THE GLOBAL IMPACT EXCHANGE

A Publication of Diversity Abroad

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VIRTUAL EXCHANGE AS A TOOL TO ADVANCE EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Stevens Initiative

We believe that virtual exchange can change how the next generation sees the world and their place in it.

IF technological skills and innovative thinking open doors to entrepreneurial growth;
IF communication breaks down biased assumptions about others;
IF people-to-people engagement is necessary to solve the greatest challenges of our time;

THEN we know that virtual exchange is a sure path to preparing the next generation to create a more peaceful and prosperous world.

The Stevens Initiative is housed at the Aspen Institute and is supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. The J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative is a U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs program administered by the Aspen Institute.

A Global Movement

Virtual exchange uses technology to enable young people from diverse places and circumstances to have powerful cross-cultural learning experiences and meaningful relationships. Since 2015, we have made virtual exchange possible for tens of thousands of young people around the globe. That momentum continues to build – we're powering a global movement to connect young people in many more regions around the world through virtual exchange.

Our Role

The Stevens Initiative is named for U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens (1960-2012). The Initiative has honored his legacy by building a community that champions the people-to-people connections the late ambassador believed could change the world – all through virtual exchange. As the leading funder and advocate for virtual exchange, we are committed to giving every young person a virtual exchange experience by:

- Investing in innovative programs that offer young people life-changing global experiences.
- Sharing knowledge and resources to support the growth of the virtual exchange field.
- Advocating for virtual exchange adoption so every young person has access to these experiences.

Our Vision

We are working toward the day when every young person participates in a virtual exchange that prepares them to prosper in an increasingly interconnected world.

Help us get there.

For more information, contact
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PUBLICATION **INFORMATION**

The Global Impact Exchange

A Publication of Diversity Abroad

The Global Impact Exchange publication serves to advance domestic and international conversations around diversity, inclusion, and equity in global education with respect to the thematic focus identified in each edition.

Spring 2023 Edition:

Virtual Exchange as a Tool to Advance Equity and Inclusion

Published July 2023

Virtual exchange has evolved significantly over the last 15 years, just as technology has advanced to support a myriad of ways to connect communities across geographic locations. Many international education practitioners and educators have developed innovative approaches to virtual exchange programming from design to implementation. For the Spring 2023 edition of the Global Impact Exchange, Diversity Abroad in partnership with the Stevens Initiative invited individuals and teams working on virtual exchange to submit pieces that consider the following questions about this model's role in advancing equity and inclusion: How can virtual exchange be utilized to increase access to international education and global learning for students/individuals who may not have access to traditional forms of education abroad programming? What are some unique challenges that virtual or digital programming have regarding equity, inclusion, or access? In what ways can virtual exchange support and accelerate global learning? How can institutions and organizations reconceptualize or reorient virtual exchange to advance students'/ individuals' learning around DEI competencies (e.g., engaging with difference, cultural humility)? How can virtual exchange be used as an opportunity to explore mutuality or interdependency given the bi- or multidirectional flows of exchange and connections present in these programs?

INTRODUCTION

By **Christine Shiau**

Executive Director,
The Stevens Initiative at
the Aspen Institute

The Stevens Initiative is delighted to partner with Diversity Abroad on the spring 2023 Global Impact Exchange (GIE). Every young person deserves the opportunity to gain the skills and friendships that come from global experiences. Virtual exchange has incredible potential to make global education more accessible and equitable than ever before. At the same time, we recognize that virtual exchange faces barriers to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) that are both perpetual and emerging within the broader global education field. Efforts like this GIE edition allow us to proactively address these challenges at a time when virtual exchange is growing and evolving. We aspire for everyone, regardless of their familiarity with virtual exchange, to gain valuable insights from this edition that will improve understanding of how this emerging practice intersects with equity and access in all areas of global learning.

We're heartened to see the significant interest in and commitment to improving virtual exchange practice included in the response to this call for articles. Educators, scholars, and administrators are advancing the virtual field by designing programs and facilitating research that puts DEIA first, as evidenced by the programs detailed here. We're doubly excited that this interest isn't just from the U.S.-based individuals, but, in the spirit of exchange, that this edition includes multiple perspectives from a wide variety of international communities and identities. This edition of GIE highlights pedagogy that can be adopted across the virtual exchange field, often using specific programs as case studies. Notably, while many of these articles articulate the power of virtual exchange to reach and include many diverse participants, they also point out how far there still is to go in fully meeting the potential that virtual exchange promises.

As you read, we hope you'll reflect on how these learnings and best practices can inform your own work. From designing programs that are inclusive of adult learners to addressing power imbalances to tackling the digital divide, these articles unpack how and why we must remain vigilant in creating a field that can avoid the pitfalls of the past and face the challenges of the future head on. We are just as inspired by the articles addressing the persistent challenges that complicate virtual exchange as we are by those which encourage its widespread adoption. While the path ahead requires significant commitment and dedication, this edition provides an optimistic view of the future of virtual exchange. By working together to address the many intersections of DEIA and virtual exchange, we can ensure that every young person has an impactful global education experience, no matter their background or identity.

From Virtual Exchange to *Critical* Virtual Exchange and *Critical* Internationalization at Home

| Dr. Mirjam Hauck | The Open University UK |

Virtual exchange (VE) combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue with the broad reach of digital technology (EVOLVE Project Team, 2019). It is a research-informed practice and a strong catalyst in advancing the internationalization of HE curricula, known as internationalization at home (IaH) (Beelen & Jones, 2015; O'Dowd & Beelen, 2021). It can prepare for, deepen, or extend physical exchanges or—as shown by COVID-19—it can also emulate study abroad.

However, VE-based IaH is not inherently equitable, nor is it necessarily inclusive. Like other forms of online or blended education, it is prone to Western hegemonies and influenced by inequalities in access to and experience with technology, institutional constraints (e.g., lack of support and incentives for educators), gender, race, age, English language dominance, and socio-political and geopolitical challenges (Helm, 2020). Hence, as O'Dowd and Beelen (2021) conclude, "we need yet to find out more about how processes of inclusion and exclusion play out in virtual settings" (n.p.).

Critical VE (CVE) (Hauck, 2020; Klimanova & Hellmich, 2021), a nascent field in VE practice and research, aims to ensure more equitable and inclusive student exchange experiences and is characterized by the following elements (see Figure 1):

- The use of low-bandwidth technologies
- A focus on students often underrepresented in IaH, e.g., those from low socio-economic backgrounds (SoB)
- Exchange topics informed by and aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- The integration of local student outreach work with businesses, NGOs, and charities to foster transversal skills development, enhance graduate employability, and support SDG achievement.
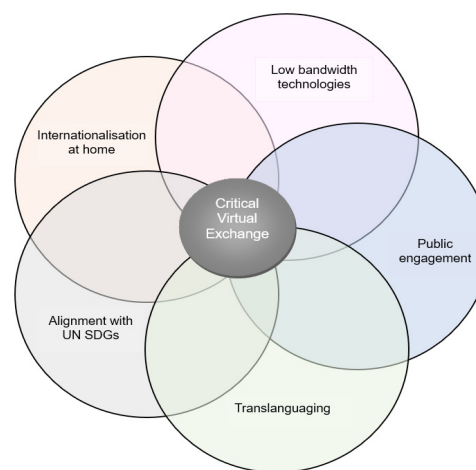
Figure 1: Critical Virtual Exchange – A Framework

In addition, we propose the systematic integration of translanguaging approaches as a defining element of CVE, particularly but not exclusively in exchanges where the learning and teaching of languages and cultures is the focal point. Translanguaging means the fluid use of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources as a single repertoire (Clavijo Olarte et al., 2023). It is about practices that encourage all learners to use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire and help them realize their full multimodal communication potential. Multimodal communicative competence is the ability to express ideas across a wide range of modes including words, spoken or written, images (still and moving), sound, 3D models, and any combinations of these (Kress, 2003). Modeling

and promoting translanguaging approaches in the student exchanges not only introduces multimodal communication as a common exchange practice, it is also a first step towards equitable multilingualism (Ortega, 2017).

VE is also known to be an ideal context for developing students' digital skills as the exchanges are—by default—mediated by technology (e.g., Helm, 2014; Hauck, 2019). CVE, however, is informed by *critical* digital literacy (CDL) that explicitly leverages digital technologies for social justice-oriented action and change, e.g., by reaching out to a wider, more diverse range of students in collaborative online learning projects (Darvin, 2020; Nicolaou, 2021) such as those implemented in VE.

Finally, CVE is also an instantiation of critical global citizenship education (CGCE) (Andreotti, 2006) which has notions of power, voice, and difference at its core, and involves the systematic development of critical inquiry, engagement, reflexivity, and re-learning. Grounded in real-world issues, CGCE involves "analysis and critique of the relationships among perspectives, language, power, social groups and social practices by the learners" (Andreotti, 2006, p. 51). Designed in accordance with these notions, CVE can b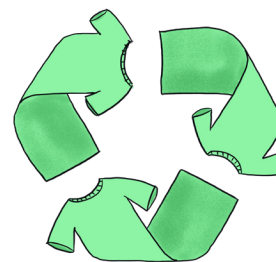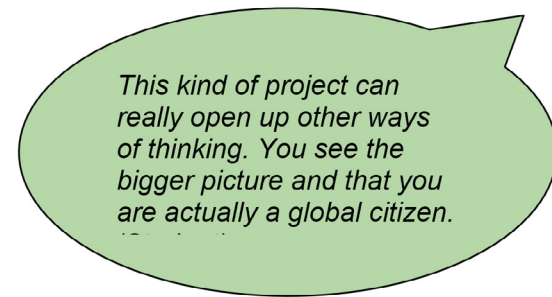ecome a pedagogical vehicle for collaborative action, public engagement, and socio-political change. It has great potential as a first step toward learner agency, glocal awareness-raising and 'thinking otherwise' (Stein & Andreotti, 2021) and—in this way—toward *critical IaH*.

Shared Garden is a CVE example that is aligned with SDG 13 (Climate Action). Here, university students from France and Spain collaborated with a local allotment to develop an environmentally friendly and sustainable watering-system which was subsequently built to maintain a physical garden close to Bordeaux University campus (https://express.adobe.com/page/qi01gwVrDxYpz/).

Another example, *Reading the City Through Agenda 2030*, involved university students from Argentina, Poland, and Sweden in critically exploring their cities through the lens of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities). They first investigated local challenges and existing grassroots initiatives and then co-created multimodal sustainability campaigns equally relevant in their respective urban environments.

This kind of project can really open up other ways of thinking. You see the bigger picture and that you are actually a global citizen.

LET THEM BEE!

These projects share the aim of fostering CGCE by engaging students in:

- exploring sustainability issues within and across geographical and cultural contexts
- understanding global SDGs in the light of local realities
- negotiating ideas by using translanguaging strategies, digital tools, and multimodal resources
- co-creating a product as a way of implementing new knowledge and taking action.

CVE has the potential to be agenda setting for VE scholars and practitioners worldwide through its focus on social justice and inclusion and to instigate transformative change at individual, institutional, and policy level. It will create new legacies in critical IaH based on an understanding of research as "living knowledge" (Facer & Enright, 2016): praxis knowledge that connects lived experiences on the ground—by students, educators, administrators, and other decision-makers involved in CVE—with the body of global critical knowledge in international and intercultural education and transversal skills building.

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International Tele-collaboration in the "Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA)" World: Facilitating Equity and Inclusion (EI) in Business Education

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Guergana Gougoumanova, PhD	Cultural Intelligence Center, LLC, Vice President
Iuliia Samoilyk, PhD	Professor of Economics, Poltava State Agrarian University

Abstract: This article provides personal narratives from two global educators from Ukraine and the United States on facilitating equity and inclusion (EI) in business education. In Fall 2021 an International Statistics undergraduate class from Ukraine and an MBA/MSc in Accounting class, Accounting Analysis for Decision Making, from the US participated in a virtual exchange (VE) project. In Fall 2022, an Economy of the Enterprise undergraduate class from Ukraine and a Cost Accounting undergraduate class from the US participated in another VE project. The 2021 project examined select Ukrainian and U.S. agricultural sectors, while the 2022 project focused on specific Ukrainian and U.S. companies' sustainability reporting practices. Both projects required cross-country teamwork and research. The first project took place before Russia's war in Ukraine, while the second was during the war. A diverse body of students had an equal chance to tele-collaborate and work on team-specific topics. The students and instructors alike experienced first-hand the four components of the "VUCA" world—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Despite some challenges (working from a war-stricken country and having sporadic supply of electricity, Internet connection, and water in Ukraine), the collaborations fostered EI in business education.

Tele-Collaborations

The tele-collaborations were conducted on Zoom. The first VE took place just before Russia's war in Ukraine. The students from the Ukrainian and the U.S. university were placed in seven teams. Recent evidence suggests that team collaboration is improved by the presence of women in teams, and that this effect is explained by benefits to team processes (Bear & Woolley, 2011). Particularly in contexts such as STEM, gender diversity helps alleviate the gender gap and bias in traditional, male-dominated teams, argue these authors. In addition, Rosenauer et al. (2016) show that the effects of nationality diversity in groups depend on task interdependence and the cultural intelligence of group leaders. These authors propose that nationality diversity is more consequential in more interdependent groups, in which group interactions and processes are more salient. Three teams had a Ukrainian leader and four teams a U.S. leader. The leaders were tasked with organizing team meetings and compiling the teams' Zoom presentations. Table 1 shows the gender and country composition of the first VE's teams.

Table 1: Gender and country composition of the Fall 2021 VE

Team number	Female students	Male students
Team 1	2 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	1 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 2	2 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university	2 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university
Team 3	3 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	None from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 4	3 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	None from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 5	3 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	None from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 6	3 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	None from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 7	1 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university	1 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university

While the 2021 project examined select Ukrainian and U.S. agricultural sectors (alternative meat, milk, sunflower, seafood, etc.), the 2022 project focused on specific Ukrainian and U.S. companies' (Arnika Organic, Apple, Kernel, Mars, etc.) sustainability reporting practices. Both projects required cross-country teamwork and research. The 2022 VE took place during Russia's war in Ukraine. There were five teams participating in this VE. Two teams had a Ukrainian leader and three teams a U.S. leader. The leaders were tasked with organizing team meetings and compiling the teams' Zoom presentations. Table 2 shows the gender and country composition of the second VE's teams.

Table 2: Gender and country composition of the Fall 2022 VE

Team number	Female students	Male students
Team 1	1 from the Ukrainian university and None from the American university	2 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 2	2 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	2 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university
Team 3	2 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university	1 from the Ukrainian university and 1 from the American university
Team 4	2 from the Ukrainian university and None from the American university	2 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university
Team 5	2 from the Ukrainian university and 2 from the American university	1 from the Ukrainian university and None from the American university

EI in VE and the VUCA World

International VE is valuable in university education in the Global North and the Global South (Figarotti et al., 2022), especially because it promotes equity for all participants. Dovrat (2022) distinguishes several theoretical underpinnings behind extant VE research: 1) pedagogical (learning approaches, learning theories, and teaching approaches/ competencies), 2) intercultural competencies, 3) digital literacy, 4) psychological and socio-cultural, and 5) other. This article provides a new theoretical underpinning in the last, 'other' category – the VUCA world. To reiterate, the 'VUCA' world means 'volatility,' 'uncertainty,' 'complexity,' and 'ambiguity' (VUCA World, n.d.). This is a relatively new concept about living in an unpredictable world, where change is fast and constant.

During the two tele-collaborations, a diverse body of students—both male and female (please refer to the two tables above) and both studying in Ukraine and the USA—had an equal chance to work together on team-specific business research topics. The students and instructors alike experienced first-hand the four components of the VUCA world. For example, in 2021, before Russia's war in Ukraine, both Ukraine- and U.S. based students talked about the possibility to study for a Masters or a PhD degree in the other country and university. The Ukrainian professor offered to translate for the U.S. students the Ukrainian version of her university's PhD brochure. There was hope for international travel and study on both sides. Before the war, students and instructors felt comfortable discussing Ukraine's agricultural exports. Very soon afterwards, on 24 February 2022, the war erupted, and the world changed overnight for the Ukrainian students. The American students also felt the effects of this war, such as higher gas prices. Hopes for studying abroad in Ukraine were stifled, at least temporarily. Despite some challenges (working from a war-stricken country and having sporadic supply of electricity, Internet connection, and water in Ukraine), the collaborations fostered EI in business education.

Conclusion

All students, regardless of gender and nationality, experienced a no-cost virtual study abroad. The U.S. students showed sincere concern for the safety and wellbeing of their Ukrainian VE partners before and during the war. One American student shared with his instructor that his team was in contact with its Ukrainian teammates once a week after the start of the war. Lasting friendships were built, both among the students and between the instructors. The latter co-authored several conference presentations and research articles as a direct result of these two VE projects. The classes acquired cultural knowledge about the two countries, besides business content knowledge. The authors encourage university instructors to pursue VE collaborations even when a VUCA world event occurs. VE helps promote EI for all. VE participation in the VUCA world offers moral support to the party(-ies) that is(are) currently experiencing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and/or ambiguity. Nobody is completely immune to the VUCA world. VE makes VE participants empathetic to one another, while learning about the subject matter.

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Promoting Inclusive Spaces Through virtual Exchange in Higher Education

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Abstract: The precepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) continue to maintain center stage in global conversations as technology accelerates the globalization process. The voice of African academia in these conversations is heard, albeit faintly. Post-colonial emancipation and changing technological realities present valuable opportunities for African educators to explore ways of achieving impact and retaining relevance in the world arena. One avenue for achieving this is through virtual exchange. This article provides a narrative of personal and professional experiences as an educator and virtual exchange practitioner. As a facilitator with Soliya and Sharing Perspectives, I have derived invaluable experiences in virtual exchange which have informed my perspectives and practice as an educator. The discussion will focus on the design and implementation of virtual exchange programs involving faculty from several universities in Africa, the United States, and Europe. The exchange programs focused on decolonization of higher education and professional development for history education teachers. In this article I will share my experiences in the design of the programs and as a facilitator. The main questions that the article will address are: What works for virtual exchange in Africa? How does virtual exchange promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Africa? What are the challenges in design and implementation of virtual exchange in third countries? What are the lessons that can be drawn from these experiences?

Introduction

The concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion have remained a central theme in mainstream emancipatory discourse. The triple concepts of EDI are gaining prominence in Africa, which for a very long time suffered under the yoke of traditional cultural practices that have inhibited the participation of a large segment of its population from development and progressive activities. Most of the African countries have recovered from the debilitating effects of colonialism and have chartered their own ways in terms of drafting their development plans, resource mobilization, and implementation of visionary development agendas. However, there is still much that needs to be done in terms of leveling the ground for key development players. Women and girls in Africa have for a long time been denied equal opportunities under the pretextual banner of religion and culture. The unheard voices of the minorities and the underrepresented have been stifled by the dominant voices of those who hold power based on gender identity, resource accessibility, and demographic factors. While educational institutions have provided a momentous push towards the achievement of equality and equity in education, there are still avenues that have not been navigated fully. Virtual exchange is one way the benefits of education as an equalizer can be leveraged to provide a platform for diverse voices to be heard in an environment that is

open and free from prejudice. This article presents an educator's experience as a virtual exchange facilitator and the lessons drawn from facilitating several exchange programmes.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Kenyan Education System

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 has made it a commitment for countries to provide all children with inclusive and equitable education, with a further commitment to lifelong learning for all (Abuya, n.d). Kenya has made efforts along this line, but more needs to be done in terms of accelerating the pace of inclusion. An equity analysis of the newly implemented curriculum revealed gaps in teacher-pupil ratios and access to educational resources including ICT. Globally, there are different conceptualisations of the concept of diversity. Many in Africa consider it in terms of tolerance for differences of opinion, ethnic tolerance, and respect for religious and cultural opinions and practices. However, these are limited points of view regarding the terms EDI. It is in this light that virtual exchange has been a suitable complementary pedagogy for educators to explore issues around diversity and inclusion from a global context and relate their local context with others around the globe. Globally, there are different conceptualisations of the concept of diversity. In Kenya diversity is seen largely in terms of ethnic divides (Kabiri, 2014).

Curriculum Reforms and EDI

The newly implemented Kenyan curriculum places tremendously high value on the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The vision of the basic education curriculum reforms does not directly mention the terms EDI; however, they are entrenched in the mission which seeks to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered, and ethical citizen. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework states that this will be achieved by providing every Kenyan learner with world-class standards in the skills and knowledge that they deserve and which they need in order to thrive in the 21st century (KICD, 2017). The growth of virtual exchange as a global standard for enhanced development of *21*st century skills is therefore an innovative approach educators in Africa must learn to use in their work and make their courses have an international component.

Virtual Exchange Pedagogical Pathways to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Virtual exchange provides an alternative pedagogical pathway to enhance the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Through online engagement with participants from different parts of the world, participants learn the intercultural competencies and learn to appreciate different and multiple perspectives regarding local and global issues. The advantage of global learning is that participants do not need to travel across several countries to experience intercultural diversity that exists across multiple cultures. They experience this from their own computers or other digital devices.

Design/Methods

The approval in design, development, and implementation of the virtual exchange programmes were comparatively the same. The design of the VE was done in three phases. Phase 1: pre-session, Phase 2: implementation, Phase 3: post/evaluation.

Pre-session. During this phase the collaborating faculty met to discuss the structure and activities for the program. These involved the activities for both synchronous and asynchronous phases.

In Session. The activities were based on four focus areas depending on the theme of the exchange. Participants were required to conduct activities around these areas. The activities included required readings, comparative video analysis, peer interviews, and discussions.

Post-session. In the final phase of the program, the participants wrote a one-page reflection of their experiences.

Major Findings/Experiences

The major experiences from the perspective of an African virtual exchange practitioner are summarized as follows:

- The voices of African scholars in the virtual exchange sub-discipline are remotely heard and this needs to be amplified.
- Most of the exchanges have been in the teaching of languages and business studies. However, there is opportunity to develop more VE projects in education and other disciplines. Universities in Africa can begin developing exchanges between themselves and incorporating at least one global partner.
- African educators have a tremendous opportunity to incorporate VE in their work the same way it is happening in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and North America.
- The use of translingual approaches in virtual exchanges provides an opportunity for educators and students to experience new languages, which is a key element in fostering global understanding.

Lessons and Recommendations

Virtual exchange is a pedagogic alternative that has multiple advantages and can be used to address many of the global problems like climate change, conflicts, and racial issues (Oenbring & Gokcora, 2022). It can be used to

foster global understanding and citizenship. The voices of marginalized women and girls in rural communities can be amplified through virtual exchange activities that highlight community problems and seek wider understanding.

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Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Global Education Through Virtual Exchange

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Abstract: This article describes Georgia State University's (GSU) effective strategies for expanding virtual exchange (VE), an initiative that provides global education for a large group of students and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). VE aims to benefit all students by developing 21st century workplace skills, including teamwork, digital literacy, and intercultural competency. Over the past three years, the GSU VE program has served over 4,000 students from various disciplines. Two major collaborative efforts to expand VE at GSU are the Scaling Access to Virtual Exchange (SAVE) Grant Program and tagging VE Signature Courses. These strategies not only ensure the growth and sustainability of VE but also enable students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to experience high-impact international learning opportunities. This article may provide guidance for other universities to create similar programs to expand VE and support DEI on their campuses.

Virtual exchange (VE) is an innovative form of global education that uses internet-based tools and online pedagogies to connect students from different cultures to collaborate on academic projects. VE brings the world to the classroom without the financial barriers of study abroad programs and offers the same benefits of enhancing global knowledge and cross-cultural awareness. VE is also recognized as a high-impact practice contributing to engaged learning and student success in higher education (Commander et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; O'Dowd, 2018; Rienties et al., 2020). Importantly, VE supports diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) through widening access to international learning for students who have historically been underrepresented in global learning activities. Research indicates first-generation college students, Black and African American students, Hispanic students, and financially disadvantaged students tend to see the largest improvements in academic outcomes upon participating in VE (Lee et al., 2022). The Stevens Initiative, an international leader in VE, suggests in its 2022 Survey of the Virtual Exchange Field that VE largely expanded due to the pandemic, but "it remains to be seen whether this rapid expansion will be sustained and whether providers will continue to invest in virtual exchange" (Stevens Initiative, 2022, p.4). Since VE promotes DEI and provides numerous benefits to students, it is important to consider how universities can grow and sustain such initiatives.

Virtual Exchange at Georgia State University (GSU)

GSU is recognized as one of the most diverse universities in the United States, according to U.S.

News's diversity index. With a student body of over 54,000 students from more than 130 countries, GSU includes a minority enrollment rate with 42% identifying as Black, 15% as Asian, 14% as Hispanic, and 6% as two or more races. GSU seeks to become a national leader in DEI through different initiatives, including the VE initiative. The GSU VE initiative has successfully supported students across disciplines to develop intercultural skills and global competency over the past three years with an increase of 480% from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022. Two of our campus-wide collaborative efforts have significantly contributed to the expansion and sustainability of the VE initiative to benefit a broader student population with diverse backgrounds and support DEI: The Scaling Access to Virtual Exchange (SAVE) Grant Program and tagging VE Signature Courses.

The Scaling Access to Virtual Exchange (SAVE) Grant

Despite the significant growth of VE at GSU, providing international learning opportunities for a large number of students remains a challenge. The SAVE Grant Program, sponsored by GSU's Office of International Initiatives (OII) and the Atlanta Global Studies Center, provides funding and various support for academic departments to integrate VE into all sections of a required course for a major and thus ensures that all graduates in that program take part in at least one VE experience. This has promoted the expansion of the VE into the curriculum of required courses across disciplines, especially disciplines that have limited resources and access to international components, such as Biology, Kinesiology & Health, and Occupational Therapy, thus highlighting VE as a campus-wide program.

Funded instructors work together to create VE templates that can be customized to fit the content of the required course for the major. The SAVE

Grant Program is designed to integrate VE into the curriculum through three phases: The VE templates and materials are piloted in one section of the required course in one semester (usually Spring semester) and then refined and revised during the summer based on student and faculty feedback. These materials are then used to integrate VE into all sections of the required course in the following Fall semester, allowing all students taking this required course to have VE experience. This is especially crucial and beneficial to historically underrepresented students and financially disadvantaged students.

The development of VE templates allows any GSU faculty teaching the course in future semesters to modify the projects, deliverables, and timelines based on student learning outcomes and the needs of international partners. In addition to funding, the OII is available to assist as needed in identifying international faculty to partner with Georgia State instructors, collaborate on designing VE projects and templates, and introduce technology tools that are best suited to VE activities.

Tagging Virtual Exchange Signature Courses

At GSU, courses with VE components are recognized as one type of signature course that provides students with experiential learning experiences. The tagging of VE integrated courses by the Office of the Registrar with a VE icon in the schedule of classes allows students to identify courses that offer global learning opportunities. Students can then intentionally select courses where they communicate and collaborate with international peers on meaningful academic projects that foster development of cross-cultural awareness and global competency. Tagging VE signature courses also helps the university to conduct retrospective research on the impact of the VE on student success, including studies on how the VE promotes DEI.

Faculty members who teach VE-tagged signature courses receive support from OII, a university-wide VE Faculty Teaching and Learning Community that meets monthly, and their departments to ensure the success and sustainability of VE courses. Tagging a VE signature course allows all students across disciplines to register for the course and participate in a few weeks or even a semester-long thoughtfully designed international learning activity. This works particularly well with courses for undergraduate students, many of whom are first-generation, historically underrepresented, and/or financially disadvantaged.

Conclusion

Recently, GSU won the prestigious 2023 Senator Paul Simon Award for Outstanding Campus Internationalization, one of the four universities in the nation that received this annual award (NAFSA, 2023). One important factor in garnering this award was GSU's successful VE partnerships with many countries that allow thousands of students, especially minority students, access to international learning opportunities to develop intercultural skills, global competency, and technology skills highly needed for 21st century careers. The SAVE Grant Program and tagging VE Signature Courses represent effective methods for preparing students to work in diverse cultural contexts, a cornerstone of DEI. GSU's efforts in promoting and expanding VE opportunities to a large number of students could inspire other universities and institutions seeking to promote DEI through VE.

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Limited Inclusion: Self-Acceptance Through Virtual Exchange

| Hassan Ibrahim | The Stevens Initiative - Alumni Fellowship Program |

"I believe in a universe that doesn't care and people who do" are words uttered in the game *Night in the Woods* that resonated with me but I was unable to relate to. Being queer in an anti-queer community has not allowed me to care for myself or reach out to people around me.

As someone who has not had the opportunity to be abroad, the only exposure to a more accepting community was the available media: a noninteractive distant look at a supportive community. That all changed with my first exposure to virtual exchange. In the midst of the Covid era, participating in the Global Solutions Sustainability Challenge, GSSC, a virtual exchange program, connected two different, yet similar, communities together. Throughout this program, all participants were trained on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, and developed an inclusive and accessible project. When our two communities met, the first thing one of the community members said was "Hey, guys!" which they apologized for immediately after for using the term "guys." This was my first exposure to a non-binary person. The support that person received from my local teammates and facilitator was surprising as no one displayed any sort of unsupportive behavior towards them. Our facilitator set up an entire optional session explaining why it's important to not only accept but also support those around us. This acted as a catalyst to a journey of self-acceptance and eventually coming out and speaking out.

My safe space was created because someone else felt safe to share.

After the GSSC experience, that not only provided me with professional skills but also put me on a self-accepting journey, I was eager to further explore these programs and find a lasting safe space. For someone with financial restrictions, virtual exchange was the most convenient source to find these spaces. In each virtual exchange that I participated in, coming out and telling fellow participants became easier; coming out was always after discussing a topic that focused on diversity and inclusion and the way the facilitator conveyed those ideologies. Facilitators, and even participants at times, discussed queer, whether directly or it was simply insinuated, which created room for discussion and freedom to express views, regardless of the response from the participants. As of all the virtual exchange programs that I have participated in, there has been a very supportive queer community within each program across all of Iraq.

One of the spaces where I felt most safe was in the Stevens Initiative's Alumni Fellowship program, where in a short amount of time, I was able to freely express myself, befriend all the fellows, and have supportive facilitators. To my surprise, sharing my "he/they" pronouns without much introduction or insinuation to my sexual orientation and gender identity was very casual and not discussed among any of the participants, but it did result in multiple participants directly reaching out to me and discuss their sexuality and how they felt much safer discussing it, or at least not worry about hiding it.

This is my narrative and it is a privileged one. Through these virtual exchange programs, I have found multiple safe spaces with queer people and allies, locally and internationally. All because I was lucky enough to know the language the programs were being conducted in.

Developing a framework that will actively ensure the inclusion of all parties would be a more sustainable solution to achieve a lasting impact.

As a Kurdish person in Iraq, which is a minority in and of itself, having the privilege of being familiar with the English language, exchange programs become easily accessible without any obstacles. These programs not only created a safe space for me, but they also offered me the opportunity to explore other cultures and their views on queer issues, which has put me on a journey of self-acceptance and an avid human rights advocate. With the English language being a requirement for most of these programs, the opportunity is limited and cannot be accessed by the entire Middle Eastern community, especially queer members in developing countries. This lack of accessibility limits the inclusion and reach of the program goals. With only a select number having this accessibility, not much change will be done within the community.

The required English skills to partake in these programs has limited community members' exposure to partake in such programs, which allows them to be exposed to other cultures, engage with a supportive community, and experience a transformative and healing journey. Overcoming the language barriers is a hard task with how global the English language is. Developing a framework with more language-inclusive programming will allow for a more sustainable program with a larger impact.

Starting with a virtual national exchange program can pave the way for better impact. Conducting a regional program led by experts and local program alumni can allow for a better reach and influence a larger number of the target groups that don't experience such programs.

In addition to that, translation services can be provided in the local language to promote programs and their activities within the regions. This will raise awareness towards activities and encourage participants to develop the required skills to engage with said programs.

These programs have played a major part of my self-acceptance journey. They have made me feel safe to come out, advocate for human rights, and create safe spaces. Because of the people who participated in these programs, I was able to sense their compassion and empathy. They made me feel safe. That is something I aim to create to other community members who may not have the privilege to partake in such programs.

Identifying the Impact of Virtual Exchange on Global Competence in Internationally Diverse Groups of High School Students

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Despite the importance of global competence education for young people in the 21st century, only limited research has been conducted on virtual exchange and global competence development among K-12 students to date. Through a recent study by AFS Intercultural Programs, a global non-profit specializing in intercultural learning programs, virtual exchanges can indeed have a meaningful impact on the development of global competence among 14- to 17-year-olds. Data for the study were drawn from pre- and post-test surveys as well as from the students' written responses from selected sections of the program's online platform. The study, funded by the Stevens Initiative, formed part of the larger Strengthening the Field: Catalyzing Research in Virtual Exchange project. From April to October 2021, over 113 high school students from 35 countries participated in the AFS Global You Adventurer (GYA). This five-week virtual exchange program focused on global competence, with an online platform containing asynchronous activities and live facilitated dialogue sessions with qualified intercultural facilitators.

From recruitment to completion, AFS centered diversity and equity. Students in each group were drawn from diverse countries and backgrounds. Diverse perspectives were represented and honored throughout the content, and the qualified facilitators held brave space for learning. The program offered live sessions at various times to accommodate multiple time zones. The program platform complied with international accessibility standards such as WCAG 2.0[1] to provide a more inclusive online learning experience. AFS recruited learners from underrepresented communities through teachers in underserved communities and schools. Students in the study included a range from paying program participants to fully sponsored.

113 Participants
35 Countries

The primary goal of this research was to identify and further develop the efficacy of virtual exchange, with the aim of strengthening programs by measuring the impact it has on high school students' global competence development.

[1] Copyright © 2023 World Wide Web Consortium. https://www.w3.org/Consortium/Legal/2023/doc-license
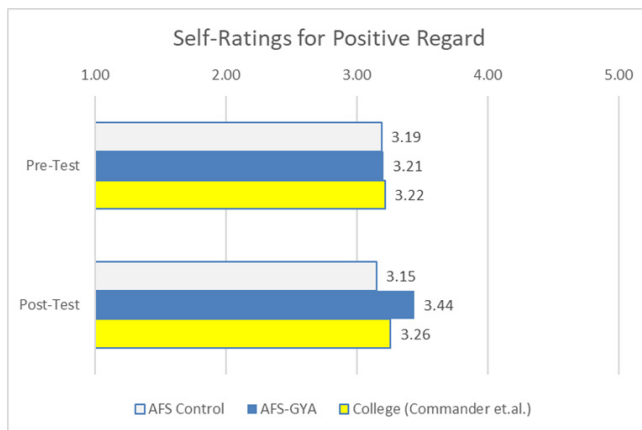
The Impact of Virtual Exchange

The results of the study suggest that short virtual exchanges, such as the five-week GYA, provide immediate growth in aspects of global competence, especially in terms of having a more positive view of peers from other cultures, being able to actively withhold judgment of others by staying curious and open-minded, and increased cross-cultural communication skills.

The Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES), developed by the Kozai Group, has been widely used to study the kinds of competence AFS was targeting in the GYA program. Using T-test comparisons of pre- and post-test scores on its 10 scales, the study found that the GYA participants significantly grew more than the control group in the Overall Scale, in "Positive Regard" and in "Self-Awareness."

Perhaps the strongest improvement was observed in "Positive Regard" (the degree to which one withholds judgements about situations or people that are new or unfamiliar; Kozai Group, 2011). Here we can compare the pre- and post-test self ratings for the AFS GYA group, the Control group, and with the result from a study by Nannette Evans Commander, Wolfgang F. Schloer, and Sara T. Cushing[2] for college-level students enrolled in international virtual exchanges who took the same survey in a pre- and post-test comparison.

As the chart below shows, while all three groups start at roughly the same level, only the GYA Virtual Exchange participants show significant simple growth on this scale (p=0.001).

Self-Ratings for Positive Regard

Pre-Test: AFS Control 3.19, AFS-GYA 3.21, College (Commander et.al.) 3.22

Post-Test: AFS Control 3.15, AFS-GYA 3.44, College (Commander et.al.) 3.26

☐ AFS Control   ■ AFS-GYA   ☐ College (Commander et.al.)

Simple T-test analysis can only compare the groups, however, and cannot control for other differences that might exist between groups, such as gender, experience with friends from other cultures, or parents' socio-economic status. In particular, with a scale of this type, the pre-test score limits the potential for growth in any item. For example, a student who gave herself a pre-test score of 1 has the largest possible growth while one who gave himself a 5 has no room for growth at all. In this study, AFS wanted to assess the strength of the changes that could be attributed to the virtual exchange rather than the possible impact of other factors. For this reason AFS used logistic regression modeling that computes the odds of success or growth when the impact of these other factors is added to the equation.

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[2] Commander, N. E., Schloer, W. F., & Cushing, S. T. (2022). Virtual exchange: a promising high-impact practice for developing intercultural effectiveness across disciplines. Journal of Virtual Exchange, 5, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.21827/jve.5.37329

With this regression model that controlled for the pre-test score and for other significant predictors, students who participated in the GYA program showed nearly three times greater odds of growth in both the overall Intercultural Effectiveness (IES) scale (p=0.022) and in the "positive regard" scale (p=0.030) compared to the control group. There is also good evidence for growth in "relationship development," which showed 2.4 times greater odds for GYA program participants, but at a lower level of statistical significance (p=0.063). While this result does not meet the standard of 95% significance, it is certainly close to it.

Scale Measured	Kozai Group Definition[3]	Result: increased odds for success predicted by GYA when pre-test and other variables are controlled
Overall Intercultural Effectiveness Scale	The IES examines three dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: Continuous Learning, Interpersonal Engagement, and Hardiness. Continuous Learning comprises two sub-dimensions: Self-Awareness and Exploration. Interpersonal Engagement comprises two sub-dimensions: Global Mindset and Relationship Development. Hardiness comprises two sub-dimensions: Positive Regard and Resilience. An overall IES Score is generated by combining the results of the above six dimensions.	288%, 98% statistical certainty
Positive Regard	The degree to which one withholds judgements about situations or people that are new or unfamiliar.	275%, 97% statistical certainty
Relationship Development	The extent to which one is likely to initiate and maintain positive relationships with people from other cultures.	240%, 94% statistical certainty

After completing the program, students were prompted in the final survey to reassess some of the attitudes and communication behaviors they held before the GYA exchange, and to comment on the specific areas where they felt they learned the most. From the analysis of these responses, AFS found that GYA students noted that their cross-cultural communications skills had not been as strong as they had initially assumed. They also commented frequently about having developed friendships with students from other countries through this program and in many cases were planning to stay connected with these new friends.

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[3] Kozai Group. 2011. The Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES): Instructor's Guide. Available: https://www.kozaigroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IES_Guide.pdf

What's Needed for a Successful Virtual Exchange?

According to the study, some of the key elements for a successful virtual exchange, and demonstrated by the AFS Global You Adventurer program, include its highly diverse and multilateral cohorts and the combination of activities that participants can do on their own time in between live facilitated dialogue sessions. Such program structure is set up to grow students' global competence and was well received by participants, who reported an enriching and transformative experience. Each cohort co-created community participation agreements to ensure an intentional, brave space for learning from each other.

GYA program participants grew particularly on measures of positive regard, relationship development, and cross-cultural communication. Accordingly, short-term virtual exchange programs may choose to focus on a particular dimension of global competence that they wish to develop among their cohort groups. Students in the 14- to17-year-old age group may especially benefit from repeated reinforcement of key ideas and time to embed these through practice.

Many students reported forming friendships, noting that they found their interactions with others particularly enriching. This shows that even within a short timeframe, virtual exchange participants can enhance their relationship development. However, some participants also desired more opportunities to interact. AFS GYA and other virtual exchange programs which have a similar asynchronous course-based structure should ensure as many opportunities for contact as possible are incorporated into course activities, including informal time to chat and connect. While not everyone will have an opportunity nor interest in in-person exchange or study abroad, virtual exchange can provide a unique experience for diverse learners to expand their alternatives in global learning that clearly have a meaningful impact.

Benefits and Barriers of Virtual Exchange Programs in Libya

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The rise of virtual exchange programs (VEPs) has allowed students from different parts of the world to connect and learn from each other in ways that were previously not possible. These connections are particularly valuable for students in areas where travel and options to study abroad are limited due to political, economic, and safety concerns.

Since 2020 the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan (WDI), with support from the Stevens Initiative, has facilitated Business & Culture (B&C)—a VEP among academic institutions in Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States. The program provides tools and frameworks for doing business across cultures and features eight 90-minute sessions in which students across the countries learn together in real time. Through an action-learning capstone project, students collaborate in cross-cultural teams on a written plan to internationalize a product. Participants gain the skills they need to communicate, problem solve, and collaborate in a global team environment.

Through the five offerings of the program to date, the WDI team has observed the impact a VEP can have on students with limited access to quality education and international connections. With additional grant support from the Stevens Initiative, WDI conducted research and drew on learnings from the past offerings of B&C to develop a marketing strategy aimed at recruiting additional students from marginalized communities in Libya. Through this process, we discovered many benefits that this kind of program can provide for similar communities, while uncovering barriers limiting access to students with diverse backgrounds.

Improved educational access and cross-cultural competencies in Libya

We discovered that B&C has provided improved accessibility to high-quality education in Libya for a wider range of students, according to both educators and participants in the program.

"Access to quality educational institutions in Libya is a common obstacle for students from remote areas and even bigger urban cities," said Younes Nagem, CEO of the Benghazi Youth for Technology & Entrepreneurship (BYTE), which facilitates B&C in Libya. "Schools and educational buildings have been damaged or destroyed in some areas because of the war and conflicts over the past 10 years. Across Libya, security remains the major fear for all Libyan families, and many refuse to send their children to school. VEPs allow more people to get a better and safer educational experience."

We also found that B&C has improved cross-cultural competencies for students in Libya. In addition to difficulties accessing quality education, young people in Libya rarely have opportunities to interact with peers from outside their own communities. For Esra Elmhdewi, a participant from Benghazi majoring in industrial engineering and manufacturing systems, the program has

provided unique opportunities for cross-cultural learning. "My teammates [in the group assignment] from Egypt and the United States were my first interactions with people who weren't Libyan," she said, pointing to the exposure to different cultures offered by the program.

Barriers to accessing VEPs in Libya

While VEPs help to bridge obstacles to quality education, having the technology necessary to participate remains a challenge. In Libya access to a computer and a reliable internet connection, particularly in rural and remote areas, is far from guaranteed. To improve accessibility of B&C in Libya, BYTE provides a meeting space in Benghazi for students to attend the virtual connected sessions and complete assignments. BYTE also has made arrangements with co-working spaces in Benghazi and more remote areas of Libya like Sirte and the Jufra District for students to join the sessions there.

Cross-cultural team assignments were also challenging for students from Libya. "Libyan students have faced barriers in collaborating with other international students for some assignments where they have different academic backgrounds. Their lack of experience with international students and educational opportunities makes some students feel shy at the beginning. It takes some time for them to connect with other students and start learning from the experience," said BYTE's Younes Nagem.

Hasan Elshawaihdi, a current participant from Benghazi majoring in engineering, confirmed that the most challenging part of the program has been keeping up with his peers on the academic content. "I haven't been exposed to key terminology or concepts, and haven't had much experience or people to really discuss these terms and concepts with."

While the specific benefits and barriers of VEPs for underserved populations may differ outside of Libya, we believe that the larger trends we identified can be useful in our future programs and those of others. At WDI we look forward to building upon our work with Business & Culture to make VEPs accessible to students from all backgrounds.

Repositioning Students as Co-creators: A Reflective Case Study of the 'Global Classroom for Democracy Innovation'

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(Re)formulating inclusionary learning design

Students are often framed as mere recipients of knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970), with staff and faculty at higher education institutions (HEIs) being solely responsible for conceptualizing and facilitating educational offerings (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In virtual exchange environments, these existing exclusionary pedagogical and relational inequities can be further entrenched (Behari-Leak, 2020). While this pattern has a long history within HEIs across the world, the uni-directional nature of pedagogical formation and knowledge transfer has been pronounced with the burgeoning of such virtual offerings in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown through a range of case studies engaged by Czerniewicz et al. (2020).

In late 2020 the authors of this paper, from various international HEIs, hosted a virtual exchange offering which brought students from the University of Toronto Scarborough (Canada) and Stellenbosch University (South Africa) together to engage around the theme of food security. Spurred on by positive feedback from the participants, we hosted a follow-up collaborative online feedback session in which students and facilitators from each institution provided feedback on the offering. In this forum, students put forward a range of suggestions, spanning from questions around the length of engagement to the potential of collaborative work between students from these two locations; this feedback became the bedrock on which the Global Classroom for Democracy Innovation (GCDI) was developed. The GCDI comprises an intensive five-week process

where students are split into globally diverse teams in which they are guided through the framework of design thinking (Constanza-Chock, 2020) to produce a project under a common theme. The themes covered in subsequent iterations of the GCDI have been climate change, sustainability, and democracy. While expecting students to co-design projects throughout this course, as the organizers of the broader project, we have been continually engaged in a process of prototyping and reformulating the project's parameters.

In March 2021 we hosted our first cohort of students which, after engaging and being prompted by a guest speaker from the international non-governmental organization (NGO) 350.org, went through the 'double diamond' process of design

thinking. Importantly, a student who joined as a participant in the initial pilot event was integrated into the coordinating team at this point. While their insights became essential in the development of the project as a whole, it also prompted the development of student facilitator roles, which would oversee and manage the progress made by each group over the duration of the project.

Moving toward inclusive, co-created pedagogy

An inescapable element of internationally connected virtual exchanges is the prevalence of multiple layers of power dynamics. In the conceptualisation of the GCDI, we remained cognizant of the ubiquity of extractive virtual exchanges and international projects (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Hoon et al., 2022; Behari-Leak, 2020). Students from the Global South are disproportionately affected by this. Nested within this entrenchment of international power dynamics is the positioning of students as solely recipients of knowledge transfer.

The GCDI coordinating committee is accordingly composed of both academic staff and students from a range of international HEIs, along with critical pedagogy practitioners and partners from the Vancouver Design Nerds (VDN), a Vancouver-based organization working on design thinking in various forms and locales. The thematic framing of the various iterations of the GCDI has a strong connection with the curricular content taught at all partner institutions. However, critically reformulating the nature and expectations of knowledge transfer by including students in the formulation and implementation, in both the curricular and co-curricular spaces through the GCDI, we have aimed to intentionally reposition the role of students.

Baran & Correia (2009), writing even before COVID-19 had significantly impacted the prevalence of online learning spaces, considered the possibility of utilizing student-led facilitation as a tool to overcome "instructor-dominated facilitation" (Baran & Correia, 2009, p. 340). We found, as Baran and Correia rightly note, that leveraging student-led facilitation can significantly alter the pedagogical milieu. During each five-week iteration, there would be a weekly engagement where all students would join a two-hour session hosted on Zoom. In these sessions general framing and a short presentation on a certain element of the design process were covered by a member of the coordinating committee, after which students split up into their groups, with a student-facilitator, to practically engage with content in relation to their own project.

At the end of each five-week iteration, students were expected to prepare a short presentation on the project/intervention that they had developed. As a coordinating team, we remained hopeful that the students would have taken the prompts provided throughout the design process to creatively and critically develop a project. Coordinator and facilitator feedback sessions were largely underlined by overwhelming satisfaction in how students had first developed interesting and practical projects, and also by the positive impact that student facilitators had had on their peers' work. In fact, by using student facilitators we illustrated that peer facilitation can be productively linked with the design thinking process, leading to critical and inclusive engagement between students (Baran & Correira, 2009).

Popularizing inclusive and co-created pedagogy

While the feedback from the two iterations of the GCDI presented in 2022 has been overwhelmingly positive from both qualitative and quantitative data received from students, questions still remain. Firstly, we have concluded that inclusion in virtual exchanges cannot be superficially addressed. A range of power dynamics must be intentionally addressed through the design of the educational

offering. In line with this, we have intentionally positioned our work around the concept of 'design justice' (Constanza-Chock, 2020), by ensuring that educational institution or degree program did not influence a student's chance of being employed as a student facilitator. By having student facilitators from a range of backgrounds, we argue that the GCDI has initiated the process of developing an inclusive educational offering.

Furthermore, a discernible shift has occurred in the field of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), which critically focuses on the expectations and needs of students in the contemporary moment. By positioning students as co-creators of virtual exchanges, and thus democratizing the design process of both the larger offering as well as students' projects (Manzini, 2015), a more engaging and inclusive offering can be developed; the parameters around what exactly this looks like, and the processes needed to bring it to fruition, remain contested.

In conclusion, the various iterations of the GCDI indicate that virtual exchanges, especially those with global ties, are both sites of possibility for the entrenchment of power dynamics, as well as inclusive and engaging pedagogy. While we have become increasingly aware of this dynamic within the GCDI project, and in that more capable of being able to address and navigate these issues, forming an educational offering with these concerns in focus initiates more inclusive and engaging virtual exchanges.

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Virtual Exchange for Adult Learners: Access and Design Considerations

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Abstract: Adult learners bring years of experience—professional and personal—that influence how they learn and engage with others. Virtual exchanges hold potential for adult learners to challenge and reexamine their ways of knowing, and promote and expand the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented learners. Adults often navigate practical constraints to balance work, family, and other social commitments in addition to their education. Virtual exchanges offer adult learners access to intercultural engagement. However, it is critical to design exchanges that address the practical demands and learning dispositions that adults navigate. This article explores design considerations specific to adult learners including practical challenges compounded by scheduling flexibility, technology access, and skills. This article also examines intercultural dimensions of virtual exchanges specific to adult learners including negotiating power dynamics, engaging communication skills, and making intercultural connections.

Introduction

Adults aged 25 years and older account for a significant portion of higher education enrollment (OECD, 2022). As current and aspiring professionals, adult learners need access to learning and engaging with colleagues in different cultures, practicing intercultural communication skills, and examining the global, interconnected dimensions of their chosen fields. Adult learners—particularly those in graduate programs—are often in leadership roles where they can model global and intercultural awareness, diversity, knowledge, and skills for others.

Virtual exchanges offer an avenue for expanding adult learner access to global learning. These exchanges use technology to connect people in different parts of the world, and promote and expand the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented learners (e.g., Sabzalieva, et al., 2022). Minimal attention has focused on the unique needs and priorities of adult learners in order to fully participate in virtual exchanges (e.g., Stevens Initiative, 2020). In this article we review key principles of adult learning and learners, and offer design suggestions for virtual exchanges that maximize learning for this population and support diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. We draw on the virtual exchange literature and our experiences conducting Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects with graduate students in the United States, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Saudi Arabia.

Understanding Adult Learners

Virtual exchanges for adult learners should be designed with their learning preferences, priorities, and constraints in mind. These considerations will shape their experience and possibilities for activating deep learning. Adult learners are

typically self-directed and goal-oriented (e.g., Jarvis, 2010; Knowles, et al., 2005; Merriam et al., 2007). They exercise greater autonomy over their learning and seek relevance to personal goals. Adults tend to possess a more fully developed sense of self. Their life experiences serve as reference points when encountering new ideas and experiences. As working professionals, adult learners may have spent extensive time training and working in their field that will inform how they engage with new knowledge, perspectives, and skills (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Experiential learning is a powerful strategy to activate critical reflection. Virtual exchanges require adults to engage with diverse people and perspectives in ways that prompt reexamination of their lived experience and new understandings about people, ideas, cultures, their profession, and the world.

Unlike younger learners pursuing a higher education degree may be secondary to an adult's work, family, and community responsibilities (e.g., Bergman, 2021). Study abroad can feel out of reach or not a priority. By removing the financial, logistical, and physical challenges of travel, virtual exchanges expand access to all adults including those from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups. For adults with little international travel experience, these virtual encounters with individuals from all over the world can provide a low-risk entry point for future in-person travel.

Design Considerations

These design considerations can broaden adult participation and incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion to optimize learning in the virtual exchange. While many are common to all virtual exchanges, these strategies specifically address adults' practical realities and ways of knowing. Suggestions center on logistical and instructional

supports for adults to communicate, collaborate, and learn in intercultural encounters.

Time Differences and Scheduling

Adults with inflexible work schedules and caretaking responsibilities often have an extremely difficult time navigating different time zones to participate in synchronous exchanges. In response, we limit synchronous whole-class meetings, schedule such meetings well in advance and record them, increase asynchronous communication, and delegate responsibility for determining when and how to communicate to the smaller intercultural learner teams. Team members then devise a communication plan that works best for them.

Technology

As the use of technology continues to expand, online collaborations and partnerships have led to making social connections, sharing experiences, and creating new knowledge with rapid dissemination (Scott, 2015). To facilitate full participation, we use communication platforms that can record and produce written transcripts. Recording meetings provides learners with the opportunity to review information and continue to participate in the project. This supports accessibility, language assistance, schedule conflicts, and internet connectivity challenges.

Learners have many options when choosing technologies for communicating and completing assignments. Adults who did not grow up in the digital era may need additional time and support to select and use appropriate technologies (Dimock, 2019). When designing and evaluating assignments and activities, we weigh priorities for intercultural relationship-building and idea exchange with the learning curve to use specific technologies.

Adult Learner Matching

Matching adult learners with international peers offers many possibilities for deepening professional knowledge, connecting on a personal level, and expanding collegial networks. We leverage adults' specialized knowledge, training, and real-world experiences to explore common challenges and diverse solutions that can spark new insights about their profession and world. Adults can also connect on a personal level when they share multiple identities as learners, workers, caretakers, and community members. Relationships that begin in a virtual exchange create opportunities for continued communication and collaboration.

Intercultural Teamwork

The foundation of any successful international collaboration is understanding and addressing power dynamics. Uneven power can shape "the knowledge that is made relevant and the terms under which the exchanges are set out and implemented" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 275). Although present for all learners, for adults these power dynamics may include—but are not limited to—language, hierarchy, and professional roles. English is often the language used in international collaborations and may result in an unequal balance of power (Helm & Guth, 2022; Stevens Initiative, 2022). Every culture has expectations regarding roles and hierarchy related to positions of power that privilege some voices over others. Adults bring established conceptions regarding these power arrangements that may differ from those of their counterparts. Adults in positions of authority may need to renegotiate their ways of communicating to be collaborative, intercultural team members. These are opportunities to enhance communication and teambuilding skills. A few strategies to support intercultural teamwork for adult learners include:

- Prioritize class time for learners to safely debrief about their teams; discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion; explore cultural differences; reflect on their professional roles; and share team-building strategies. For example, doctoral students pooled their collective personal and professional knowledge and skills to strategize ways to reduce their privilege (i.e., age, leadership role, and language) to encourage participation from their international counterparts.

- Focus on the specific skills that each learner brings to the collaboration. For example, learners in a graduate course at a partnering university had acquired technology skills that the multigenerational teams relied on to develop the presentation.

- Create opportunities for adult learners to practice intercultural two-way communication skills. For example, graduate students introduced both languages as part of their presentations.

Conclusion

Virtual exchanges hold exciting possibilities for expanding adult access to global learning by removing obstacles to in-person travel. When designed to accommodate adult learner preferences, priorities, and constraints, virtual exchanges offer authentic opportunities for adults to step out of familiar roles to engage with new perspectives and practice intercultural collaboration. Virtual exchanges hold potential for professional growth and expanded collegial networks. Adult engagement with diverse perspectives and enhanced intercultural communication skills can also benefit their organizations and communities.

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Acknowledgements

Best Practices to Effectively Engage Diverse Participants in Virtual Exchange Programming

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Global learning experiences equip students with a broad range of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills (Sanger, 2017). While in-person exchanges have played an important role in this aspect, at peak, they only reached 1.7% of youth in the United States (Digest, 2018), and minority students have been historically underrepresented in these programs (Digest, 2018) due to a range of barriers to entry, including access to study abroad programs, financial constraints, and fears of not belonging or being accepted in their host communities (Norton, 2008).

Over Soliya's 20 years of experience in designing and implementing impactful programs, we've found that virtual exchange programming has unparalleled power to expand access to global learning experiences for all students and address these barriers to create greater access for youth in underrepresented and underserved communities. We have engaged diverse participants at over 250 institutions for learning across 37 countries and 31 states in the United States, and below is a snapshot of the diversity of Soliya's American participants, demonstrating the impact of our efforts.

Breakdown of U.S. students in Soliya's programs compared to U.S. population by race in 2022

Race / Ethnicity	Soliya's U.S. Participants (%)	U.S. Population (%)*
Black / African American	18%	13.6%
American Indian / Alaska Native	3%	1.3%
Asian	7%	6.1%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	1%	0.3%
Hispanic / Latino	19%	18.9%
White	53%	59.3%

*(U.S. Census Bureau, 2022)

In feedback collected through post-exchange surveys from Soliya's participants in the 2022-2023 academic year, we found that 87% of participants felt that they belonged in the program, 88% felt valued by the other young people in the program, and 89% felt included in all aspects of the program.

The recommendations below are drawn from institutional practices at Soliya that have resulted in the diversification of Soliya's participants and their positive feelings of inclusion during their virtual exchange experience.

Engaging Partners and Institutional Champions

Engaging diverse participants begins at the planning and design phases. We recommend that you begin by building an understanding of the breadth of diversity factors that exist within the communities you seek to engage. You can then seek out partnerships with institutions that serve those hard-to-reach communities. For example, in the United States, Soliya aims to work with a cross section of youth, hence we forge partnerships with minority-serving institutions, public universities, and community colleges to engage a wide spectrum of youth in underserved communities.

We've found that focusing recruitment efforts on institutional partners—rather than individuals—allows us to have a better understanding of the broader opportunities and challenges in different communities. Institutional partners are also more effective in engaging larger, diverse groups of students by drawing upon existing networks to target individual student recruitment efforts, and they can provide critical support in addressing local infrastructural challenges and other obstacles that might affect program implementation.

Once you've identified the right partners, it is critical to identify a champion educator who will lead the partnership and the implementation of the program at the partner institution. These champions can be almost anyone at the institution: university administrators, professors, program coordinators, or, in some rare cases, highly motivated students. The common traits they share are a passion for bringing global exchange opportunities to their institution, an understanding of the diversity of the student body, a willingness and capacity to engage different stakeholders at the institution to secure buy-in for your program, and access to one or more groups of students to whom they will offer the program.

Building Capacity and Supporting Educators

One of the crucial lessons we've learned is that aligning around initial programmatic goals and forging a partnership does not guarantee success. Different institutions and demographics have varied needs, challenges, and access to resources; students are juggling their studies with work and other competing priorities, educators need to make programs accessible to students who have physical or learning disabilities, and educators themselves may have limited resources or support within their institutions to implement new programs. As such, making time to understand the needs of each partner and co-designing effective systems for their participation is critical to successful recruitment and retention.

Here are 3 key ways we've supported educators across the globe in recruiting students, implementing our global programs, and engaging diverse participants:

1. Understand the needs of the educators and students, and engage educators around how your program can help meet their goals. Then, support them in building incentive structures that will help them engage their students and achieve your combined learning goals.
2. Develop customizable materials aimed at informing and orienting students around the program, with an emphasis on what they will gain and why it is important to their learning. Often students in underserved communities do not have adequate information about opportunities that exist. This will also help educators recruit and prepare students for your program.
3. Engage champions at one or more partners in building a community of practitioners, where educators can share their experiences, exchange best practices, and learn from each other.

Designing Inclusive Programming

Finally, you will need to ensure that your program content and delivery allow for participants of diverse backgrounds, access, and abilities to engage in your programming in safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.

Here are the 3 most important considerations in designing inclusive programming:

1. Use inclusive and adaptive technologies, and ensure that your platform accommodates different abilities and learning styles. Having tools such as automatic transcription built in or using platforms that are compatible with assistive devices greatly expands access to students who may otherwise not be able to engage in virtual programs. Since financial constraints often pose a significant challenge for students from underserved communities, consider making all the technical tools, software, and content they need to participate free of charge.

2. In designing your curriculum, consider the needs of your target demographics and how you can create an inclusive space for students to express their identities and perspectives fully. Use these considerations to drive your decision making around which topics you choose to highlight and how you frame them. To bolster participants' ability to explore diverse perspectives, consider including activities that iteratively build their capacity to be respectful and constructive in their engagement with each other, such as setting ground rules early in the process, and investing in icebreakers that build positive relationships amongst participants.

3. Have trained facilitators lead participants' engagement in program activities and discussions. Facilitators can ensure all students have an opportunity to share their perspectives and be heard, they can type out short summaries for those who might be struggling with technical

issues or poor language comprehension, and by paying attention to underlying power dynamics facilitators can support students' ability to dig deeper into the dialogue and address those dynamics constructively.

After each program iteration, we collect feedback from partners and students on how our programs are meeting their needs, and what challenges they continue to face, in order to understand how we can continue to improve our programming and reach more young people in underserved communities. We invite you to do the same so that together, we can harness the power of virtual exchange and enable more students from diverse backgrounds to access meaningful global exchange experiences.

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Virtual Exchange: Practices for Engaging Diverse Students

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Organizing a virtual exchange (VE) with diverse participants requires developing more than the VE content. Facilitators of a VE between Moroccan, Iraqi, and American students went through a comprehensive training program prior to the VE experience. The cross-cultural training content focused on building knowledge and understanding of different cultural identities including Cultural Dimensions by Hofstede (1980), cross-cultural adaptability skills such as Emotional Resilience, Flexibility and Openness, Perceptual Acuity and Personal Autonomy, and suggestions on how to avoid misunderstanding and incorporate culture into their project. To foster global education, the focus of this particular VE was on both creating projects which addressed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Cohen, 2021) and the development of participant students' cross-cultural skills (Stevens Initiative, 2023). This VE brought together a group of 45 students, between the ages of 14 and 17, from Morocco, Iraq, and Denver, Colorado, USA to focus on the project theme: The Earth. The VE lasted for a period of ten weeks, and each bi-national team concluded with a Community Action Project solution for local problems related to SDGs 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, 13 Climate Action, 14 Life Below Water, and 15 Life on Land. Some of the projects that students developed focused on topics like ocean acidification, deforestation, river water and marsh pollution, food waste, and desertification. Winning projects had the option to apply for funding. The students met synchronously once a week for an hour, and interacted asynchronously through Google Classroom and other apps like WhatsApp.

The following section of the article describes the interplay of diversity variables in this particular VE and then shares inclusive and equitable practices that VE facilitators from all three cultures used to integrate the diverse identities and perspectives in their bi-national team communication and project development.

Identity

One of the well-known dimensions of Hofstede's model of Cultural Dimensions (1980) is Identity. Hofstede conceptualizes identity to have two dichotomies, Individualism and Collectivism. In individualist cultures people value independence, self-reliance, and empowerment to make individual decisions. In collectivist cultures people prioritize attention to group and make decisions as part of an entity. In this VE, American students were regarded as individualist participants, while Iraqi and Moroccan students were seen as collectivists. Facilitators noticed that American students had a more 'let's get this done' attitude than their other cultural counterparts. While their collectivist counterparts took much more time to make decisions that reflected group consensus.

Power Distance

Power distance in this VE was observed in the way students approached their facilitators. Moroccan and Iraqi students tended to use titles like Mr. and

Mrs. to address their facilitators, and it was hard for them when more informal ways of addressing them were suggested. Facilitators noticed that American students were open to discussing and exchanging thoughts with facilitators, unlike the Iraqi students, who seemed shy to request assistance from the opposite culture's facilitators.

Gender and Age

In both Iraqi and Moroccan cultures facilitators noticed dominance of male voices over female voices, especially in breakout room discussions. The variable of age influenced bi-national team dynamics and participation. Some of the Moroccan and Iraqi students who participated in the VE were high school students, while the American students were in middle school. This difference in age, according to the facilitators, created a reluctance in American students to participate in decision making and in taking the lead for different parts of the project.

Language Proficiency

One of the reasons VE organizers selected high school students from Morocco and Iraq instead of middle schoolers was due to their English language proficiency. Though Moroccans and Iraqis were older in age, their English proficiency was adequate to handle project conversations with their younger American peers. The facilitators noticed that the American students did not use an empathic approach in their communication when they addressed Moroccan and Iraqi students, which would require a slow speaking pace and a careful articulation of words.

Connectivity

Internet connectivity remains a problem for most students in the MENA region. This caused an issue in keeping up with the online session and on other occasions not being able to join the weekly virtual session.

INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PRACTICES

1. Encouraging diverse voices
To ensure students of different ages, genders, and language backgrounds were heard and could contribute to decision making, the facilitators intervened to encourage participation. The two practices they used were calling participants by their name and applauding their participation. Facilitators often prompted silent students by asking follow-up questions. In helping boost the self-confidence of students with lower language proficiency, the facilitators would occasionally have American students repeat or type what they said in the chat to ensure linguistic understanding. Also, when students from collectivist communities tended to take more time to decide on future actions, and their individualist counterparts would usually agree with what was suggested, the facilitators would navigate these dynamics by prompting decisions and asking follow-up questions to ensure everyone was heard and included in the decision making.

2. Assigning leaders to facilitate discussions
To encourage students from diverse backgrounds to take the lead in discussions, especially students from high power-distance cultures, the facilitators created a system of leadership to facilitate group discussions. Using this strategy students would take turns in facilitating group discussions and practicing inclusive practices. They also had to be mindful that everyone's voice was included, and group ownership of decisions was necessary.

3. Reaching out to participants
There were instances where students would miss a session for different reasons. To ensure that everyone had ownership of the project development in every step of the decision making, facilitators

reached out to the participants who did not attend and left them a message saying that they were missed during the session. This strategy boosted the self-confidence of students and made them feel that their voice mattered. It also worked effectively especially with students who doubted their English language proficiency.

4. Creating alternative communication platforms
To continue the participants' discussions as a group, the facilitators encouraged the creation of WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp is accessible to everyone and does not need a strong internet connection to operate. This allowed students to continue the conversation around projects outside of their VE session times, and those who had internet connection issues managed to still engage with their group. This had one drawback, however; students were on different time zones, which hindered the reception of instant responses.

Conclusion

The shared practices in this article could be used by future VEs to foster inclusivity among diverse participants. The practices could be used with the same diversity variables this program had, or they could be extended to cater for other individual characteristics like disability identification, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity (Lopez-McGee, 2019). Encouraging diverse voices in a group discussion, for example, could be used to encourage students from marginalized groups to participate in decision making.

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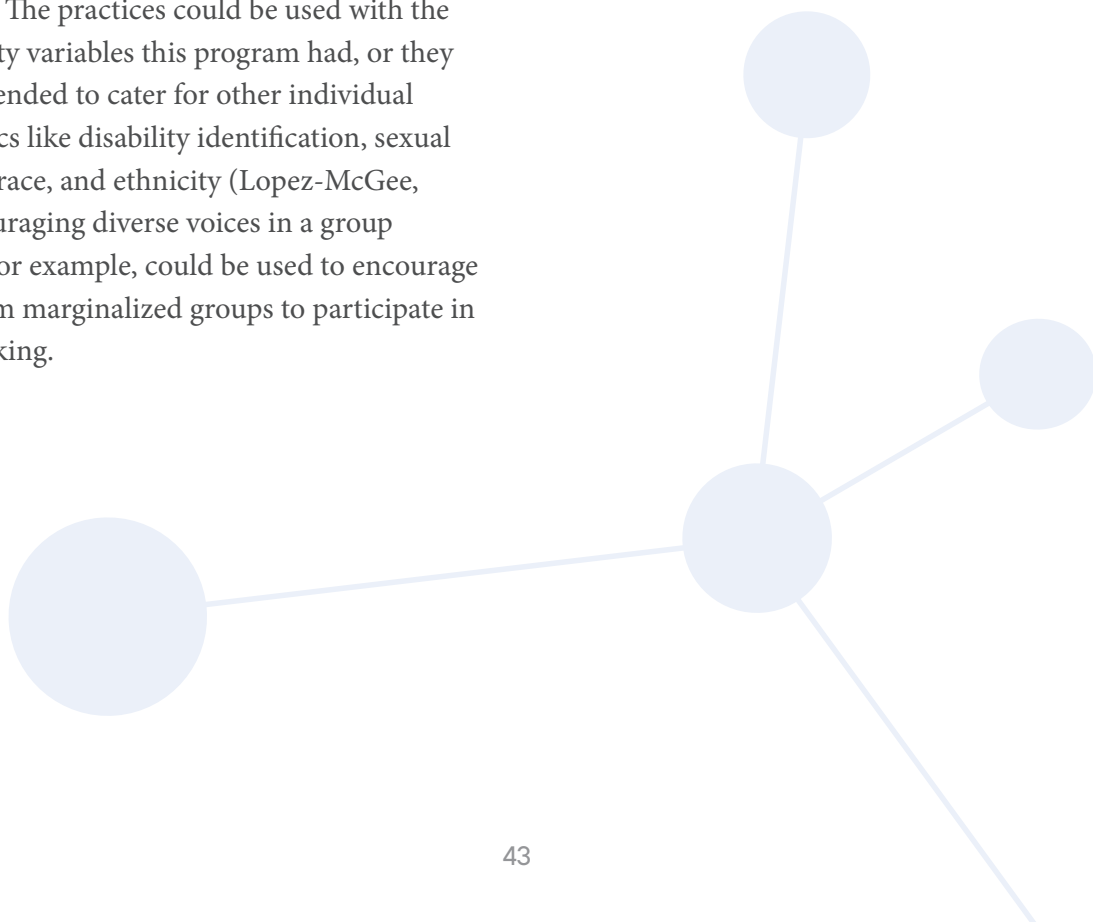
Virtual Exchange as a Means of Providing Access to International Education for Community College Students: Challenges and Solutions

| Melissa Whatley, PhD | SIT Graduate Institute |

Virtual exchange has great potential to create access to international opportunities for various student populations, particularly those who are marginalized and less often included in more traditional international education experiences, such as study abroad. Community college students, who accounted for 40% of undergraduate enrollment in the United States in the 2020-21 academic year (Community College Research Center, 2023), stand to benefit greatly from the availability of international opportunities that do not require international travel, which can be both time-consuming and costly. This student population historically does not access opportunities like study abroad to the same extent as students enrolled at four-year institutions, although notably participation in study abroad is low across all institution types. For example, in the 2018–19 academic year, around 2% of U.S. students who studied abroad were classified as associate's degree students (IIE, 2023). Lower access to study abroad among community college students is likely due to several factors, both institutional and societal, that complicate participation for this student population. For example, recent statistics indicate that 44% of community college students were older than 22 and 65% were enrolled part time (AACC, 2023). Students who are older and who enroll part time are more likely to have responsibilities related to parenting and other caregiving, and they also are more likely to hold full-time jobs. In the United States, these responsibilities often preclude long periods away from home, even if for educational purposes. As of 2015–16, around 72% of part-time community college students held full-time jobs, as did 62% of full-time students (AACC, 2023). Both family and work responsibilities can prevent students who are otherwise interested in international education from participating in study abroad due to the time commitment and cost of programs that are not designed with these students' needs in mind. The opportunity to participate in virtual exchange can provide valuable international experience for many community college students. This article summarizes recent research on the extent to which virtual exchange programs are accessible to various demographic groups in the community college context.

Although virtual exchange has great potential to create access to international opportunities for marginalized student populations, such as those who often attend community colleges, improved access does not happen by default when these programs are established (e.g., Alami et al., 2022; Bali, 2014; Custer & Tuominen, 2017; Hinshaw et al., 2022; O'Dowd, 2013; Oviedo & Krimphove, 2021). Indeed, "the design and implementation of virtual exchange projects requires time, resources, experiences and support, and outcomes are not always predictable or always successful" (Helm, 2019, p. 140). Recent research indicates that equitable access to virtual exchange may be impeded by limited access to technology for both students and instructors, time zone differences

between students in different geographic locations, linguistic power dynamics at play in virtual exchanges, particularly when English is the native language of some students and not others, and resistance to program implementation among key stakeholders such as faculty and college administrators (Bali, 2014; Custer & Tuominen, 2017; O'Dowd, 2013; Oviedo & Krimphove, 2021). Recent scholarly work highlights a gap in knowledge regarding whether and the extent to which virtual international exchange improves access to international opportunities (Bali et al., 2021; Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021; Satar, 2021).

In response to this gap, one recent study explored questions around access to virtual exchange for specific demographic groups (Whatley et al., 2022). Two community colleges located in the U.S. Southeast, one smaller and more rural and another larger and more urban. The study included data from a total of 41,655 students representing entering cohorts between Fall 2016 and Spring 2021. In total, the dataset contained 1,039 virtual exchange participants. Regression results documented patterns that suggest inequitable access to virtual exchange among students, particularly along racial/ethnic and disciplinary lines. More specifically, students identifying as Black were less likely to participate in virtual exchange compared to the average student, while students identifying as white were more likely to participate. Students enrolled in transfer-focused degree programs, such as associate in arts and associate in science programs, were also more likely to participate in virtual exchange, as compared to students enrolled in career-focused associate degree programs.

Identification of these patterns is a first step in addressing these inequities so that virtual exchange program design and implementation can more intentionally address international education's historic inequitable patterns of access

and exclusion. These findings regarding racial/ethnic identity are especially troublesome, as they suggest that white dominance in international education is not confined to study abroad. Instead, these results speak to how deeply entrenched issues around race and racism are in international education. Messaging that indicates (whether real or perceived) that international education is only for white students (Brux & Fry, 2010; Thomas, 2013), a lack of programs that include interaction with students in Africa (Penn & Tanner, 2009), and a lack of administrative support for their participation (Williams, 2007) are issues that Black students encounter when considering study abroad. These issues may also apply to virtual exchange. An additional structural explanation for this finding regarding racial/ethnic identity relates to the degree program findings. Although sparse, prior research indicates that Black students often do not enroll in degree programs where study abroad is prominent (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993), a potential explanation for uneven participation in international mobility programs among racial/ethnic groups. A similar explanation possibly accounts for this study's findings. That is, virtual exchange opportunities are often embedded in students' coursework. If students are not distributed evenly along racial/ethnic lines among the degree programs where this coursework happens, then these patterns will also be reflected in virtual exchange participation.

Although these findings derive from data representing only two institutions, they have implications for international education practitioners and educators interested in implementing virtual exchange programs at both community colleges and other institutional types. First, these results indicate that the democratizing function that virtual exchange can potentially play in international education cannot be taken for granted. International education practitioners and other stakeholders need to interrogate their data to explore the extent to which virtual international

opportunities are distributed among students with different demographic characteristics. Second, these findings highlight how patterns of inequality can be hidden in plain sight along disciplinary lines. That is, while students and educators alike may perceive that virtual exchange is available to anyone who wants to participate, the uneven distribution of these programs across classes, degree programs, and academic fields can hide patterns of inequitable access. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these findings highlight the extent to which historic inequities along racial lines are entrenched in international education. Unlike education abroad, students' finances and ability to pay for participation are less a barrier to virtual exchange participation. As a field international education must confront the reality that many programs are simply not designed for students who do not come from the same backgrounds as those who historically participate in international education programming.

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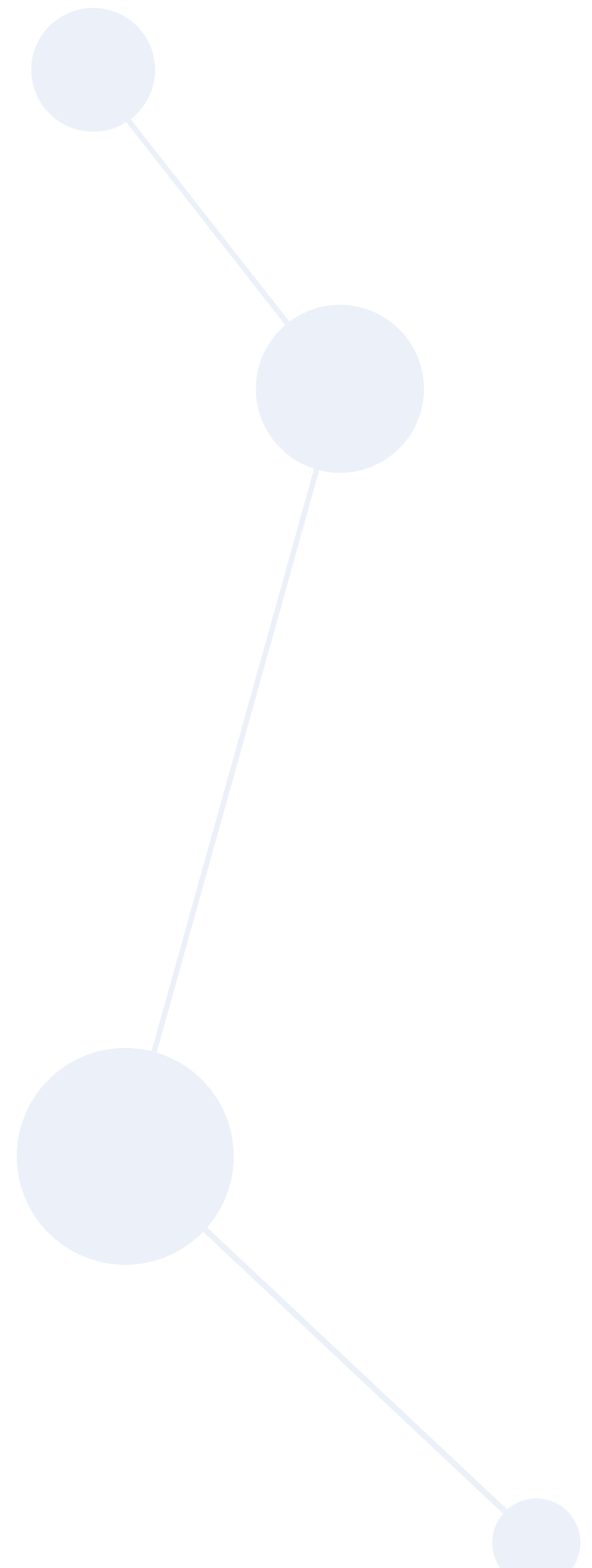
Equity of International Access: Connecting First-Generation University Students to Globally Networked Learning

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Summary: While many undergraduate students—like teacher candidates—would like to study abroad, the costs associated with study abroad programs can be a significant barrier. This can be especially true for first-generation university students who may not even consider studying abroad because of the high costs. International virtual exchange programs—like Globally Networked Learning (GNL)—provide affordable and equitable access to international experiences. In this article we described a GNL experience between students in Germany and the United States.

Introduction

Preparing undergraduate students as global citizens means addressing inequities, challenging ignorance, and providing opportunities for the development of global competencies through international experiences like study abroad. Study abroad has benefits including developing empathy, expanding intercultural awareness, and providing for immersive world language experiences (Byker & Mejia, 2022; Pilonieta et al., 2017). Not all undergraduate students, though, can afford to go on study abroad programs. While many undergraduate students—like teacher candidates—would like to study abroad, the associated costs are significant barriers (Byker & Putman, 2019). For example, Green and her colleagues (2015) explained how the high costs associated with study abroad limit the number of undergraduate students who participate, making study abroad usually exclusive to the already financially privileged. The Institute of International Education (IIE) publishes an annual report called *Open Doors* and found the average cost of a semester-long study abroad program to be

around $18,000 (IIE, 2022). Such a hefty price tag makes study abroad almost impossible for many undergraduate students including first-generation university students who may not even consider studying abroad because of cost. We have found international virtual exchange—like Globally Networked Learning (GNL)—to be an affordable and equitable entry point for access to international experiences for undergraduate students.

Globally Networked Learning (GNL)

GNL is a collaborative approach to international virtual exchange that enables students and instructors from different locations around the world to participate in learning and the creation of knowledge. Equity is a goal of GNL. Equity addresses the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources through targeted practices and policies (Byker et al., 2021). Equity also connects with educational opportunities. Educational equity is the access to opportunities for all learners to develop academically and advance their well-being through education (Hancock, Allen, & Lewis,

2015). Because GNL projects are inclusive of all learners in a classroom setting, there is much greater access to the opportunities for international virtual exchange as well as access to the career benefits that come with such experiences. GNL often happens as a course-based curriculum that can go from 6 to 8 weeks in length. The curriculum usually includes an ice-breaker type of experience, a few synchronous webinar meetings (if the time zone differences permit), opportunities for students to further communicate via technologies like WhatsApp, and a project-based learning type of activity the students work on together. GNL allows students in the course access to international experiences, regardless of their background and previous international experiences. GNL is also affordable as it is usually integrated into an existing course and curricula. It provides students, including those unable to study abroad, an opportunity to engage with others from abroad in a virtual setting (Commander et al., 2022). Students are able to gain a deeper understanding and respect for new countries and cultures while developing global and international competency skills. GNL is a low-cost virtual exchange program, which means that students can gain a global perspective, interact with their international peers and faculty, and experience similar benefits to studying abroad without traveling to another location.

GNL Impact

We implemented a GNL project with 26 undergraduate students at Magnolia University (a pseudonym) in the United States in collaboration with 28 undergraduate students from Edelweiss University (a pseudonym) in Germany. Among the students at Magnolia University, about 35% of them identified as first-generation university students. In the pre-survey only four Magnolia University students (15%) had traveled outside of the United States and six students (23%) spoke a language other than English. Thus, one of the goals

of our GNL project was to provide the students with the opportunity for extended intercultural communication through a collaborative, project-based learning assignment called the Global Competencies Virtual Odyssey (GVCO). The GCVO is a multimedia tool that learners created about a region of the world using shareable technology like Prezi or Google Slides.

The students worked together to create and present their GCVOs about regions in Germany and the United States. The large majority of students from both universities (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that GNL provided a unique international opportunity that would be a benefit to their future career. Here is what one of the students wrote about the GNL experience: "I appreciated this GNL opportunity. The whole GNL project provided the chance to make new friends and participate in an experience that I will apply to my future as a teacher to teach about global citizenship." Overall, GNL not only enabled students to collaborate with international students, but GNL also equipped students with opportunities and skills for their future careers. GNL fosters equitable participation and engagement in international experiences regardless of geographic location, socio-economic background, or the educational levels of parents. By providing affordable access to international opportunities for undergraduate students to collaboratively participate in, GNL promotes equity in education.
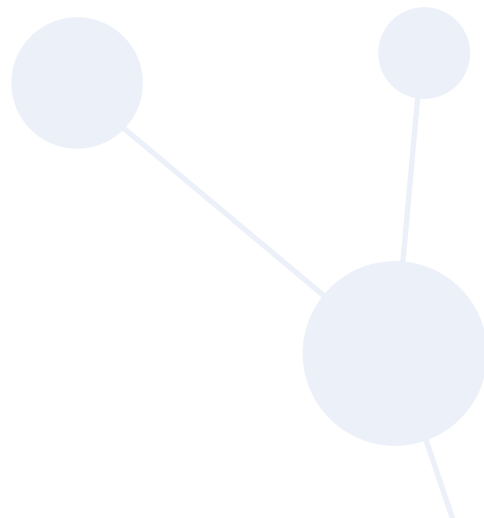
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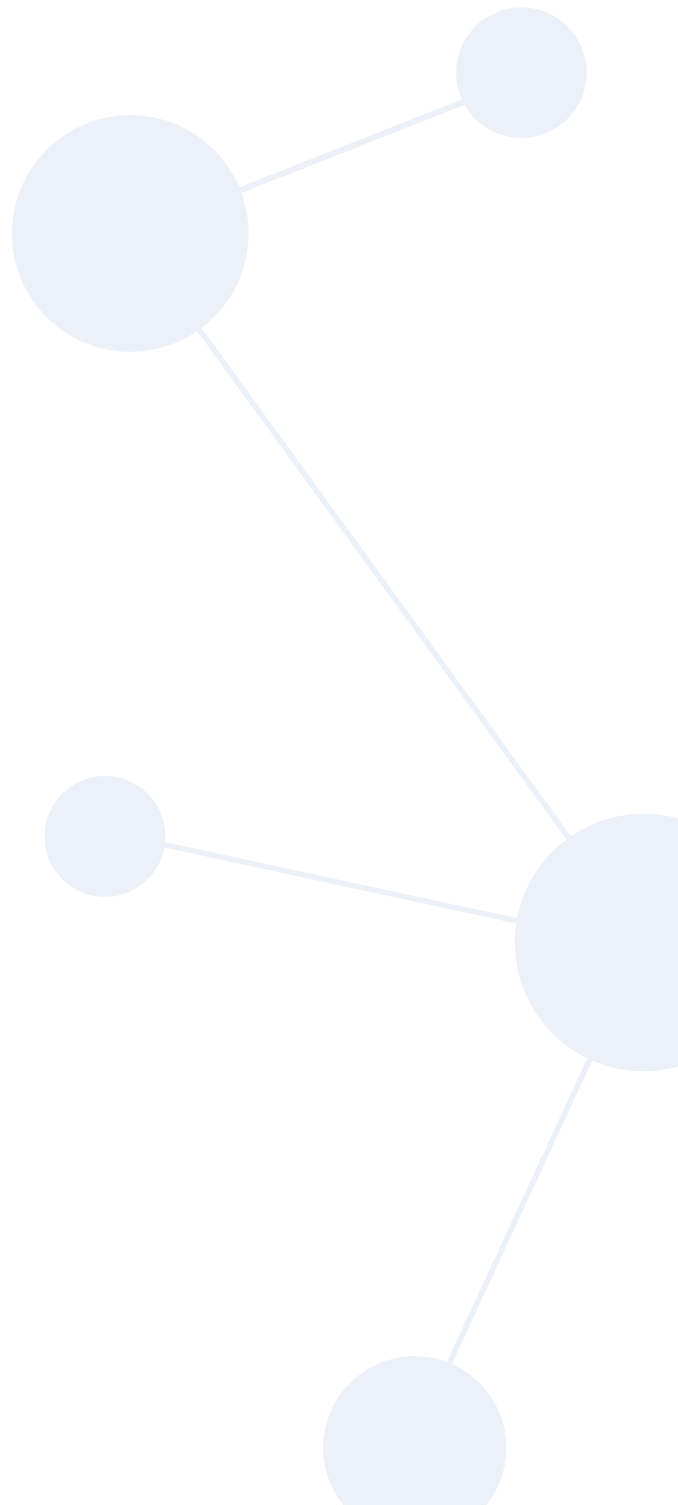
Global Learning:
Virtual Exchange Between Malaysia and the US

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An increasing amount of scholarship has shed light on the myriad benefits of virtual exchange in fostering students' intercultural competency. Some addressed the importance of establishing social connectedness in remote settings (Bolliger & Inan, 2012; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007); some documented the development of students' intercultural understanding through authentic cultural experiences (Jin, 2013; Kong, 2022; O'Dowd, 2020; O'Rourke, 2007); others underscored students' empathy and the drive for active and integrative learning in both language and culture (Catalano & Barriga, 2021; Lomicka, 2020, p. 307). As Guillén, Sawin, and Avineri (2020) aptly summarized,

> *A successful virtual exchange compelled our students to engage with different perspectives and challenge their assumptions about others and their own identity, beyond classroom walls and narrowed approaches to language growth.*
> *(p. 324).*

While existing scholarship demonstrates the pedagogical potential and common practices of adopting virtual exchange to foster intercultural communicative competence, we need to be mindful and intentional in designing virtual exchange "to contextualize this practice in terms of access, inclusion, diversity and equity (AIDE)" (Kastler & Lewis, 2021, p.17). In the same light, Christensen and Kong (2022) reflected on their intention to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment for both international students and local students to conduct virtual exchange so that international students will not feel tokenized to serve the local students' learning.

One way to increase equity and inclusion through virtual exchange is to co-construct a mutually beneficial project to engage all students to explore nuances and diversity from each other's cultures and stories. Building on this understanding, we designed and completed a virtual exchange project to connect students across the Pacific Ocean to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as explore cultural identities.

Project Description

This 6-week global learning project involved 40 undergraduate students, 20 from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in the United States where they studied Chinese language and culture as well as second language acquisition, and 20 from Taylor's University in Malaysia where they studied English language and culture. The purpose of this collaboration was to extend language education beyond the classroom and to broaden students' cultural awareness through interacting with peers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The project design reflects our attention and intention toward access, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE). (1) We designed a mutually beneficial model by mapping our course objectives to ensure that both cohorts would have equal opportunities to achieve their respective learning
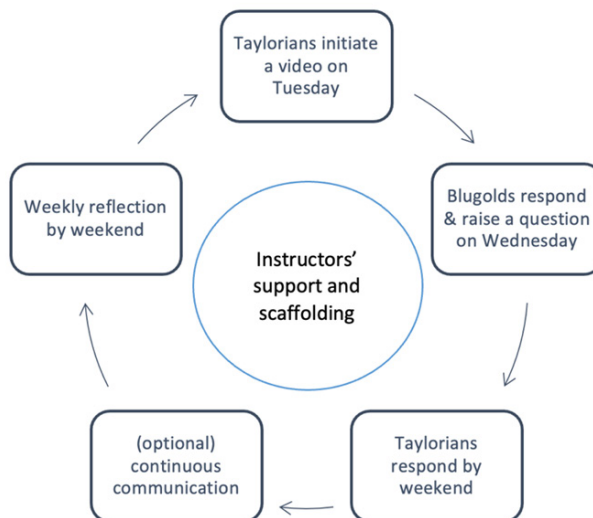
goals. (2) We selected Flip (formerly known as Flipgrid), an online video recording tool, for this project due to its various advantages addressed in existing studies (Apoko & Chong, 2022; Stoszkowski, Hodgkinson & Collins, 2021; Yeh, Choi, & Friesem, 2022). In particular, Flip offered easy accessibility and many user-friendly features for students as they built a social presence and established interconnectedness with each other.

(3) Weekly discussion topics were open-ended and allowed ample space for students to explore the diversity and intricacies of culture, gender, identity, and intercultural citizenship (Table 1 & Figure 1). (4) We collected weekly feedback from students and made adaptations accordingly so students' voices were included and impactful during the ongoing learning experience.

Table 1: Weekly topics and an example list of prompts

Weekly Topic	Example of weekly discussion prompts
Topic 1: Getting to Know You	**Topic 4: Roles & Performativity** 1. Compare-contrast how gender, identity, and culture has evolved over the years. 2. Pick one topic/category to focus on: for example, women then and women now, or Gen X and Millennials. 3. Think of an interesting category to discuss using a movie clip/a popular movie/series or reality show as an example to base your sharing on. 4. Your sharing would be on what is happening nowadays, why is this happening and if it is alright for new practices, values and beliefs to replace old ones.
Topic 2: Personality Test	
Topic 3: Expectation vs Reality	
Topic 4: Roles & Performativity	
Topic 5: What Hats do you wear?	
Topic 6: Through Your Eyes	

Figure 1: Weekly activity procedure

Students' Feedback

Students' active participation and written feedback displayed a positive learning experience towards AIDE. Flip statistics showed that students created a total of 95 video responses to the prompts, viewed each other's videos 4,022 times, generated 118 comments, and invested over 170 hours in this virtual exchange. These impressive statistics within 6 weeks reflected students' dedication to getting to know their partners on the other side of the world and thus inspired both instructors to continue the momentum of global exchange.

In addition, students offered positive feedback and underscored the valuable opportunities for them to hear authentic voices from their peers from different backgrounds. Echoing Kastler and Lewis's (2021) suggestion to pay attention to contextual understanding, students' feedback divulged their benefits from this project in relation to their learning context and course goals. For instance, the Malaysia cohort's course focused on exploring complex identities, and many students shared how the virtual exchange expanded their horizons on identities and human rights. As one participant (Yan) reflected,

> *The society undoubtedly has its own stereotypes on how members of all genders should behave or express, and often times these stereotypes limit one's freedom of expressing their own identity without having to worry about judgement from others. While my partner agreed with me, he also talked about his experience with coming out to his family and friends, from his video I learned that the US is currently discussing on revoking gay marriage rights which is very saddening to hear. Through the sharing of our opinions, I learned that our society still needs progress and improvement.*

Meanwhile, the American cohort explored general cultural diversity to increase cultural awareness, and many students shared their appreciation of knowing about cultural equity and inclusion in another country. For instance, one participant (Mike) elaborated on his expanded understanding of Malaysian culture through his partner,

> *Topics like "What hats do you wear" and "Through your eyes," made me think deeper about myself. Talking with my partner gave me topics that I might not have gotten to talk about with the other, and that is the trans-community. I might not be trans myself but my oldest sister is, and getting to share things my sister told me about with someone who is also trans is something more special compared to someone who isn't trans or known someone going through the experience. She also told me what it was like being a part of the LGBTQ+ community in Malaysia.*

Similar reflections were also shared by other students, highlighting the value of talking with their intercultural partner, such as "keeping me motivated to learn about other cultures," "connecting with another person all the way across the world," "getting to learn about another country from the residents' eyes, not from a textbook written by a non-native," and "learning important things going on in their country, like activism."

Instructors' Reflections and Suggestions

In the process of integrating and fostering AIDE, we learned the importance of commitment, reflection, and adaptation. We encourage more educators to adopt global virtual exchange to promote high-impact intercultural learning, and thus offer the following suggestions.

1. Give students sufficient space to form their ideas and voices. We found it significantly beneficial to offer broad and open-ended prompts to encourage students to present their views in innovative ways. For instance, when discussing the topic "Roles & Performativity," students' presentations ranged from Disney characters to pop music, from male cosmetics to gender inequity.

2. Instructors' communication and continued support played an instrumental role in successful learning. Such support could include training on effective intercultural communicative strategies, weekly check-in, revising prompts based on students' feedback, language scaffolding, and resolving communication breakdowns or intercultural misunderstandings.

3. Taking on an equity lens to design this virtual exchange was modeling equity and inclusion to our students, by demonstrating the importance of mutual understanding and ethno-relative worldviews. Our guided reflection and debrief sessions reminded students of intellectual humility and an inclusive mindset.

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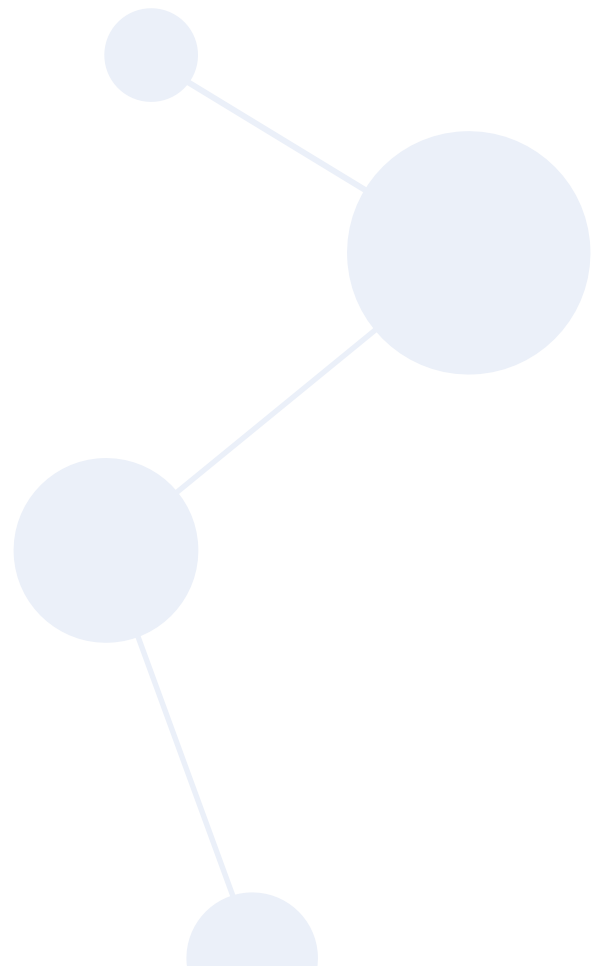
Why Virtual Exchanges Matter to Students in the Global South

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Introduction: Despite the rise in popularity of global education programming, much of the surrounding pedagogy and scholarship continues to center on the experiences and outcomes for students in the Global North, while neglecting to cultivate and investigate the impact on counterparts abroad, particularly in the Global South.

Globally, study abroad programs and virtual exchange opportunities are largely driven by educators in the Global North, as these experiences are often predicated on specific resources, infrastructure, and capacity not available at many institutions in the Global South. As a result, many global exchanges between these regions are developed and structured unidirectionally, with learning objectives oriented toward one group of learners, and/or with one group of learners being positioned to learn about or "help" the other, oftentimes further reinforcing colonial notions of Western privilege (Villarreal & Lesniewski, 2021; Zuchowski, 2017).

Given the mobility and financial limitations of study abroad, virtual exchange programs can make global educational opportunities more accessible to a more diverse range of students, provided the program is culturally responsive and designed to address and mitigate structural, technological, and other disparities (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015; Krasnoff, 2016; Membrillo-Hernández et al., 2023). Without addressing the unique needs and identities of students and staff, these exchanges risk reinforcing neoliberal and colonialist frameworks that can perpetuate global learning inequalities (Villarreal & Lesniewski, 2021).

Equally important is research and scholarship that reflects the experiences of students and counterparts in the Global South, who oftentimes are not interviewed and tend to form the "backdrop" in many case studies about global exchanges (e.g., Oberhauser & Daniels, 2017). In order to create a more equitable and culturally responsive classroom environment, it's essential to investigate the unique impacts of these programs and identify best practices for partners as global exchanges become more prominent.

This article draws from research conducted around a 3-year virtual exchange partnership between two universities in the United States and Liberia which captured the respective student benefits and generated practical considerations for the participating faculty and administrators (Devereux & Glenn, 2022). The goal of this article is to center the experiences of Global South students in the scholarship and provide context and praxis for leveraging virtual exchanges to better address their learning needs and priorities in a transformative classroom environment.

Case Study: *Global Agriculture* Global Classroom

Between 2019-2022, faculty at universities in the US and Liberia designed, implemented, and evaluated a Global Classroom Model (GCM) course centered around *Global Agriculture* (Devereux & Glenn, 2022). GCMs are innovative, project-based, cross-cultural, and virtual courses specifically designed to

engage students "across national, geographical, and cultural boundaries, [while] recognizing the cultural, historical, epistemological, and ethical context" in identifying problems and developing sustainable solutions collaboratively (Wiek et al., 2013).

Within this course, each week students explored a new topic related to global agriculture (e.g., gender, climate change, spirituality) through case studies, guided discussions, and guest speaker presentations, and collaborated on solutions that could address some of these issues locally within their own communities.

The course instructors adapted tools including the Transformational Learning Scale and other approaches to guide student self-reflection and to promote collaborative, equitable, and reparative relationships between students in the Global North and South (Clayton et al., 2010). Transformational learning approaches are particularly relevant for decolonizing Western educational frameworks as they seek to empower indigenous people to detect and resist treatment of inequality via a recentering on human consciousness, collective soul, and holistic self (Akena, 2019; Dei, 2002).

The respective benefits and outcomes of this course were captured via semi-structured pre- and post-interviews. U.S. student outcomes are shared as a point of comparison to highlight the distinct nature of the Liberian experiences.

Results: GCM Benefits as Reported by Liberian & U.S. Students

Liberia	Common Themes	United States
Realized that other countries experience similar suffering/struggles, and this commonality gave hope	Shifts in Perspectives	Better understanding of the nature of global relationships, the role the US plays, and the development industry
Spirituality, gender, technology, and climate change	New Knowledge	Africa, agriculture, and extension
Reading, writing, and problem solving	New Skills	Technical writing, monitoring & evaluation
Ability to serve others and make an immediate impact in their communities	Application	Individual support for future interviews, jobs, or graduate school
Confidence in sharing their opinions and ideas with people from outside of their culture	Cross-Cultural Communication	Understanding the importance of listening to understand and asking questions before speaking
The unity and friendship they felt during the class	Favorite Aspect of the GCM	New perspectives and knowledge that enhanced their undergraduate education

(Devereux & Glenn, 2022)

Reflection & Summary

While both groups of students reported outcomes related to new perspectives, skills, and knowledge, the framing of these benefits was distinctly different for the two groups. While Liberian students tended to focus on the immediate application of these benefits to their communities, the U.S. student experience was grounded in self-discovery and reported in terms of the future impact on their careers (Devereux & Glenn, 2022). Broadly, this reflects the value systems of their respective cultural backgrounds where Liberian society tends to be more collective and the US more individualistic (Zhao et al., 2021).

Evaluating the impact of cross-cultural exchanges on students within the Global South can be difficult due to limitations of time and resources, and differences in research policies and protocol between universities (Flint et al., 2022). However, global educators must strive to capture this data through participatory approaches that can inform both scholarship and pedagogy. The impact and adoption of virtual cross-cultural experiences varies significantly by cultural and educational context, meaning educators must adapt their courses according to the unique backgrounds and needs of diverse groups of students (Zhao et al., 2021; Joy & Kolb, 2009; Hornik & Tupchiy, 2006). Learning objectives and course content should reflect an iterative collaborative process which allows for flexibility, individual tailoring of assignments and activities, and open exchange of ideas. For example:

Encourage faculty to co-develop the class from the beginning rather than one institution developing the class and inviting the other to participate;

- Providing separate syllabi with parallel curriculum and assignments tailored for each group of students and their institutions;
- Developing specific learning objectives for each group of students that reflect their educational goals and cultural backgrounds;
- Providing separate but overlapping reading materials that are tailored for the reading levels and languages of both student groups;
- Designing parallel project assignments to account for differences in reading, writing, math, and skills;
- Provide resources and support to professors and administrators at partner universities in the Global South to initiate, develop, and sustain these types of classes.

By tailoring virtual exchanges to the needs and interests of each specific group of students, practitioners can create a more equitable and inclusive environment that celebrates and leverages diversity among cultures and individuals rather than minimizing it. Virtual exchanges like the GCM that focus on decentering Western pedagogy and elevating the unique knowledge, skills, and perspectives of those in the Global South have the potential to create a more transformational learning environment that can empower members to then go on to address global challenges within their own communities. This shift enables actors in the Global South to go beyond merely *partaking* in global exchanges to actively *shaping* the global education sphere and beyond.

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Examining Social Disadvantage and the Institutional Limitations of Virtual Exchange

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An important goal of education is to prepare a workforce that can meet the human resource requirements of the global market to support social and economic developments. Whenever the global economy undergoes a revolution, its workforce requirements will change, and educational systems must transform accordingly. The COVID-19 pandemic advanced the digital transformation of the global economy, accelerating existing trends in remote work, e-commerce, and automation (McKinsey, 2022). Studies show that socially disadvantaged members of society face unique challenges within the global digital economy (Helsper, 2008). This article highlights the growing need for strategic student preparation for an increasingly interdependent global and digital economy, and the importance of overcoming limitations higher education institutions (HEIs) impose on virtual exchange (VE). We discuss the challenges socially disadvantaged students face in an increasingly digital global economy. We then expound on why it is crucial for HEIs to intentionally tackle these challenges if they mean to develop inclusive and equitable global education programs. Lastly, we detail how HEIs can begin to tend to these challenges and utilize VE as a method to advance equity.

Educational equity means that each learner receives what they need to achieve their full academic and social potential. Helsper (2008) found that those who suffer social disadvantages such as limitations in skill, health, or income tend to be excluded from the global digital economy. These findings are troubling because global digital engagement is a prerequisite to compete and succeed in a world that leverages digital cooperation. Educational systems must respond to this trend of inequity by intentionally preparing underserved students for the advancing digital world. Moreover, the World Economic Forum (2023) emphasizes the critical need for digital and technology skills, collaborative problem-solving, self-management, innovation, creativity, global citizenship, and civic responsibility. Virtual exchange provides students with opportunities to gain these global competencies within their coursework. It links students and classrooms around the world through co-taught, blended online coursework, bridging the physical distance between students through technology (AAC&U, 2023). In short, VE is a modality of effective teaching and learning that can offer the educational equity needed for students to thrive in an accelerating global digital economy.

The Role of Higher Education Institutions

Although VE has the capacity to develop critical skills for all students, it has met restrictions within HEIs, such as limited institutional motivation, knowledge, or support. In response to the pandemic, HEIs have more widely

adopted the use of VE, primarily as a method for internationalization and a response to the curbed opportunities for study abroad; increasing access to global learning. With the rapidly shifting landscape of the workforce, this article is a call for HEIs to place emphasis on VE as an institutional strategy for effective teaching and learning, building global competence as part of their institutional commitment to student success. We place the onus on HEIs to meet this challenge for two reasons: Firstly, they are the most equipped to address the need. Studies show that HEIs have a long-standing record of directly impacting and upskilling diverse student populations (Gasman, 2013; Charles & Togunde, 2022). Secondly, meeting this new growing need is imperative to HEI survival as it affects their ability to adapt to the evolving needs of the diverse students they serve (Bista & Pinder, 2022; Chama & LeBeau, 2022).

The Way Forward

Businesses and jobs are changing: The latest World Economic Forum (2023) report on the *Future of Jobs* suggests companies in 26 advanced and emerging economies are rapidly digitizing their work processes. The demand from global industries supports the increased need for collaborative problem-solving, global networks, and civic responsibility, all of which VE cultivates. Moreover, VE, when supported with financial resources, professional development, and institutional strategy, has the potential to advance social mobility for disadvantaged students and enable active engagement in a digital economy. Institutional support in these areas can significantly contribute to the successful implementation and impact of VE programs (e.g., dedicated staff or office, funding and resources, professional development, campus curriculum integration, partnership development, and assessment). We suggest HEIs begin to address this growing need through a strategic approach following these action steps:

1. Embrace VE as a method for effective teaching and learning at the institutional level
2. Expand institutional commitment by increasing faculty professional development, resources, and support for virtual exchange implementation.

Strategic Step One. Integrating virtual exchange as effective teaching and learning:

Research shows that globalizing student learning experiences through the curriculum is an impactful first step for a comprehensive internationalization process (Charles & Togunde, 2022). To date, HEIs are failing to embrace the full spectrum of benefits of VE. Although VE can be utilized to create opportunities for access and inclusion to international education and global learning, its full efficacy cannot be realized without true institutional commitment (Togunde & Charles, 2022; Akomolafe, 2022). HEIs will need to recognize inclusion for global digital engagement as a critical component of student preparation and will need to commit to a comprehensive strategic use of VE to meet that need. A fully supported VE program supports equity, inclusion, and accessible education by broadening global access, creating inclusive learning environments, providing customized learning pathways, ensuring technological accessibility, empowering underrepresented voices, and building global competencies. Virtual exchange as effective teaching and learning has the potential to transform higher education into a more equitable and inclusive space and foster skills needed to engage in global industries.

Strategic Step Two. The development of faculty global education skills & readiness.

HEIs that prioritize diversity outcomes alongside traditional measures of achievement are better equipped to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body and society (Anderson, 2008). Faculty readiness within such HEIs is said

to be crucial to the success or failure of VE design and course implementation. Faculty members play a critical role in designing and implementing VE as meaningful learning experiences for students (Charles & Togunde, 2022). Impactful professional development provides faculty with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively use VE tools and platforms, and design a curriculum that aligns with global competencies to foster intercultural learning and cross-cultural collaborations. By investing in professional development, HEIs can ensure that faculty are equipped with the pedagogical and technical skills needed to create effective virtual exchange coursework. With well-trained and supported faculty, institutions can better create environments that celebrate diversity, promote cultural understanding, and prepare students for success in an increasingly diverse and interconnected workforce.

Conclusion

Connectivity is a key driver of access to information and opportunity for economic development and community well-being. Each institution will need to tailor its support strategies for enabling global connectivity based on its specific goals, resources, and student population. The key is to provide the necessary infrastructure, funding, guidance, and recognition to facilitate and enhance VE experiences for faculty and students. In short, as the global economy continues to evolve, educators and leadership must recognize the value of VE as an institutional strategy to promote student preparation in the fourth industrial context. By embracing VE and systematically addressing social disadvantages and institutional limitations, HEIs can foster educational equity, inclusivity, and accessibility to create sustainable institutional change.

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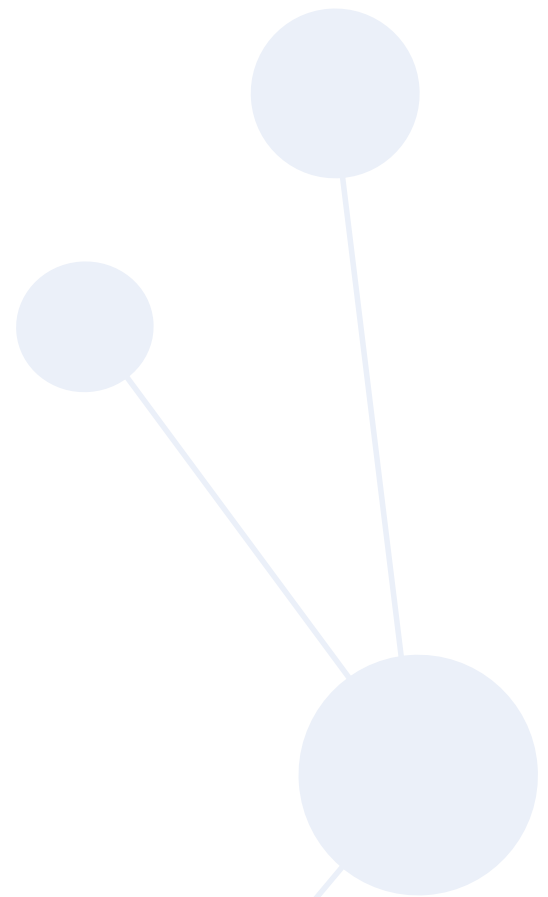
Disentangling Virtual Exchange and Study Abroad Discourses in Equity and Inclusion

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"If they can't study abroad, at least they can still do *something*." This all-too-common response to international virtual exchange (IVE) must be resisted, especially when it is invoked in conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in international education. The argument goes something like this: because IVE requires fewer financial resources and is an option for place-bound students, we should promote IVE as providing greater access to international education for first-generation and marginalized students facing obstacles to studying abroad.

This argument is dangerous not because it is false, but because it is only a partial truth. While IVE is more affordable and does not require travel, and while some international education is indeed better than none, statements such as these run a serious risk of relegating IVE to a secondary status of "study abroad lite." Doing so misses the unique strengths of IVE, including for those marginalized by more traditional educational settings. More profoundly, viewing IVE as a substitute for study abroad provides political cover for institutions to reduce their efforts to make study abroad programs more accessible for first-generation and marginalized students, pushing them instead toward IVE. Urging marginalized students to participate in what is understood to be a second-rate international experience in the name of equity and inclusion should raise alarm bells.

Rather than viewing IVE as the lesser sibling of study abroad, we instead should see the two as distinct approaches to international education, with their own strengths and weaknesses, particularly those related to equity and inclusion. Likewise, we should take seriously the demands that a commitment to equity and inclusion places on both IVE and study abroad, rather than imagining IVE as an easier (read: less expensive, less time-consuming, less logistically complex, less training-intensive) mode of delivering an international experience to marginalized students. Consider the following three points:

Creating Equitable Virtual Spaces Through IVE

First, IVE (at least in its collaborative and reciprocal form) provides a more equitable space for students to meet across geographic and social boundaries than study abroad. By definition, study abroad requires one group of students to travel to another location, immediately casting participants in the role of either guest (those traveling) or host (those receiving the travelers). Interactions between guests and hosts can be incredibly rewarding and meaningful, but they can also be almost entirely superficial, or imbued with profound differentials in power and access. More often than not, it becomes more privileged students who travel, received by hosts who lack the resources to engage in similar travel. These dynamics are exacerbated when study abroad programs originating in the Global North travel to the Global South, with further racialized, gendered, and class-based differences thrown into high relief.

By contrast, IVE participants meet as equals, in a shared virtual space that is not already inhabited by one or the other group. In practice, of course, this dynamic is more complicated. Global and local inequities—with their own racialized, gendered, and economic histories—reappear in access to technology. Inequities also extend into vexing questions of language dominance, time, cultural capital, and geopolitical dynamics.

Preparing IVE Participants for Reciprocal Engagement Across Difference

These potential obstacles to full inclusion within IVE bring us to a second point: many who promote IVE in the name of equity and inclusion drastically underestimate the importance of preparing both students and instructors to deal with issues of identity and difference. Institutions accept that students studying abroad should receive at least some pre-departure training in navigating cultural differences ethically and respectfully. Yet IVE participants often receive very little preparation for their encounters with difference and diversity, and when they do, it lands almost entirely on the individual instructor to do so. This lack of institutional investment in preparation can have dire consequences, not only for relationships between IVE sites—especially between the Global South and the Global North—but also for marginalized students within the Global North.

At its best, IVE provides a context in which students usually marginalized within global centers of power find themselves empowered by their diverse language skills, backgrounds, and abilities to navigate cultural difference. At its worst, though, these same students are forced to negotiate intolerance and entitlement in how their peers engage with both them and their colleagues in the Global South. By imagining IVE to be a less-demanding version of study abroad, and thus paying insufficient attention to preparation

around issues of equity and inclusion, educational institutions in the Global North can further alienate their own marginalized students along with their partners in the Global South.

Resisting the Temptation to Substitute DEI Efforts in Study Abroad With Expanded IVE

Finally, imagining IVE as the preferable option for marginalized students with limited resources or access to travel while leaving access to study abroad programs untouched fails to address the longstanding and persistent inequities within study abroad. As IVE gains traction, this could result in a two-track system, with marginalized students experiencing one type of international education—a lower-status, under-resourced form of IVE—and more privileged students continuing to travel the world through the gold standard, study abroad. We must avoid allowing IVE's strengths—including its flexibility and affordability—to make us complacent or even exacerbate the very inequities we seek to address across international education.

Generating Greater Equity and Inclusion in Both IVE and Study Abroad

We have not yet reached the point of a two-track system. But if we intend to take issues of equity and inclusion seriously, we need to work tirelessly to make *both* IVE and study abroad more accessible, ethical, and reciprocal. A crucial first step would be to disentangle the ways in which we speak about and imagine both forms of international education, not as first and second choices, but rather as two distinct and intriguing approaches, each of which provides affordances that the other does not, and each of which demands distinct consideration of identity, equity, and access. If we manage to do this, the opportunities for marginalized students to thrive within both IVE and study abroad experiences will increase dramatically.

Exploring the World Without Leaving Home: A Case Study on Using VE to Create Global Competence in a Diverse Population of Students

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So... how do we achieve our mission during a pandemic?

This is the question that we, at Global Citizen Year, asked ourselves when COVID-19 threw the whole world off of its axis. Prior to the pandemic, Global Citizen Year supported over 1,000 students through our international immersive fellowship program as part of our mission to help young people emerge into self-aware and culturally humble global citizens. Our Fellows developed insights and skills that shaped their character, guided their higher education, and equipped them to collaborate towards a positive social impact[1].

At the onset of COVID-19, we paused this fellowship program and pivoted to launch Global Citizen Year Academy—a 12-week virtual program that combined synchronous and asynchronous learning to help nearly 1,500 young people cultivate that same set of insights and skills: self-awareness, cultural humility, and global empathy. According to a study by Harvard researchers, the Academy effectively built global competence in this culturally and experientially diverse group of students. We also helped to foster a deep sense of community between these students of vastly different backgrounds. In fact, over 90% of our students connected with other students *after* completing the program, illustrating the strength and endurance of the cross-cultural relationships they developed.

We believe that many of the positive results we achieved in our Academy were not in spite of but *due* to the virtual format of the program. In this article we describe three elements of the Academy that we were able to incorporate because of the virtual nature of the program and that we believe contributed to this success: students' organic exposure to diverse and global perspectives, a focus on helping students see global communities through a local lens, and an opportunity for students to be vulnerable while in a safe and secure setting. Throughout, we provide relevant student quotes that were collected at the end of the program to illustrate these three elements.

Advancing diversity and equity

Being virtually oriented allowed us to ground program recruitment and design in our commitment to diversity and equity in ways we had not yet been able to do in our immersive in-person program. First, we could recruit students who would not have engaged in an international travel program such as our fellowship program for a variety of reasons reflective of paying capacity, personality, culture, safety, and visas. As such, the virtual format facilitated more equitable and inclusive approaches to student recruitment and participation.

Second, being virtually oriented allowed us to recruit an international team of instructors. Not only did this expand our talent pool, but this also allowed students to be taught by instructors with diverse and global perspectives. The increased diversity among instructors also created fertile

ground for their professional growth, as they were able to learn from colleagues across the globe, each with distinct context, experience, and training.

Finally, the virtual environment also led us to expand our course content to represent more global perspectives. During our in-person fellowship we were hesitant to "overload" students with too much content which could detract from the unique opportunity to become fully immersed in their new community. Conversely, the virtual Academy provided space for students to engage deeply with written and viewable content representative of diverse cultures, worldviews, and perspectives. The expansion of course content resulted in a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning framework which pushed students to extend and challenge their own perspectives beyond their inherited cultural lens.

To illustrate this, one student explained,

> *"Global Citizen Year allowed me to explore the world and challenge my beliefs. It was enlightening to hear so many people talk on the same topic and express such different points of view. I think that the program made me much more prepared for the variety of opinions and cultures."*
> — Student from Lviv, Ukraine

Seeing global communities through a local lens

The virtual nature of our program also pushed us to redefine the culminating program project. While in the in-person fellowship, students' projects centered on the community where they were immersed, we requested that students in the virtual program explore their own local community through a new lens. As a final project, students applied the principles of asset-based community development to identify assets in their home communities which could be leveraged to inspire meaningful local

change. In sharing the final projects with their global peers, students were introduced to multiple communities across the world and invited to view them through a local, asset-based lens. In this way, the virtual nature of the Academy offered students meaningful viewpoints into multiple communities across the world, a breadth of perspective that was not possible through an in-person experience alone.

For example, one student said,

> *"We're a diverse group so we don't know how other cities and countries are. This allowed us to see places I'd never seen and gain a more intimate perspective of that community."*
> — Global Citizen Year student from Tunisia

A virtual invitation to vulnerability

Unlike in our in-person immersive program, whereby only a few students were placed in communities together, students of our virtual program were placed in virtual learning cohorts curated to maximize diversity across students' place of citizenship, racial identity, gender identity, and family income. Throughout the course, students developed meaningful relationships and deep connections with their global peers by synchronously interacting with a curriculum that was grounded in the exploration of self and community as a pathway to developing a global orientation. The program asked students to reflect on their identity, privilege, implicit biases, and other characteristics in an attempt to push students to engage in deep reflection and be vulnerable in ways that gave them space to be exposed to and consider the various culturally and experientially based perspectives of other students. The fact that students engaged in the program from the comfort of their own home allowed students to be in a physically safe and familiar place for reflection and contemplation. Further, students did not have the inherent social

distractions of in-person classes to detract from reflection and vulnerability, and they seemed less apt to "perform" by presenting an invulnerable exterior shell in the virtual environment.

To illustrate, one student said,

> *"Students need an experience like this one because in no other program is there a safe learning space with people from all over the world willing to get to know you and grow with you and share knowledge."*
> — Global Citizen Year student from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

So now what? Combining the best of both worlds

We recently launched our newest program, Take Action Lab, to continue our mission to help students develop skills needed to be impactful global citizens. This program, informed by the lessons we learned about the value of virtual exchange, blends a virtual experience with an in-person immersive component. Fifty students from over 25 countries came together virtually for four weeks to participate in a synchronous curriculum designed to help the students create community and vulnerably reflect on and share their own predispositions. These students then were sent to Cape Town, South Africa to live together and work in local human rights NGOs for 12 weeks. We look forward to sharing what we learn about this blended approach with you.

*Students explicitly consented to allow their quotes and their names to be presented in Global Citizen Year publications.

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Virtual Exchange for Preservice Teachers:
A Boundary Space Where DEI Can Flourish

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A growing body of literature demonstrates the potential for virtual exchange (VE) to develop global competencies in participants (O'Dowd, 2017; Machwate et al., 2021). Such research is particularly encouraging for undergraduate teacher education, where training culturally competent preservice teachers is widely acknowledged to be paramount as a foundation for DEI in future classrooms across the spectrum of education. Currently, teacher education is developing unique models for advancing DEI in and through VE that may have possibilities for broader application in other disciplines as well.

Teacher education places a high priority on developing global competence in preservice teachers in order to prepare them for the cultural diversity of their future classrooms. In fact, teacher education programs have long developed education abroad programs with the specific goals of training preservice teachers in global competencies. Yet, ongoing challenges persist in providing accessible global engagement opportunities. Education abroad programs have shown great promise, but the costs and lockstep course schedules of most education programs keep many students from participating. Moreover, lack of diversity in teacher training programs overall is compounded and more pronounced when considering the lack of diverse participation rate in programs of education abroad. By providing accessible global learning opportunities for preservice teachers, VE holds potential to overcome these barriers and develop many of the intercultural skills that teacher education demands (Jaramillo Cherrez & Gleason, 2022; Sapkota et al., 2023).

One example of a VE model developed for teacher education is IGlobal, an extracurricular club focused on the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, led by education undergraduate students and international students, attended by middle school students from around the world. DEI is not only a characteristic of each group of participants, but also informs the content and focus of the program. Supported by the University of Illinois College of Education, the Illinois Global Institute, and grants from the U.S. Department of Education Title VI program, preservice teachers are partnered with international students and work in tandem with practicing teachers locally and from around the world. Modeling cross-cultural collaboration, they virtually lead groups of middle school students in extracurricular STEAM activities and projects that require cross-cultural collaboration, which we call STEAM-C. It is the multilayered, cross-cultural collaboration that distinguishes the IGlobal model from collaborative online international learning (COIL). Designed specifically for preservice and in-service teachers, IGlobal reimagines virtual exchange as an online international teaching and learning laboratory where participants gain global awareness and global competencies, as well as practice in globally collaborative online teaching and learning. In COIL, by contrast, participants are typically partnered virtually with peers from a different cultural context to study topics of mutual interest or shared language. In IGlobal, participants are partnered with both peers and mentors from multiple cultural contexts while also engaging in teaching activities with multinational, multilingual

middle school students. Seeming barriers of language, culture, and technology instead all become the sites and source of collaboration, as teachers, preservice teachers, and international students all work together to educate globally based middle school participants about the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In the IGlobal project model, we conceptualize the online environment as a boundary space, where difference can be encountered and engaged. Drawing from boundary crossing theory, diversity is recognized as a vital force for change and development (Akkerman & Baker, 2011). Differences are recognized as potential learning resources that depend on multiple perspectives from multiple parties. Rather than giving simplistic calls for agreement, boundary crossing theory acknowledges the potential difficulty of action and interaction across cultural and belief systems, while at the same time emphasizing the value of communication and collaboration. Boundary crossing does not mean imposing ideas from one side of the boundary to the other. Instead, using this framing encourages participants to accept that differences will remain. All participants learn to engage with difference in a stance of cultural humility amidst multidirectional flows of knowledge creation. IGlobal works from the assumption that encountering cultural difference is challenging and disrupting. Encountering cultural difference will not automatically result in greater understanding but must be treated as a learning opportunity.

Following this model in practice means recognizing that all participants have contributions to make as well as potential knowledge to gain from each other within the boundary spaces of VE. This theory undergirds practice in IGlobal, in which the virtual space shared by multiple cultures functions as a boundary ground where cultures of teaching and learning encounter each

other and learn to respectfully engage to solve challenges through the medium of technology. The differences encountered here in this virtual boundary space serve as the catalysts for learning. DEI flourishes in this multinational, multicultural, multilingual VE. Serving as club chapter leaders, preservice teachers participate in cross-cultural collaboration while at the same time learning how to teach these skills in complex virtual environments. Preservice teachers practice facilitating cross-cultural respect and creating spaces where multiple perspectives can be heard and addressed in proposed solutions.

In addition to synchronous virtual club meetings with students, all preservice teachers and international student leaders meet together weekly to discuss what they learned as co-leaders in their session. They take turns sharing video clips that illustrate successful or challenging moments. Talking through these examples as a group allows preservice teachers and international students to both teach and learn from each other. In what is commonly referred to as the multiplier effect, as future teachers, the education students will potentially continue to transmit what they have learned from their international peers, mentors, and students into their school communities for decades to come.

While the benefits of providing greater access to global learning for all preservice teachers cannot be overstated, even within these new models of VE, significant challenges to DEI remain. Access to the VE is limited by the digital divide, with schools around the world lacking the technological capabilities to join. Teacher training, equipment, and internet connection all serve as major barriers to participants from the Global South, or even from less affluent areas of the Global North. VE provides an important step in providing global learning for more students who could not afford traditional mobility, or don't have opportunity to travel, but

it will not solve all the inequities that remain. VE focused on DEI for educators and young students provides hope that these challenges will continue to be addressed by the generations to come.

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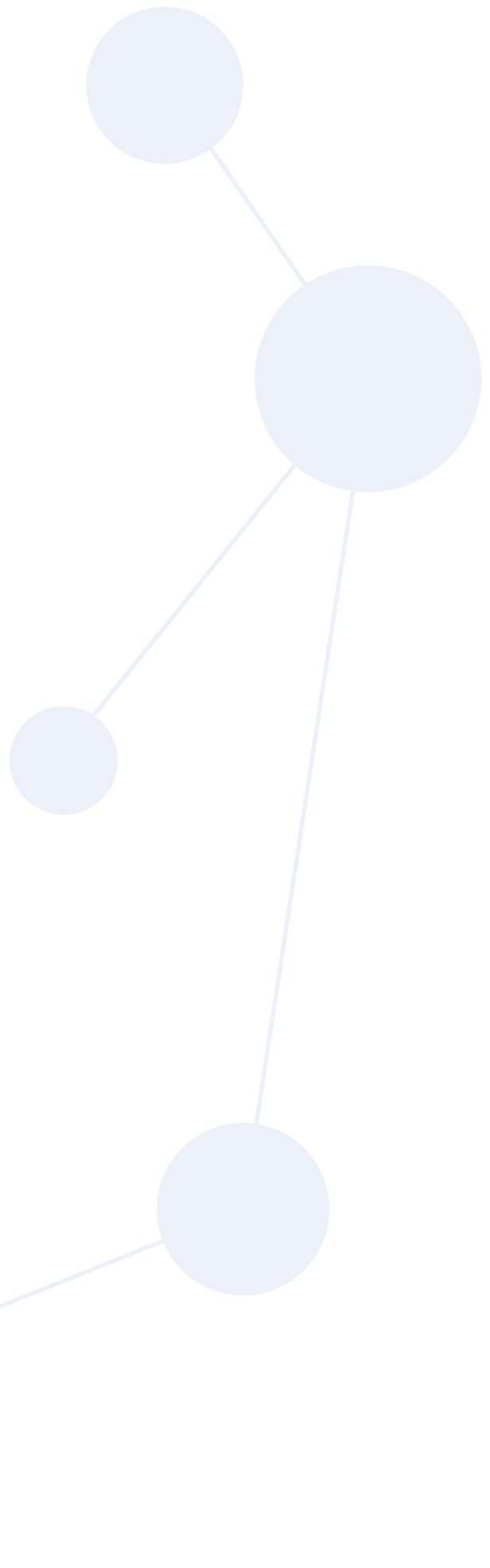
TOCA Online: Using Language Learning to Connect U.S. High School Students of Color and Refugees Worldwide

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Lamar Shambley	Teens of Color Abroad, Founder/Executive Director

Overview of *TOCA Online*: Speaking a language other than English opens up opportunities in careers and life. Nationwide, early engagement with comprehensive language learning correlates with increased overall academic achievement, cognitive development, and positive attitudes toward different cultures. TOCA (Teens of Color Abroad) exists to bridge the racial gap in the United States regarding access to the most proven ways for youth to become fluent in a new language. TOCA primarily serves students of color from low-income communities and students attending Title I schools, who are highly underrepresented in global education programs and therefore underrepresented in the numerous life and career benefits associated with participating in them. TOCA founder, Lamar Shambley, noted that there were only a few Black students like him in his language learning and study abroad experiences in college. His aim in creating TOCA was to enhance students' language learning experiences, augment their educational outcomes, and strengthen their global competency skills.

In Summer 2020 TOCA partnered with NaTakallam to launch *TOCA Online,* a virtual language learning and cultural exchange program that allows U.S. high school students of color to study Arabic, Spanish, or French, taught by refugee conversation partners dispersed worldwide. In the *TOCA Online* program, students take small-group language lessons, connect with like-minded peers across the country, and participate in cultural exchange sessions where they listen and learn from refugees' lived experiences. *TOCA Online* supplements students' school-based language-learning experiences, increasing their classroom participation and knowledge of global political and cultural landscapes.

Challenges of Engaging Students of Color

Addressing the below challenges requires program developers, students, and families to work together to build trust, create an inclusive environment for learning to occur, and provide adequate resources and support. As a result, it's important to work closely with the communities that one serves to better understand their needs and priorities.

Awareness. Students may not be aware of the opportunities available to them because individuals in their community may have never participated in similar activities, or they may not be aware of the holistic benefits these opportunities afford. A solution to this is to create peer mentorship programs designed specifically for students of color where alumni share their experiences with students and their families. TOCA has developed Community Circles, a space for universities and international education associations to discuss global education opportunities to TOCA participants.

Lack of representation. Students may not see themselves or their cultures represented in the programming, including those leading and

facilitating the programs. It is critical to proactively create a diverse workforce to ensure that different perspectives are represented during program development and marketing efforts. *TOCA Online* receives real-time feedback from students, which helps shape the programs based on students' needs. Organizations should hire leadership and facilitators who come from similar backgrounds as the students they are serving.

Inadequate preparation and partnerships. Without adequate preparation and training, organizations may perpetuate stereotypes or biases, creating an unwelcoming environment for students. It is important when developing partnerships for stakeholders to have shared goals and priorities for the populations they are serving, and ensure that training is offered before and after programming occurs.

Impact of *TOCA Online*

Second-language acquisition is important for employability, personal and cultural enrichment, and solidarity building. In many industries speaking multiple languages is advantageous and may help individuals advance within their organizations. Additionally, our students have expressed an interest in learning languages ranging from engaging with their local communities to connecting more meaningfully with relatives outside of the US, which may lead students to identify as heritage seekers when pursuing global education opportunities in college. These types of experiences empower students to share their personal stories (e.g., What's it like to grow up as a young Black man in America?) in another language, which creates bridges to connect with other cultures.

TOCA Online has enrolled over 300 high school students of color from more than 30 states. Based on 208 responses to TOCA's Global Identity Questionnaire, our findings indicate that our

programming has impacted students' global perspectives and identity. Findings show that students are interested in a career where they can use their language skills, they are interested in studying languages in college, they consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating global problems, and they are interested in having an international career as an adult. Our findings show that our programming is promoting the use of language skills in future academic and professional environments. Although more work needs to be done, TOCA Online is having a positive impact on our students, which demonstrates the need for these types of virtual exchange programs
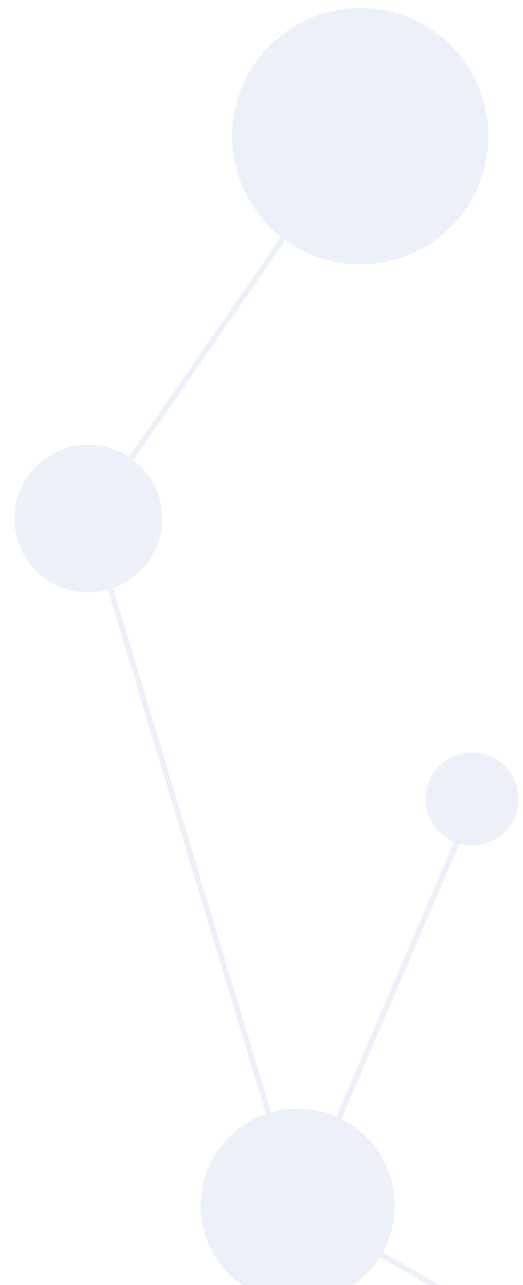
Meeting in a Third Space: Possibilities for Equity and Inclusion in Virtual Classrooms[1]

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The language of diversity, equity, and inclusion has largely been promoted by and within United States-based institutions. As a result, these initiatives have not always focused on challenging power asymmetries related to the category of nation, including imperialism and linguistic domination. Virtual exchanges (VE), while far from perfect, can offer a chance for students and professors of various nationalities to work collaboratively towards more expansive visions of transnational solidarity. Drawing on our experiences facilitating two multi-sited, co-taught courses between universities in Argentina and the United States, this piece asserts that VE can promote equity and inclusion for instructors and students by 1) centering the voices of the Global South in the course material and 2) creating transnational collaborations through project-based assignments and co-teaching teams who work together across borders and often in multiple languages. VEs create a third space for students and professors to reflect about global issues such as racism and gender violence. The networks born of VE act inside and outside the classroom through practices of collective knowledge making, like this piece written by scholars from South America in collaboration with scholars in the US.

First, our VE promoted equity and inclusion through course syllabi that foregrounded the perspectives of scholars and activists from the Global South. The class material contextualized and recognized human diversity while the assignments and discussions encouraged students to learn from each other. For instance, in one of our classes, Online and in the Streets: Feminist Protest and Activism in Latin America, we included materials on Black, Chicana, trans, and popular feminisms to provide a critique of "mainstream" Western White feminism that fails to account for non-White and LGBTQIA++ people. Teaching-learning spaces that center marginalized experiences not only expose students to new stories, but also frame experiences in the Americas as systemic and interconnected, rather than as unconnected or individualized anecdotes. Thus, VEs can be laboratories to test

plural forms of education, respecting diversity and aiming for emancipatory practices.

This leads to our second point about the virtual classroom as a third, interstitial space: one in which cultures, languages, experiences, and histories converge. In this way VE can promote intercultural encounters that foster dialogue amongst students from diverse backgrounds. Transnational collaborations among students take the form of project-based assignments that encourage students to work in teams as they develop digital projects. A student from another VE course, Literature and Ideas in the Caribbean, reflected:

> *The experience of working one-on-one with other students becomes a matter of convergence and divergence [...] The magic is that once I am aware this distance exists, and once I remember that in the tension between here and there I can meet those who seem to be far away, suddenly relationships become a little less complicated, and I can finally enjoy and take advantage of both likenesses and differences to grow, to better understand others, and ultimately, to become more like myself.*

It is through these assignments that students like the one quoted above face the challenges of collective learning and enjoy the benefits of connecting with students from diverse backgrounds. This enables personal growth, a deeper understanding of others, and ultimately a greater sense of self.

For instructors VE also promotes transnational collaborations through co-teaching teams that work together across borders and languages. Inspired by popular pedagogies from South America, co-teaching means to collectively plan (in teams of two or more) lectures and discussions, advise students, and reflect about teaching and learning practices. As another example of the transnational

dialogues that VE can create, Online and In the Streets organized Conversatorios (Talks) with activists and scholars from the Global South as part of the class. These conversations featured speakers whose subjectivities and experiences are too often overlooked in higher educational settings.

In sum, we conceptualize the VE as an opportunity to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education by challenging students to consider nationality and language as categories of power (among other categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality that are more commonly theorized in DEI) . In our experiences VE prompted transnational networks where scholars and students collaborated by teaching in interinstitutional teams, creating visual projects that analyze race and gender from a comparative and transnational perspective, and expanding knowledge making outside the classroom. This opinion piece is part of that network that continues weaving webs of solidarity and collaborative intellectual work across national borders and languages.
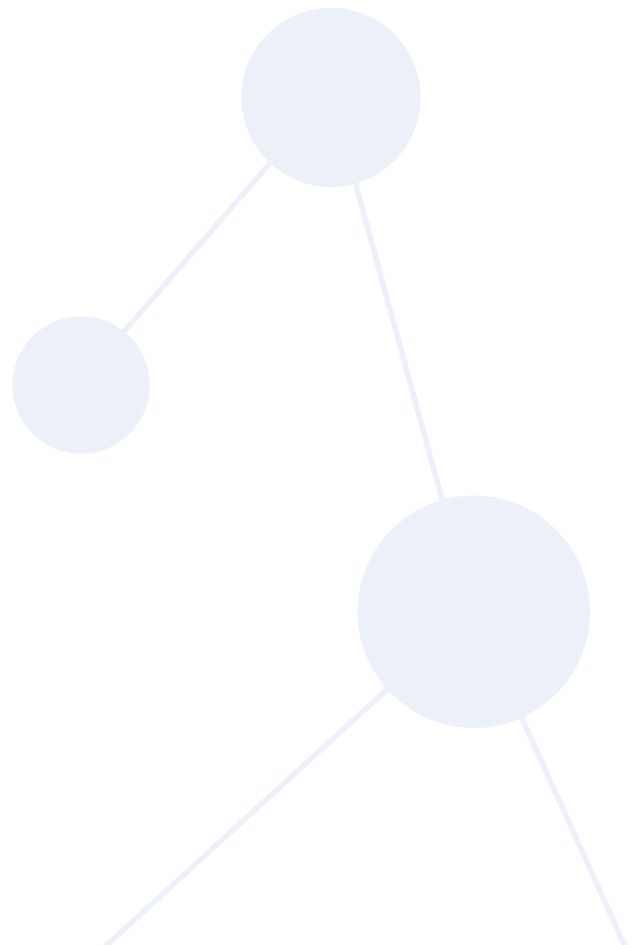
Virtual Exchange to Develop More Humanity-Driven STEM Pre-Professional Undergraduate Students

| Diba Mani, PhD | University of Florida |

Incorporating art and humanities-based aspects for pre-professional undergraduate students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses is necessary for developing more humanity-driven pre-professional students. Pre-professional programs are tracks in undergraduate programs that prepare students for advanced professional training like medical and dental school after earning their bachelor's degree. A student may major in any degree program but still enroll in a pre-professional program, although most select a major that is related to their future career aspiration, such as biology or physiology for a pre-medical track. Although this results in reasonable overlap between requirements for graduation and graduate/professional school requirements, most students must still take courses outside the degree program they're pursuing at their four-year institution, such as an organic chemistry sequence for a physiology student or anatomy and physiology for a chemistry student interested in applying for medical school. Any "free" time these students have is often directed toward prerequisite classes, volunteering hours in research labs and/or clinics, and/or part-time jobs, families, or athletics. These students may not have the time to travel abroad, whether for academics or not, during their undergraduate career and thus may lack experiencing the global dimension that is the basis of STEM fields. In fact, unpublished data collected by Mani & DeVita (in revision) found that "too busy" was selected as a reason for not traveling abroad by 40% of respondents (a close second most popular explanation: "too expensive" [74%]).

Work such as that published by Costa et al. (2020) revealed that coordinating the undergraduate curriculum with the pre-professional programs like health professions education is vital for enhancing the development of student capabilities associated with arts and humanities, which includes the study of history, philosophy and religion, languages and literatures, art, and cultural studies. While programs can be designed and implemented to target small groups of pre-health professional students to develop interpersonal skills through humanities (Poirier et al., 2017), most students are not afforded these opportunities: they may not have the ability to take additional courses, are not enrolled in small groups like honors programs, and may not even have these types of classes offered at their institutions.

Internationalization (O'Dowd, 2018) and virtual exchange (De Wit & Leask, 2015) in courses already within the curriculum of student degrees and pre-professional programs may be the key to developing more humanity-driven future healthcare providers. Internationalization involves curriculum development and change to integrate an international/global dimension into content and/or form (Leask, 2015), while virtual exchange is one method by which courses may be internationalized. As defined by O'Dowd (2018), virtual exchange is the engagement of students in intercultural interactions in a virtual setting, comprising a connection with some partner(s) from other cultural contexts and/or geographical locations as an aspect of the classroom curricula.

Knight (2012) points out that competencies related to effective development of international knowledge and intercultural skills inspire students to create superior understanding of collegiality between nations, sustainable world economies, holistic leadership, and lifelong learning, which can be interpreted as "humanity-driven."

By connecting students with diverse people of differing backgrounds and perspectives but in relevant fields, often across the globe, students may become more aware of the diversity and perspective of others, as exemplified in a Neuromuscular Aspects of Exercise course taught in the Department of Applied Physiology & Kinesiology at the University of Florida. In this class students interviewed scientists from across the globe to gain awareness of cultural and even ethnic impacts on science across four semesters in one of three formats: (1) fully in-person, (2) hybrid (partially in-person and online), or (3) fully online. Summed across the four semesters, 183 students self-reported a higher level of compassion and understanding about the individual they were connected with via video-conferencing technologies like Zoom or Skype: 91-95% of the students noted that they felt more positive about their ability to "communicate with someone from another culture," self-"adaptability," "respect for culture, political, and/or economic systems," and "personal cultural values and biases." One student (Fall 2019) shared the following at the end of the term: "I loved the experience. It really changed my perspective on presenting research papers and on scientists. I was scared for the interview but realized that they are regular people. It made me see that I could see myself doing research." Even without acknowledging the global dimension, the student is humanizing the researchers that establish material taught in the STEM field is recognized. All feedback was collected anonymously and with no impact on student grades in the course.

The virtual exchange experience may be the closest the students get to communicating about science and/or healthcare during their entire academic career, which is quite limiting. However, it is predicted that experiential learning opportunities like the one afforded the students in the undergraduate Neuromuscular Aspects of Exercise course will resonate with them throughout at least the remainder of their undergraduate career, if not through their professional school. For example, a student with a pre-health track during the course may retain the intercultural skills augmented in their virtual exchange experience through medical school, thus engaging in similar activities during their professional education as they develop into a more conscientious and humanity-driven physician. Integrating diverse perspectives and humanities-based activities, with or without virtual exchange, is not lost on our students. For instance, observations presented by Adkins and colleagues (2018) reveal that the integration of life science and visual arts can augment even undergraduate biology classrooms. No doubt, educators can and should consider the integration of relevant global issues in courses that target pre-professional students and incorporate artistic and humanistic dimensions in their STEM courses.

Colleagues interested in incorporating virtual exchange to internationalize their STEM course(s) may consider partnering with a colleague's classroom in a different country to simply have students read and evaluate a selected research paper over videoconferencing. This experience may last no more than half a class session but can result in the development and appreciation of intercultural skills within relevant academic topics that will hopefully be held through post-graduate experiences such as graduate programs.

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