In a Global State of Mind

Spring 2012 COIL Partnership:
Corning Community College & the University of Belize
“The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge.”

Daniel J. Boorstin
• Background and Timeline
• What We Built: Learning Outcomes and Assignments
• Instructional Challenges
• Takeaways for Future Collaboration
• Student Cross-Cultural Reflections

Outline
The University of Belize
Belmopan, Belize

LITR 4502
Multicultural American Literature

Instructor: Ubaldirim Guerra

Corning Community College
Corning, New York

ENGL 1020
College Composition II: Writing About Literature

Instructor: Ryan Hersha

The Spring 2012 Partnership
• Enrollment of approximately 5,600, with locations in Corning, Elmira, and Big Flats (Southern Tier/Finger Lakes Region of New York).

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

• COIL project aligned with CCC’s 2011-2012 Strategic Initiative, which included making the College a more “Diverse, Culturally Aware Community” and with SUNY’s 2010 Strategic Plan, which calls on us to “nurture a culturally fluent, cross-national mindset.”
• Enrollment of approximately 4,000, with locations in Belmopan City, Belize City, Cayo, Punta Gorda and two marine sites
• Belize’s national university
• COIL’s project aligned with UB’s vision and goals to “prepare Belize to meet global challenges”

The University of Belize
Corning in January (avg. high of 33°)
Belmopan in January (average high of 89°F)
Our Timeline (Don't Try This at Home!)
• Applying various cultural perspectives to the interpretation of literary works.
• Describing how their own cultural lenses affect their interpretation of literary works.
• Identifying and participating effectively in varied contexts of online discourse, including academic and cross-cultural discourse.
• Using knowledge of another culture to extend their access to information, experiences, and understanding.
• Understanding their own culture in a global and comparative context.
• Appreciating aspects of a different culture (language, art, music, political structures, philosophy, and material culture).
• Accepting cultural differences and tolerating cultural ambiguity.

Global Competency Learning Outcomes
• **Self-introductions** in online discussion forum
• **Real-time interviews** between international partners
  • Student pairs arranged interview times & tool (Skype, Google Video Chat or Facebook)
  • Started with suggested questions
  • Posted results of interview in Blackboard
• **National anthems** research, interviews, and essays
  • Students worked in cross-cultural partnerships
  • Helped each other using research, cultural perspectives, and literary analysis to develop interpretive essays on counterpart’s national anthem
• **Cross-cultural reflections**

Collaboration Assignments
• Course design/scope: integrating collaboration with existing course, learning outcomes
• Pairing different courses, different levels (first-year with fourth-year)
• Technical difficulties experienced by students
• Occasional student failure to complete assignments on time, impacting international partners
• Tracking student participation in partnerships
• Moving students beyond pleasantness to thoughtful analysis and reflection

Instructional Challenges
• The more alike your courses are in level and subject matter, the easier it will be to write effective shared assignments.
• Commit firmly to shared deadlines and manner of amending them. The schedule gets tangled & squished quickly.
• Track student progress/success in partnerships closely.
• Devote time early to walking students through use of tools.
• Meaningful reflection on cross-cultural experiences benefits from guided discussion toward specific learning outcomes.
• Cross-cultural learning challenges students to learn about their own culture—and their relationship to that culture.

Takeaways for Future Collaboration (Hersha)
• When collaborating two different levels of students, at some point some students may feel that assignments were too rudimentary.
• Intercultural exchange allowed students to confront and challenge their own worldviews and prejudices.
• This exchange enables instructor to learn more about students’ goals and outlook on life, and thus strengthens the instructor – student relationship.

Takeaways for Future Collaboration (Guerra)
Student Reflections
After a short period of time I felt like I was talking to a friend that I have known forever. When I finished our chat I started to think about different cultures and America. I found it very interesting that people from other countries know so much about America when we know little about them.

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

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

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

Student Reflection (UB)
I enjoyed the chance to communicate with another culture. That experience *makes me feel like a more well rounded person* because it gives one a chance to see how things happen in other countries instead of what just happens in the United States.

**Student Reflection (CCC)**
For me it has always been difficult to come out of my comfort zone, and when I found out that the class was going to be interacting with students from another university, I panicked. This was overcome, however, as my partner shared much insight about her life and dispelled my notion about the “American Dream”. I learnt about economic and social problems she faced, similar to those faced in Belize.

Student Reflection (UB)
I really enjoyed doing the National anthem assignment with my partner.... After I read her essay on the American anthem I realized how different it seems to people from other cultures. When I think about the anthem the historical illusions are very strong in my mind and I assumed other people would see it that way as well. She helped remind me of the more poetic elements of the anthem that I sadly skipped over to get to the historical parts. I also was really thankful for her feedback to my questions relating to her anthem. Her knowledge about the Baymen and what they mean to the people of Belize helped me greatly.

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

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

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

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

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

Student Reflection (VB)
• Challenging students to a higher level of responsibility: collaboration.
• Teacher as learner:
  • Approaching own subject matter from fresh perspective.
  • Learning about the other culture.
  • Working with partner in a creative venture.
• Camaraderie between students and instructor as we engage challenges, questions, and discoveries together.

Other Benefits
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