# Multiple countries, languages, disciplines and academic levels: Overcoming barriers by working on a UVE-COIL project

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) provides multicultural experiences. Knowing and working with people from different countries promotes students' motivation for learning activities, increases cultural awareness and builds their confidence in practicing other languages.

In Fall 2019, the University of Texas (UT-Austin) in the USA, Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL) in Ecuador and Universidad Arturo Michelena (UAM) from Venezuela partnered in a COLL initiative.

# <u>AIM</u>

The goal was to foster intercultural collaboration, encouraging students to communicate, provide projectbased feedback and learn from international peers.

### **CHALLENGES**

Key challenges included language barriers, different academic levels, subjects, courses schedules, diversity in student groups, and limitations to internet access.

# **PARTICIPANTS**

54 students participated:

**21** senior students from UT-Austin taking "Capstone Research in International Relations and Global Studies"

27 First-year students from ESPOL taking the course "Analysis and Problem Solving"

**O6** are graduate students from UAM taking the "Decision making and problem solving"

### **METHOD**

Platform used for planned activities: Google Classroom COIL activities:

#### 1.- Icebreaker activity

Students posted a 90-second introductory video: What is your name, school, major, and grade level? What is your favorite place on campus? What is your city famous for? Why is intercultural/global exchange important today?

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- 5 comentarios de la clase
- Saludos Brunolt Mi sitio favorito del campus es la cilica de rehabilitación ani comparto todos los días con muchos pacientes alumnos que hacen sus practicas clinicas de la camera ally bueno para mi es un places aportar en su concimiento durante el pre gado. Custinamo más acercas de u carrera de que
- 15 oct. 2019 Nice to meet you Brund Your favorite spots on campus sound avesome. We have a pool here on our campus too, but on restaurant next to it. I wish we did though! What kind of food do you like from the restaurant? I'm not very familiar to Ecuadorian cuisine, so I'm really interested!

### 2.- Engaging in research

- Sept: UT students posted 3-minute videos describing their independent research projects, along with an abstract summarizing their project. ESPOL and UAM students provided feedback.
- Oct: ESPOL students, who worked on real-life projects in teams, posted videos about their research, including abstracts in English. UT and UAM students gave feedback.
- Throughout: Since UAM students were in a master-level program, they served as mentors, giving feedback to UT and ESPOL's students.

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Control COLL projects inducems were "Digital work item" conformed by Elika Almache, Bruno histopo,Bherne Wargan, Mances Portocerrero, 1948 Jargar and Lang Digitals. Duri riske is about the resolution of a public mainty Exang Theinitianity methodology. Work is induce raining in the succe is marrow the examines) and such the property of a Darber Projectment is how to norsease the followers in the social metal of Matters can diplice the company as a faeder in sale of holdgenable products. The Sandokine company is the barden to matter the control of the diplice the company is a faeder in sale of indiplication of the success of the success of the success of the barden term barden is also of the company. Then we define about the social media, so we had an intraview with the COD part to low can all the barden the produces these, where we are an in-redit, constraining associated and the factors of the produces the success of the optimum tabulance were used in the needs, uncertained and the distribution of the produces the success of the success of the produces the success of the distribution of the produces the success of the success of the success.



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We enjoyed your presentation, but we had a bit of trouble with the video audio. We apologize if we missed some of the key points that you might have made.

We enjoyed your introduction to the project, and we feel you did a great job of situating the importanc of your project in proper context.

From what we've gathered, you're attempting to use design methodology to increase social media followers for this brand with the end goal of increasing company sales. We understand the technique

### 3.- Reflection

To conclude the COIL project, students wrote a short paper reflecting on their experience in this way:

- Describe what your discussions were about.
  What surprised you about something they said or
- What surprised you about something they said or discussed?
- What are some of the cultural differences that you have been made more aware of as a result of working with teams from other countries?
- How will this change the way you research your own project?

### Testimonials reported by students in the reflection:

"(...) this online course (COIL) was an amazing experience for every student who participated in it; we could exchange many ideas, points of view and even culture. The fact that we were able to communicate in English was really nice because it made me develop mu English skills." ESPOL

"As a result of the international collaboration in the course I have become more aware of the importance of communicating and collaborating with people from cultures outside of my own." UTA

"This experience helped us to understand better the views of other students, but also to understand more about ourselves." ESPOL

"Having to explain my project to students unfamiliar and also with a language barrier allowed me to conceptually grasp the contents of my project at its core. It helped me understand my project better." UTA

"This COIL experience will help me in the way I do research because I learned that there are multiple ways of solving a problem and seeking for help of others is important, feedback is important." ESPOL.

# **RESULTS**

Results showed an overall satisfaction of the experience.

UT-Austin students gained greater awareness about partnering countries and their own, examining bias in their own language. Students also learned that intercultural conversations can inform their research.

On the other hand, despite ESPOL students being Spanish speakers, most of them prepared videos and provided feedback in English for the COIL activities. The COIL experience helped them to overcome some fears about interacting with people from other countries/cultures.

UAM students especially liked providing feedback because they felt like tutors since they were at a master's level.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

Universities must show enough support and flexibility to include COIL activities within the academic curriculum. It is recommended to plan more time or activities to build rapport among students before collaborating on graded work.

Moreover, it is essential to provide enough support to students for activities; for instance, rubrics with criteria for assessing specific tasks on others' work and regular contributions by the teachers to the online discussions.

Finally, when working with students from different regions, teachers should provide some tips about what to expect/to do when interacting with people from other cultures/countries; thus, they can feel more comfortable working together.

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