COIL) at the State University of New York (SUNY) to develop a globally-networked class between students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and American University of Beirut (AUB).

The partnership between UNCG and AUB was a bit unlikely given the contrasting demographics between the institutions. As a regional state university, UNCG draws many of its 18,000 students from the surrounding communities in central and western North Carolina. AUB, on the other hand, is a private institution of 8,000 students and has a more cosmopolitan student body. Additionally, there were internal diversities among each institution that emphasized different perspectives on dealing with human rights issues. At UNCG the racial makeup between white students and black students was an important characteristic both for the students at UNCG and AUB. At AUB, the religious diversity also played an important role in shaping the conversations on human rights. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two groups was in the socio-economic status. Typically, the students at UNCG and AUB come from different social strata in their respective societies. Obviously this also contributed to different viewpoints on human rights issues. At AUB the course was housed in the Civilization Sequence Program (CVSP). Every student at AUB passes through CVSP as it serves as a general education requirement. At UNCG, the course was offered in through the Lloyd International Honors College. For students in this program, there is an expectation of study abroad and study of a foreign language. Our course was offered in the late afternoon in Beirut and the morning in Greensboro. There was a little stagger at the beginning and end of the semester as UNCG started three weeks before AUB. In total, there were eleven weeks of collaboration.

The nontraditional class structure, synchronous and often virtual, also presented us with the opportunity to address many of the challenges of human rights through the practical realities of working across cultural, religious, geographic, and political differences. For instance, rather than examine abstract philosophical claims of human rights' universality, we put this assertion to the test through the day-to-day activities of the course, as students negotiated the efficacy and meaning of various human rights concepts across multiple contexts. As such, students learned many paradoxes of human rights inductively through experiencing them instead of just reading and thinking about them. The benefit of this approach is that human rights become attached to material realities instead of just residing in a theoretical space.

We decided that the first few weeks at UNCG would work through the pre-classical and classical period and the work they produced would be for the purpose of helping students at AUB get caught up to speed quickly. One of the ways in which we facilitated this work was through the use of the program VoiceThread. It provides an online space for students to comment on a series of questions and images that Dr. Moore put together for the students at UNCG. The students were reminded that not only are they developing the conversation with their peers at UNCG but that they are also providing background information for the students at AUB. This idea of a dual audience is one that made them more self-reflexive in their responses. It required students to be accountable beyond their local space for the ideas they contribute. Unfortunately, the VoiceThread program also presented a technological challenge, and it took a couple of weeks to get all the AUB registered with it and able to comment. We continued with this approach of dual audiences—through different course media, however—throughout most of the

semester with very positive results.

During the second week of class I (Dr. Hartwiger) was able to visit Dr. Moore's class in person. Throughout my visit, I had an opportunity to field questions and talk about the background of the students at AUB. I also turned the table on the UNCG students and asked them what information they wanted me to share about them when I returned to Beirut. We reminded them that there is often a difference between the way they see themselves and the way others see them. I framed this question specifically within our content area of human rights. What do human rights mean in the US? The conversation that followed was productive. Students engaged in a discussion about race and the fact that there are still unresolved rights issues in the US. To me, it was helpful that students in Greensboro were beginning to see their own perspectives as situated in various ways, rather than as automatically shared. In a class in which everyone is from the US, there might be a tendency to leave uninterrogated some assumptions about rights. The idea of having another presence in the classroom sparked an awareness of the limits of each individual's perspective. We noted, for instance, that the U.S. students, knowing that their primary audience is their AUB counterparts, didn't comment at all on Islam, though they weighed in frequently on Christianity and Judaism.

As the semester progressed, we attempted to keep an eye on big picture issues. One of the issues was content specific. In providing a space for examining the intellectual tradition of human rights through pre-classical, classical, Enlightenment, and contemporary moments we constructed a very linear, Western-oriented trajectory of human rights discourse. Throughout the semester we worked to ensure that in teaching this content we were not simply replicating this structure. In other words, we thought it was necessary to provide critical distance from the material in order to have productive observations and deep analysis of the ways in which rights have emerged in our contemporary world. We did not want to teach a course which might reify potentially problematic narratives about human rights as they emerge through a particular intellectual tradition. In showing how each period informs the next, we worked to understand more about why rights look like they do today.

The first virtual meeting provided an interesting moment of first contact. During the last fifteen minutes of class the two classes Skyped. There was the first awkward moment but overall there was a good energy. There was one memorable comment from an AUB student. She wanted the students in Greensboro to talk about what they thought the AUB students would look like and what they would wear. The students at AUB were very anxious about how they would be perceived by their peers in North Carolina.

One little observation about why the guidelines for engagement are important. Our first photo posting assignment asked students to post one picture of something precious in their life and one picture of something that causes them stress. Nearly all of the students posted the regular things you might think of: family as something precious and a source of stress, school as a source of stress, religions as something precious, etc. However, one student posted a very graphic picture of an abused woman, and she mentioned that this was a cause of stress. We did not yet have the terms of engagement up so it was rather problematic to point to a specific guideline about posting. Lesson learned: Make this the first activity and have it up before posts start.

During the semester, we deviated from the syllabus slightly to address the Kony 2012 phenomenon. This was a very productive decision to go off script so to speak because it put into practice many of the theoretical principles we were studying. Additionally, this was a crucial conversation that we continued both domestically and transnationally because it spoke directly to the issues the students confronted when they designed their own final projects (which were largely visual). Thinking about issues of representation, depictions of suffering, audience, and implied response were all essential to that final

project, and the KONY 2012 video made the stakes of those issues very clear.

Another significant moment for the class came in the form of a lecture by Dr. Habib Malik about his father, Charles Malik. Charles Malik was one of the primary framers of the UDHR along with Eleanor Roosevelt and China's P.C. Chang. In fact, Malik was responsible for writing the preamble, which we discovered he did over the course of a weekend. Dr. Habib Malik's talk was thoughtful, reflective, and celebratory of both his father and the UDHR. One of the aspects that struck me about the talk was the importance he placed on a non-binding document. Dr. Habib Malik repeatedly suggested that the UDHR, for him and others, was more significant than conventions which have the potential to be ratified by member states. He argued that the UDHR is a source of inspiration for those who wish to claim their rights. For example, he pointed to the UDHR's role in igniting opposition to communist and socialist regimes, ostensibly playing a part in bringing down the Soviet empire. While these were Dr. Malik's impressions of the role of the UDHR, it was very helpful for students to consider both the history of the document as well as the way the document lives on today. Our classes had spent time examining the document and looking at its structure, but we had not had such a personalized account of the framing of the document. It changed the way a lot of the students understood its importance.

Another interesting, partially improvised assignment the students had last week was to post two newspaper articles, one from the US and one from Lebanon, on the current crisis in Syria, and then to compare the two approaches in discussion within the groups. This constituted another turning point in the class, as suddenly the AUB students were, by far, "closer" to the crisis. Whereas much of what we'd done in the middle section of the class (Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, the UDHR, Kony 2012) really used the U.S. as the central point of reference, in this case the focus shifted to Lebanon's neighbor and a crisis with profound implications for the country. It was interesting to see the students respond to this shift. In one case, an AUB student offered as the first comment in the group's discussion a long, detailed overview of the relationship between politics in Syria and Lebanon and why it matters. She was, in effect, saying that there was no point trying to compare the articles until everyone knew something more about the situation (which in turn spoke back to what the newspaper articles either assume or ignore). In another group, the UNCG student began with a kind of summary of what the articles each "did" (without any interpretation) and then followed her summary with questions to her AUB group members for more information. Another (AUB) student posted as his contributed article a blog commentary comparing Kony 2012 to the treatment of Assad in the media. In short, we' really saw how students have come to understand one another's different positionings as sources of knowledge.

As we progressed throughout the semester we developed higher stakes work, moving beyond the get-to-know-you activities to deeper engagements. This was particularly observable during our reading of Joe Sacco's graphic narrative Palestine. At AUB, the students were not only eager but also prepared to engage in discussions that had an overtly political dimension. Lebanon lives with the reality and reverberations of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict everyday with Palestinian refugees, a closed border with Israel, etc. As such, the students at AUB were not shy about discussing Sacco's work and specifically his representation of the conflict. The dimension that was really interesting and demonstrated the productive nature of globally-networked learning was that as the students read the narrative they constantly had the UNCG students in mind. In other words, in-class discussions at AUB were informed by the presence of students from the United States even on days when there was no real time interaction. The four walls that house the class became permeable and students' knowledge production was informed not just by local conversations but through the presence (sometimes real and sometimes imagined) of another class. As we reached the conclusion of the text, students at AUB formulated questions about the difference in reading Palestine in Lebanon and the US for students at UNCG. The

questions prompted some very interesting discussions on Blackboard.

The culmination of these activities was a final joint presentation in real time through the Prezi program of a particular human rights issue. Students had to work through background and context as well as questions of representation and solutions. While this was logistically challenging both in producing the work and in the actual presentation, all the groups were able to put together final presentations. This final project revealed an important outcome of the course. In order to do significant work, students were required to consider perspectives that often challenged their own strongly held views. In particular, we asked them to think about how their study of the course material would have been substantively different without the collaboration (this is the prompt, in part, for the course reflection essay, too). We wanted them to be cognizant of the ways in which one can "love humanity, but dislike people" in the famous quip, and how actually having to negotiate tasks, values, projects, readings with other people, with all the technological, personal, temporal, cultural logistical/philosophical complications that entails, makes the stakes and challenges of "human rights" all the more concrete and pressing.

After UNCG finished their semester, Dr. Moore traveled to Beirut to meet with the AUB students and also give a talk for the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR). The visit provided good closure and symmetry to the semester. We felt like the experience was productive for us as teachers and very valuable for students as it challenged them step out of a traditional mode of learning. We are most pleased with the fact that students left the class having benefited from the collaborative nature as it extended the content in ways that would not be possible in exclusively local sites of learning.

Section 10: Student Feedback

AUB

"Logistically speaking, however, this course was more complicated than what I originally expected. I still cannot believe that a dual presentation was created and presented so smoothly for all the groups!"

"It was hectic...to many assignments not enough time to rest in between...The technology was a bit challenging at times especially with the slow internet connection."

"Beyond the material of the course I really benefited a lot from the way the course was structured, specifically the AUB-UNCG collaboration. It was fascinating to see the different perspectives concerning the topics we discussed in the course. It was interesting to see how we generalize our opinions while in reality they might be just exclusive tous."

"I consider this course one of the most important and unforgettable courses I have taken at AUB. The experience and the communication skills I have acquired in this course was far more informative than any other communication course or humanity course. I have learned to interact with strangers that live overseas and be close friends with them. I have learned to express and describe my feelings towards anything possible, such as pictures on VoiceThread with comments, discussions on blackboard, Skype, visual presentations (Prezi), conferences and even lectures."

"I had to learn to trust that when I woke up in the morning, parts of the project would be more complete than when I went to sleep – and that my own section of the project may have been altered or shifted. We all had to become better negotiators because there is no way to force anyone to do their share of the work."

"After we were able to conduct smaller discussions as a group, I got to know each of my group members a little deeper, so when we had larger discussions, I could navigate them more easily because I would always start with reading what [my group members] were saying, and I would go from there to decide which posts I would respond to."

"Any communication in this class had to first be filtered through the fact that you were talking to students of a completely different culture whom you barely knew. This reality surprisingly did not hinder our conversations with the AUN class. It gave me the chance to take that extra time to reflect on what I was going to say before I said it. The idea of reception is almost as important in human rights as the actual violations discussed."

"I may be overly empathetic to people I do not know, but I am just like that in general. I feel everything. But I also tend to be quite ignorant about what other cultures are actually like and what they have actually suffered and experienced. […] That is what I liked the most about this class. I already have empathy for people just because they are people, but I am moved even more once I learn their stories and it becomes that much more real. […] [I]t is also the simple things that I learned about life in Lebanon. […] I started this class hating technology and maybe a little bit afraid to talk to people who are from another culture for fear of seeming stupid or something, and now, I still hate technology but I have come away with a much bigger realization of the world."

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