Healing & Transformation Across Cultures

2013 COIL Partnership
Corning Community College (SUNY) & the University of Belize
• History & Background
• Learning Outcomes
• Student Voices
• Collaboration Assignments
• Takeaways & Next Steps
• Questions

Outline
Spring 2012 & 2013 Partnerships

The University of Belize
Belmopan, Belize

2012: LITR 4502, Multicultural American Literature
2013: LITR 1157, Survey of Literature

Instructor: Ubaldimir Guerra

Corning Community College
Corning, New York

2012: ENGL 1020, Writing About Literature
2013: ENGL 2800, Healing in Literature (online course)

Instructor: Ryan Hersha
• Enrollment of approximately 5,600 in the southern Finger Lakes region of New York state.

• Ranked one of the top 50 community colleges in the United States (Washington Monthly) & in top 10% of community colleges nationally (Aspen Institute).

• COIL project aligned with CCC’s Strategic Initiative, which included making the College a more “Diverse, Culturally Aware Community” and with SUNY’s 2010 Strategic Plan, which calls on us to “nurture a culturally fluent, cross-national mindset.”
• Enrollment of approximately 4,000, with locations in Belmopan City, Belize City, Cayo, Punta Gorda and two marine sites

• Belize’s national university

• COIL’s project aligned with UB’s vision and goals to “prepare Belize to meet global challenges”

The University of Belize
Corning in January (avg. high of 33°)
Belize in January (average high of 89° F)
• Applying various cultural perspectives to the interpretation of literary works.
• Describing how their own cultural lenses affect their interpretation of literary works.
• Identifying and participating effectively in varied contexts of online discourse, including academic and cross-cultural discourse.
• Using knowledge of another culture to extend their access to information, experiences, and understanding.
• Understanding their own culture in a global and comparative context.
• Appreciating aspects of a different culture (language, art, music, political structures, philosophy, and material culture).
• Accepting cultural differences and tolerating cultural ambiguity.

Global Competency Learning Outcomes
Student Voices
After a short period of time I felt like I was talking to a friend that I have known forever. When I finished our chat I started to think about different cultures and America. I found it very interesting that people from other countries know so much about America when we know little about them.

Student Voice (CCC)
My experience with my international partner has helped me to develop a more rounded personality as I am no longer shy. I believe it is great to interact with people from different backgrounds because there is a lot we don’t know about each other.

Student Voice (UB)
[This collaboration] made me want to continue to learn more about Belize and try to be more aware of different cultures. I have started to realize that I know much less about other countries than I thought I did. So far this experience has made me think about how many different cultures are in the world and wonder what the similarities are.

Student Voice (CCC)
The collaboration permitted me to re-evaluate myself in terms of cultural differences and similarities. I was greatly surprised that I have been to more American states than my partner. I am now much more open to interacting with new individuals from different backgrounds and I’m grateful to learn how a fellow college student balances life, work and pleasure.

Student Voice (UB)
I enjoyed the chance to communicate with another culture. That experience makes me feel like a more well rounded person because it gives one a chance to see how things happen in other countries instead of what just happens in the United States.
For me it has always been difficult to come out of my comfort zone, and when I found out that the class was going to be interacting with students from another university, I panicked. This was overcome, however, as my partner shared much insight about her life and dispelled my notion about the “American Dream.” I learnt about economic and social problems she faced, similar to those faced in Belize.

Student Voice (UB)
I really enjoyed doing the National anthem assignment with my partner.... After I read her essay on the American anthem I realized how different it seems to people from other cultures. When I think about the anthem the historical illusions are very strong in my mind and I assumed other people would see it that way as well. She helped remind me of the more poetic elements of the anthem that I sadly skipped over to get to the historical parts.

Student Voice (CCC)
For an array of personal reasons, I am very much outspokenly not fond of the U.S. I am in strong disagreement with their foreign and domestic policies and consumerism ... I do think, however, that the exercises allowed me to make a conscious effort to set aside my own prejudices when dealing with subject matter that on any other time I would have had a negative outlook on.

Student Voice (UB)
I spent some time thinking about how much I know about other countries. *I realized that my knowledge of other countries needs some serious improvement.* I have made this a goal of mine over the summer. I really enjoyed the experience of a class linked with a class from a different country... *I am surprised how much more I know about myself and the American culture because of this opportunity.* I now have a greater realization of the different viewpoints people have and how their culture shapes who they are as a person.

**Student Voice (CCC)**
My interaction with others in the collaboration gave me the opportunity to share my own Creole culture, living the village life and sharing my favorite cultural dishes. This experience has also thought me to be more open-minded toward the American culture, as we tend to be bombarded by much negativity when it comes to the U.S.

Student Voice (UB)
I was surprised at how happy I was to be able to ask and answer the interview questions. I think that part of the happiness was because of how hard we worked to get the assignment completed. I am very glad that we were able to chat and that I was able to discover how similar we are.

Student Voice (CCC)
Learning about both the American and Indian cultures has definitely sparked my interest for a deeper study of these cultures. The National Songs exercise has left me with a hunger to learn more about American history. Generally speaking, the cross-cultural collaboration has been one of the most enlightening and exciting class exercises I have participated in.

Student Voice (UB)
Collaborative Assignments
• **Self-introductions** in online discussion forum
• **Real-time interviews** between international partners
  • Student pairs arranged interview times & tool (Skype, Google Video Chat, ooVoo, or Facebook)
  • Started with suggested questions
  • Posted results of interview in Blackboard
• **Discussion of shared texts** in Blackboard: 3 novels over 8 weeks
• “Absolutely True Diaries” – shared journals
• **Student newspaper/newsletter articles**
Hello, My name is Hillary Green. I wouldn't consider myself an "average" 20 year old. I have a very overwhelming life, but its great and amazing. In the photo is my doggy Lennon, he is a beagle pug mix and a big part of my life. Although that image would never begin to explain me, i love music!! Dave Matthews is my all time favorite, hes so amazing! If you have never heard of him certainty you need to look him up :) I spend way to much of my time helping other people, its a passion! I work in a residential home full-time, even though i get way over stressed i wouldn't rather be doing anything else then making an impact in somebody's life. Family is another thing that holds a special spot in my heart, without the support and guidance i probably would have lost my mind.. (or have i :) Im happy where i am in life! i love the sun shine, something that has been hiding for far too long!!! I am very excited to meet new people :)!!

Hi Hillary! I love dogs, I have four pit bulls....obviously not as warm as yours. I also love music, with extreme passion. I listen to the Dave Matthews Band all the time. Crash Into Me is my favorite song. His voice and lyrics is amazing...and I am a sucker for real instrumental sounds. Do you have any song suggestions? I've never heard any of his solo works but would like to.
• Students paired with international partners
• Students then **mutually responsible** for:
  • Scheduling,
  • Setting up,
  • Conducting, and
  • Reporting on interviews.
• Plenty of instructor time and effort expended on monitoring student progress and reassigning students as necessary. Possibly the most challenging aspect of the course for instructors and students.
Partial results (in progress) of post-interview surveys.

Lessons: students will use the tools with which they are most comfortable (Facebook here). However, they can also be introduced to new tools by their international partners (ooVoo, for example).
International Interviews
International Interviews
Shared Texts (Discussed Online)
Inspired by themes in shared assigned text *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie

Not an analytical assignment, as are the discussions forums and essays

Instead, less formal, more personal connections in small groups

Opportunities to creatively share stories that connect with course themes, reflections, and personal responses
Yesterday's family trip to the annual Miami Youth Fair was an exciting moment of fun and bonding, which brought back many childhood memories of family trips to amusement parks. On this trip, there were 9 of us, including my wife, Nerissa, and son, Ulbaldimir Jr. (Mimicito, his first time in the U.S.), my big sister, Elda, and her children, Liam and Teresa, my Tia Anne, her daughter Kayli and her grandson Daniel.
Before going to the fair, I initially thought that the nature of the fair being for children would have caused me to become quickly uninterested. But as we arrived there, memories of going to Disney and Universal Studios with my grandfather, parents and 3 siblings and cousins affected me in two very interesting ways. First, I remember my granddad, who must have been in his 60's at the time, and his consistent smile and joy in seeing his grandchildren and family having fun. As I reflected on his good spirit, it made me see how we can gain joy from making children happy. Second, the more I reflected on his smile, the more it allowed me to ease myself and become like a child once again. In the end, while smiling, I saw my granddad’s face begin to merge with my own which was truly an exhilarating experience for me.

Allow me to share an old photo of a trip to Disney and a photo of our trip yesterday at the Miami Youth Fair.
My big sister, Elda, me and my big brother Luis

Comments: 1

Michael Nichols said... Friday, March 29, 2013 8:43:46 PM EDT

Professor, witnessing our children's joy is a phenomenon which can, like you eluded, bring us closer to our elders. Knowing that they reveled in our fun.
I think grandparents are perhaps a special group of parents - just far enough removed from grandchildren to thoroughly feel every moment of time spent with them. It's great that you have made that connection so early in your life. Some parents will watch and be happy with the fact that children are having fun, whereas parents like yourself will get knee-deep in the games with them!
Okay, let me try my first entry!

This last Sunday my girlfriend Jennie and I received a text from a mutual friend asking us if we would like to go for a hike. Thanks to some peer pressure, I overcame my initial resistance ("I have tons of student papers to read!") and found myself out in the woods in short order, stomping up and down the very muddy paths of a trail that was new to me and Jennie both, and really enjoying it—not just the fresh air, sunshine, and a little exercise, but the little adventure as well.

One thing I appreciated about this particular hike, on a patch of ground I'd never heard of called Plymouth Woods, was its eccentricity. Here is a picture of what they have at the trail head: a sign displaying the front of an abandoned old Plymouth... and one of my favorite poems by Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

Here is the poem:

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
• **Technical/procedural** hurdles (e.g., enrollment of international students in LMS)

• **Technical** difficulties experienced by students

• **Varied levels of student commitment**, impacting international partners

• **Tracking** student participation in partnerships and ensuring all students have the opportunity for high-quality partnerships.

Instructional Challenges
Commit firmly to shared deadlines and manner of amending them. The schedule gets tangled & squished quickly.

Track student progress/success in partnerships closely.

Cross-cultural learning challenges students to learn about their own culture—and their relationship to that culture.

International collaborative learning encourages heightened **student involvement and sense of responsibility.**
• Relationship with facilitating organization (COIL)
• Release time/stipends
• Professional development support (travel, etc.)
• Technical investment and support
• Active intervention against bureaucratic roadblocks

Making It Work Where We Are
• When collaborating two different levels of students, at some point some students may feel that assignments were too rudimentary.

• Intercultural exchange allowed students to confront and challenge their own worldviews and prejudices.

• This exchange enables instructor to learn more about students’ goals and outlook on life, and thus strengthens the instructor – student relationship.

Takeaways for Future Collaboration (Guerra)
• Challenging students to a higher level of responsibility: collaboration.

• Teacher as learner:
  • Approaching own subject matter from fresh perspective.
  • Learning about the other culture.
  • Working with partner in a creative venture.

• Camaraderie between students and instructor as we engage challenges, questions, and discoveries together.

Other Benefits
What’s Next?
Ryan Hersha
rhersha@corning-cc.edu

Ubaldimir Guerra
uguerra@ub.edu.bz