SUNY COIL Stevens Initiative
by Allison Church, Project Coordinator

The SUNY COIL Center develops and supports sustainable, campus-based exchange initiatives integrated into academic and international programs at participating universities. The Center was awarded a Stevens Initiative grant in March 2016 to further partnerships with MENA region schools. The inaugural pilot courses will be launched in the Fall 2016 semester with 7 partnerships between four SUNY campuses and four universities in the MENA Region.

Featured Partners
The SUNY has had successful exchanges with universities throughout the Middle East & North Africa for many years, and it was for this reason that the COIL Center looked to our Nodal Network for nominating MENA partners. The COIL Center’s Director, Jon Rubin, then travelled to the region and met with several faculty and administrators on various campuses, focusing on a partnering pool to four schools. Such regional partnerships are critical to the success of the Stevens Initiative. It is of equal importance for US Institutions of higher learning and those abroad to participate. These faculty candidates embody the values of their schools, exemplify academic excellence in their fields, and represent their national and regional cultures. Fourteen nominees were put forward for the first round of this project and we were impressed with the amount of enthusiasm that faculty expressed to participate in COIL enhanced courses, and the interest that they had in working with each other.

June Workshop
The first workshop took place in June 2016 at Al Kafaat University in Lebanon, and offered a chance for the faculty partners to meet and enhance their professional development for online exchange courses. Before meeting in Beirut, all participants completed “information gathering tables” sharing their perspectives on many topics. The workshop was immediately followed by an online academy where participants ‘learn by doing.’ Based on an “experiential modelling” approach, teachers – through the process of completing tasks – engage in the kind of collaborative activities that their students in COIL courses will subsequently undertake. Paired teachers will be co-leading virtual exchanges between their classrooms this fall.
On the last day of the workshop the workshop participants took a day-trip to the historical coastal city of Byblos 22 miles north of Beirut. Byblos is the oldest city in the world that is still inhabited. Its origins are Phoenician and has survived for 8000 years. We explored the ruins of the city, (three ancient temples, and a Roman theatre) while enjoying the view of the Mediterranean Sea. We ventured into the museum, viewed the sarcophagus of King Hiram, and beheld one of the earliest Phoenician alphabet inscriptions in the world. We then explored the Temples of Resheph and Balaat Gebal and hiked along the shore before eating dinner at Aal-Bahr Restaurant at sunset.

Traditional Lebanese cuisine includes appetizers of assorted Mezza’s like hummus and babaganoush—pictured here.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Beyond the professional development and online course training that is central to the workshop there were outings and cultural opportunities that are also important when developing a successful COIL-enhanced course. These excursions cement partnerships, sustain collaborations, and provide a cultural understanding that serves as a framework and reference for professors when presenting the COIL-enhanced course to their students.

Byblos Souq

Our first glimpse of Byblos, stepping off of the bus was stone cobbled streets, sandstone villas with orange-gabled roofs, and gardens bordered with oleander trees. In spite of Lebanon being a majority Muslim country, it is not uncommon to find trendy bars with a misty cloud of mint scented arguile smoke billowing out of tent covered cafes on tile-covered sidewalks. Known for selling typical souvenirs for less than $5, what is less known is that it sells actual artifacts; tiles dating as far back as the ruins themselves, cedar ornaments, ceramic vases, & rich alcohol free oils. We explored the bazaar and mingled with Lebanese youth who lounged throughout the souq in bamboo chairs and fashionable linen garb. We spent an hour exploring the hidden shops and charming cafes, learning Arabic phrases and negotiating for the best prices.

"If Beirut is the Paris of the Middle East, as the cliché goes, then Byblos, some 22 miles up the coastline, is its Cannes...Byblos lays claim to being one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in the world, dating its origins to 8000 B.C."
OUR SUNY PARTICIPANTS

LaTasha Brown (SUNY New Paltz)

The participants in the first phase of the Stevens Initiative were selected by our COIL Coordinators, and come from a variety of disciplines. They have utilized pre-existing partnerships to connect with our MENA institutions and some of them have previously undergone professional development through the COIL Center.

SUNY COIL Nodal Network

There are approximately 28 member institutions in the SUNY COIL Nodal Network that participate in our projects. While also collaborating with other U.S. Institutions, the SUNY system provides a network of campuses unique in the U.S.

PROJECT COMPLETION

33%

The Stevens Initiative is divided into 3 phases, and the June 2016 iteration is the first phase.

4 SUNY Institutions

COIL courses not only partner students and faculty together but also connect universities. A successful collaboration is measured by sustained partnerships, membership in one of our networks, and administrative commitment. Our Nodal Network includes 28 SUNY universities and colleges throughout NY State, and may represent the most diverse student system of schools in the U.S. During the first phase of the Stevens Initiative we welcomed SUNY Cortland, Empire State College, SUNY New Paltz, and Nassau Community College. For the proceeding two phases we have invited nominations from all Nodal Network campuses. These potential faculty participants, like our MENA faculty undergo a rigorous 5-week online COIL Course Orientation and then participate in a partnering phase leading to our online COIL Academy and the COIL Workshop in Beirut next in early November. All of these components make up a complete COIL Professional Development program. Certification and awards are issued upon completion.

If you are a member of our SUNY Nodal Network and would like to initiate a course for spring 2017 semester as part of the Stevens Initiative, please contact Allison Church: allison.church@suny.edu

Fields of Study

We strive for diversity in the subject fields of our participants. In phase 1 we have a variety of disciplines including: business, rhetoric, literature, history, and human rights for peoples with disabilities. Interdisciplinary COIL collaborations disciplines are encouraged, usually in undergraduate courses with relatively similar class sizes.
THE NAME ‘LEBANON’ IS AN EXTENSION OF THE ARABIC WORD FOR MILK-‘LEBAN’. THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY YOU WILL NOT FIND LEBANON ON LICENSE PLATES, BUT YOU WILL FIND LEBAN!

Nirvana, Byblos Ruins Guide

Downtown Beirut

by Allison Church
Dr. Fathi Oueida is the President of Al-Kafaat University and as such is directly involved in overseeing the partnership between Al-Kafaat and the SUNY COIL Center. He has made it his goal to see that COIL enhanced courses are integrated throughout the University and are sustained beyond the allotted grant.

Dr. Abraham Abdallah of Al-Kafaat University is the COIL Coordinator and Professor of Human Rights with Peoples of Disabilities. He is partnering with Janet Duncan of SUNY Cortland on a course designed to examine laws that specify human rights for this underrepresented population and formulate ways that they can be adjusted based upon a comparison with the UN treatise dealing with these communities.

Alexa Moukheiber of Al-Kafaat University is partnered with Mary Lannon of Nassau Community College in a course about cross-cultural perceptions through media and journalism. The students of this collaboration will utilize interview techniques and then present each other, highlighting how perceptions influence the definition of culture.

“Al-Kafaat’s dedication to assisting disabled communities and their commitment to reaching an economically diverse student body enhances the Initiative and helps to represent Lebanese people from all walks of life.”

-Alison Church

Dr. Fathi Oueida
President of Al-Kafaat University

Jeannine Mercer
Professor and COIL Coordinator at the American University in Halat, Lebanon

Larbi Touaf
Professor of Literature at Mohammed the First University in Oudja, Morocco

Jasmine Maklad
Professor at the American University in Cairo

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-Alison Church
Collaborative Online International Learning

The SUNY COIL Center has recently been the recipient of two funded grant initiatives that focus on COIL exchanges targeting specific geographical regions. The Stevens Initiative being focuses on the Middle East and North Africa, while the US-Mexico Multi-State Project focuses on Mexico. U.S. participation in these projects is usually limited to the SUNY system but the Mexico project includes four other US universities.

In June 2016, the COIL Center carried out project-related 4-day workshops in Cuernavaca, Mexico and in Beirut, Lebanon. The Stevens Initiative Workshop involved the partnering of 8 institutions and 4 different countries to launch the preliminary phase. During the course of the workshop, professors began to design their COIL-enhanced course module and constructed the learning activities and projects for their upcoming courses. Together, the two projects will reach over 1100 students during the fall 2016 semester alone! Over 840 students from the US and Mexico, and over 280 students from the US and MENA region, will carry out online collaborative projects in credit-bearing undergraduate and graduate level courses.

Aside from achievements in professional development, each workshop included several opportunities for faculty to have their own cross-cultural exchanges that encouraged cooperation and cemented partnerships that can be sustained and cultivated in the future.

Stevens Initiative

The SUNY COIL/Stevens Initiative partnership seeks to increase academic collaboration between MENA and US institutions through COIL-enhanced courses that utilize virtual exchange platforms and project-based asynchronous course design. The goal is to enhance partnership, facilitate scholarship, and evaluate the stewardship in credit-bearing courses through dialogue and inter-dependent student projects. With financial support from the Stevens Foundation, through the Aspen Institute, the U.S. State Department, and The Bezos Family Foundation and others, the COIL Center is constructing the base for sustainable partnerships between US and MENA Institutions. The COIL Center is coordinating the pilot program for selected faculty, and leading the effort for students in the US and MENA region to connect and enhance their existing knowledge of one another, in addition to, gaining an informed understanding of cultural distinctions. With Al-Kafaat University in Lebanon as our host we have strategically positioned ourselves at the epicenter of the Middle East, and with partners in Egypt and Morocco we have extended our reach throughout North Africa.
Upcoming Iterations

Coil Course Orientation
The SUNY COIL Center recently concluded its June COIL Course Orientation online training, led by Jan McCauley from SUNY Broome. Interest in COIL programs is growing and for this CCO we had so many interested candidates that we ran multiple sections. Our enthusiastic participants have now progressed into the partnering stage in our COIL Networks partnering venue.

Registration is now open for the August COIL Course Orientation which is filling up quickly. If you are an individual faculty member or COIL Coordinator, and your campus has interest in COILing a course for the Spring 2017 semester, you should register as soon as possible. We expect all instructors who have not previously taught a COIL course before and who want to participate in our Stevens or MCP initiatives to take the CCO.

DATES OF IMPORTANCE:
- August 9: CCO Registration Deadline
- August 15 – September 20: CCO
- September 15 – October 10: Partnering via the COIL Networks Page
- October 7: Course Proposal Deadline
- October 30 – November 2: The Stevens workshop in Beirut
- October 17 – December 5: COIL Academy.

Other Professional Development Opportunities
Professional development is integral to maintaining expertise in your field and advancing in academia. The SUNY COIL Center has many opportunities for enriching ones understanding and knowledge in the field of Collaborative Online Learning. If you or your institution is considering a COIL-enhanced course but are not ready for the upcoming academic year then consider the following opportunities.

For information on the Stevens Initiative and the SUNY COIL Center visit our website: http://coil.suny.edu or contact the Project Coordinator: allison.church@suny.edu