COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities Course Development and Implementation Case Study

1. Australia - USA: Film & Screenwriting

Abstract

An international online collaborative course exploring cinematic storytelling across cultures proved to be a rewarding experience for both faculty and students. This is evidenced by course design that reflects the varied artistic sensibilities of content creators in formulating a rich syllabus with assignments and discussions that drew much out of the students. The combined aesthetics of the instructors resulted in a challenging curriculum that made the teaching experience a memorable one. Technical glitches were minimal and therefore the cyber nature of the course supported the maximum potential of the collaborative experience.

Students, for their part, were energized by what they indicated was a unique opportunity in online learning: to forge creative friendships with what could, in the best case scenario, become lifelong film industry contacts and collaborators. The energy was demonstrated by their always lively and carefully-considered responses to discussion board topics and the zeal with which they applied themselves to all aspects of the course building to the key final assignment – writing a film treatment in collaboration.

In retrospect, faculty may have done better to streamline grading procedures to avoid the pitfall of trying to come to a consensus on creative work. Another aspect of the course for future iterations involves implementation of additional and more specific creative touchstones built into the assessment of the student writing process and measurable in the final deliverables.

Contents

Section 1: General Course Information

1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level
Cinematic Storytelling Across Cultures	National University (U.S.)	Film and Screenwriting	Graduate
Cinematic Storytelling Across Cultures	Griffith University (AU)	Master of Screen Production	Post graduate coursework

2. The team

Team Member #1	
Name:	Bettina Moss
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	National University
Position at Institution:	Associate Professor
Department and/or Program:	MFA in Professional Screenwriting – SOPS (School of Professional Studies)
Team Member #2	
Name:	James Napoli
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	National University
Position at Institution:	Core Adjunct Faculty
Department and/or Program:	MFA in Professional Screenwriting - School of Professional Studies
Team Member #3	
Name:	Herman van Eyken
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	Griffith University – Queensland College of Art –
Position at Institution:	Head of School
Department and/or Program:	Griffith Film School, Master of Screen Production
Team Member #4	
Name:	Hugh Burton
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	Griffith University – Queensland College of Art –
Position at Institution:	Sessional Lecturer in Screenwriting
Department and/or Program:	Griffith Film School, Master of Screen Production

3. When?
September/October 2012
4. Number of students enrolled from each institution
Five American and Five Australian
5. Is this typical for classes of this type?
Typical for screenwriting workshops @ NU - National University Griffith University - This class was exceptionally small, and we could only offer it if it was of strategic importance for the further development of the film school. - Griffith University

Section 2: Issues of Language

6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution
English for both
7. Primary language of most students in each class
English
8. Language of the course collaboration
Yes, all in English
9. Language fluency
Primary language of all participants
10. Language proficiency difference
Very few considerations along this line as both groups of students were native English speakers. Occasionally, colloquialisms would arise which created more amusement than confusion.

Section 3: Curricular Information

11. Online or blended?
Online only with weekly synchronous audio class meetings and student collaborations via Skype
12. Duration
Eight weeks
13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period
No collaboration prior. In most cases, significant collaboration after, with at least three pairs of students continuing to work on their screenplays together following the end of the course.

Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

14. Tools
E-college (all), Skype (all), email (all)

15. Server location
E-college provided by National University

16. Technical problems
NU response: None through e-college. A few students had moments of technical difficulty with the chats but these were minor. Griffith response: From the Australian perspective there were some technical issues that did affect how students interacted with the course material. These were ultimately circumvented but did create some confusion. At the course design level the Australian partners wanted to have an interactive peer review questionnaire, where students would be paired up and review each other's work. It was our desire that this review would have an interface like most online questionnaires, with multiple options and different threads opening up depending upon responses to questions, to take full advantage of online interactivity. I wanted the results to then be viewed by the student whose work was being reviewed rather than be collated in a central database. We were not able to make this happen so we had to use a word document that they filled in and posted online.   Our NU partners created a beautiful design for the presentation of pages of course information. They contained notes about each of the films being studied and embedded videos. Many students experienced difficulties accessing the embedded videos, some were not able to view all the videos and some were able to access them via alternative methods.

17. Frequency of use
ECollege was used for the online audio meetings once a week. The Discussion Boards within the course design were used by the entire group and by the individual pairings to share analysis and collaborative ideas throughout. Students in pairs Skyped at least two times a week during their work together.

18. Informal communication
The impression was that personal interaction outside of the class project occurred naturally during student Skype sessions and Discussion Board postings. Certain personal details often came up when in the process of comparing ideas (personal tastes and preferences and personality quirks).

19. Re-use
Yes. (NU) Our NU partner hosted the system under which we operated; we were therefore compelled to adopt the associated software. Future partnerships would require the same arrangement. There may be some

debugging that could occur to ensure videos were accessible, and our university could provide a back-up option for viewing all the material. (Griffith)

Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

20. Tools
ClassLivePro is the synchronous audio class meeting tool used through Ecollege, as detailed above. Students used the e-college system for posting their discussion threads and evolving drafts. They used Skype for partner-to-partner discussions.
21. Server location
ClassLivePro provided by National University through ECollege. Skype was cloud-based.
22. Technical problems
None of any significance. (NU) (Griffith) The "Live Chat" function within e-college would not launch for many of the Australian participants who were Mac based. The technical support people at NU and in Australia provided a pathway through the problems and they did not recur. It did however undermine confidence in the system with that initial difficulty. Fortunately we had encountered the difficulties prior to the course going live so we ran a test session with the students before the first live chat, where we debugged our connections. It did appear to be a Mac related problem, however most film students in Australia are Mac based so this is something to be mindful of in the future. Professor Burton runs a hybrid face-to-face and online course in Australia with between twenty and thirty external students with live chat sessions where video is supported. This is extremely beneficial in helping to establish a real sense of community. We understand that this was not possible via the e-college system, possibly due to the spread of participants across the globe. NU note: Mac and e-college are not as compatible as PC and e-college. E-college purports to be working on this issue but have never really given NU faculty a satisfactory response. NU Faculty continue to bring this to the attention of NU administrators.
23. Frequency of use
Once a week for the synchronous meetings. Students were expected to Skype at least once a week to brainstorm and nail down ideas for their scripts, and in almost every case exceeded that.
24. Informal communication
The impression was that personal interaction outside of the class project occurred naturally during student Skype sessions and Discussion Board postings. Certain personal details often came up when in the process of comparing ideas (personal tastes and preferences and personality quirks).
25. Re-use
Yes. Professor Burton would prefer to be able to have video images and would like to investigate an option of teleconferencing future live chat class sessions.

NU note: We have heard some discussion of future iterations of e-college embedding SKYPE software to enhance ease of video conferencing. We have yet to see it in practice however.

Section 6: Assessment Information

26. How?

Point scores for each assignment (total of 100 points for entire class).
There was no formal measurement of cross cultural awareness per say but intrinsic to the learning process was the expansion of an international awareness concerning the film markets and aesthetics of both countries.

27. Common assessment rubric

NU note:

Yes, Professors Burton and Napoli collaborated on a rubric for the final project via email exchanges (the film treatment) by deciding upon criteria for grading various aspects of the writing and assessing how well the students grasped the concepts outlined in the course through their execution of the final treatment. We would both admit that in hindsight we may well have created rubrics for some of the other assignments, which would have eliminated some grey areas around assessment and given us a clearer guideline for our reasoning in grading creative material.

The rubric is in word table format and does not properly copy into this space. There does not appear to be a way to attach a document to google.docs. I have placed the content of the rubric in a comment (Moss) but it is not in proper format.

Griffith note:

There does appear to be a significant cultural difference in approach to assessments that is in part represented in the rubric: It is Professor Burton's opinion that film schools in Australia value innovation, thus the creative, conceptual elements are emphasized whilst the formal technical requirements are acknowledged. This can result in a significant spread of assessment results. Students in Australia understand that it is the ideas behind the assignments and the degree of skill in realizing those ideas that are of greatest importance in relation to assessment.

A significant difference that arose between the two partners was the grade point average for the subject. In Australia marks are awarded for excellence, thus the average mark is normally around 75% to 80% with occasional High Distinctions (above 85%) for exceptional work. This appears to be at odds with the system in the USA.

Students worked in teams, with their partners. They were assessed by academics from their own country. It seemed unjust if one partner obtained a different mark to their colleague for mutually constructed outputs. Thus the Australian partners adjusted their marking in line with the USA assessment. There was one discrepancy of 0.5% for one assessment which caused concern from one of the students, which we resolved by increasing the mark to align with their partner's final mark. It is an area that needs further consideration for the future.

28. Assessment outcomes

As we have mentioned in our COIL update posts, we found out belatedly that each institution should probably have graded their own students. We tried a little too hard to create a collaborative grading agreement and it did lead to some stress and miscommunication among students who, on admittedly rare occasions, felt they were shortchanged when each professor assessed work differently without

having time to confer with each other because of their other teaching responsibilities.

29. Peer assessment

Yes, there was an entire course module devoted to Peer Review, with a specific set of questions designed by Professor Burton for students to assess each other's work. This was a word document questionnaire which has been attached here as a comment.

30. Charter or guidelines for student interaction

Nothing for the course itself but the American students, when given the opportunity to participate in the course, were asked to formally commit to doing so with an agreement letter. This was via email communication.
Griffith University has a charter for students covering the relevant interactions. There were distinctive aspects of this course where the development of some guidelines may prove advantageous, especially in relation to expectations of how the cross-cultural pairs function and partner responsibilities.

31. Attrition

One American student dropped due to new job responsibilities.

32. Is this typical for similar classes at your institution?

Outside family and work pressures are usually the reason students drop courses at NU. This student's dropping was atypical for her. It was not related to anything having to do with the globally networked nature of the course, which actually inspired a commendable level of commitment from all the students aside from the drop.
Students were attracted to the novelty of developing a script with a stranger from another country. There was an element of chance in success of the partnerships; however there was also considerable support and encouragement from Burton and Napoli when differences of opinion arose within pairs. This process of working through differences and finding compromise is obviously a central plank in the construction of cross-cultural learning. Thus the excitement stemming initially from the novelty and ultimately from the quality of input from all participants was no doubt a significant factor in retention. The oppositional force of the high workload and short turnaround time did create some challenges for students with other commitments, but did not overshadow the positives.

Section 7: Institutional Support

33. Type of support

National University Institutional Support

The COIL Fellowship was brought to the attention of lead faculty Bettina Moss by her then dean Karla Berry. During the writing of the fellowship application the Provost of the university, Dr, Eileen Heveron, was brought into the discussion and she wholeheartedly supported the endeavor.

Once the partnership with Griffith University was established, the fellowship application submitted and our partnership chosen by COIL, the Provost again provided support in agreeing to allow the e-college platform to be used to host the course. The Provost's office also supported the participation of Del Mackey from NU Cris (community outreach arm of NU) as co-instructional designer. NUCris contributed financially towards Del's travel to NY (per diem). The Provost also provided travel funds for Core Adjunct James Napoli as this was not covered for the first conference due to the participation of an International Coordinator from NU (Amy Portwood) who is no longer involved in the project.

The Provost's office did not get involved in content development other than to agree that the subject matter and the technical means (e-college) would be supported by the University.

Griffith University support:

When contacted by Bettina Moss, I was rapidly convinced that his was an experiment worth taking. Australia, as a country of immigrants is very interested in cross-cultural collaboration, and the field of screenwriting is one of the few relevant fields to develop online courses, and therefore long distance collaborations. As non US Fellows, there is no financial support, but Herman Van Eyken did travel to NY for the first conference on course development funding coming from the film school's budget. Hugh Burton was predestined to come on board, though he was not a Full Time Faculty member of the film school. Instead he had online screenwriting course experience, and Herman Van Eyken considered this a major asset for the further development of the course.

I presented the course to the College Committee and the faculty board, and found overall support of further develop the course. Griffith had a previous good experience with one of the COIL Fellowships in the field of Criminology. That course has now evolved into a very successful online course. The Dean of the faculty is now looking into the matter for a sustainable offer of the course, and therefore both Hugh Burton and Herman Van Eyken continue to follow up on the peer evaluation, assessment of the course.

34. Engagement with international programs office

NU: None. Although a coordinator from the International Division was part of the first conference, she has since left the Los Angeles area and is now based in another state. There has been no additional interaction with our International Division specifically.

Griffith: None, but that is normal within GU policy, but they were kept informed and are genuinely interested in the development of this course. When time comes, they will act upon this initiative and encourage us to develop the course further, and help assure its delivery within an international context.

35. Importance given to globally networked learning

NU Note: Initially there was approval from the then head of the International Division, Dr. Jack Paduntin,

whom the Provost brought into the process. NU does have an institutional desire to engage in global learning. One of the Institutional Learning Outcomes (#4) states:

- Demonstrate cultural and global awareness to be responsible citizens of a diverse society.

Additionally, as part of the National University System there is a National University International (NUI) division, the goals of which state, in part:

- To create educational collaborations for the National University System with partners abroad
- To enrich the student experience within the National University System by promoting cultural understanding through educational exchange.

It is through the Provost that awareness of the COIL Fellowship is being disseminated to the university at large and to NUI.

Additionally, just this past month, the Clum Charles and Gwendolyn Bucher Endowment Faculty Scholarship Abroad Award was established at NU. The purpose of the endowment is to enhance the recognition of National University, its programs and its faculty members in the international community; encourage the pursuit of scholarship by full-time faculty members through foreign study; and allow mutual exchange of faculty members as teachers with foreign universities. Lead faculty Bettina Moss will be applying for this Endowment award with the hope of being chosen to further the establishment of joint courses and/or future programs in partnership with Griffith University Film School.

Griffith note: Absolutely, and I can confirm that this has become one of the priorities of the strategic plan of the university

36. Commitment

NU: We began with a singular commitment but are both very open to developing future programs/classes together. This will be further discussed at the COIL conference in April.

Griffith: Fully second this opinion.

37. Future iterations

NU: Not scheduled as of yet. Awaiting further in person discussion at COIL conference.

Griffith: Fully second this opinion.

38. New globally networked courses

There are no formal plans but I believe NU is very interested in pursuing this.

Griffith: Fully second this opinion.

39. Response of chairs, deans, provosts or other administrators to the possibility of expanding this pilot course(s) into a broader program of globally networked courses

NU: This has not been discussed as of yet. NU and Griffith would have to bring a specific proposal to the attention of the Provost in order to pursue again.

Griffith: GFS has opened these discussions now, in preparation of the Capstone meeting in NY. The major role in this will be the Dean's contribution or support, and I will be able to report more in detail about his reaction and commitment in NY.

40. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses

Informally, I believe NU is very open to further international course development for the MFA SCR program. I have not had a specific discussion with the dean or provost about such.

Griffith - Ibid #42 response

41. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning

 At NU it would be university wide willingness to support expansion that is proposed which I believe would be agreeable to them.

Griffith: An ongoing group to share development ideas and to discuss solutions to specific challenges.

Section 8: Reflections

42. Goals set

National:
- Demonstrate the viability of International student collaboration in the field of screenwriting
- Keeping the course working technically
- Encouraging cross cultural experiences and awareness of similarities and differences
- Fostering an international creative network for opportunities in the film industry

Griffith U:
- To design and implement an innovative course where cross-cultural creative collaboration would provide a mechanism for filmmakers to contextualize their practice
- To encourage reflection by participants upon creative processes in addition to acquisition of practical skills.
- To engage a learning community beyond the confines of the physical institution
- To develop a course that would demonstrate the strengths of online and interactive learning
- To create a model they could be built upon and expanded in the future

43. Goals achieved

NU: The technical aspects went very smoothly, the student engagement and enthusiasm about making new friends in a creative field was hugely evident. The gauging of cross cultural effectiveness was a little difficult to establish owing to the many similarities in language and attitudes toward filmed entertainment, but it was very clear that students from both countries viewed this as a remarkable opportunity and this was reflected in their intense level of engagement in the course.

Griffith: There was considerable discussion and preparedness to listen and contribute that reflected effective student engagement and practice analysis. Student responses were enthusiastic. They have continued to develop their stories and to keep in touch, so the course has spawned an ongoing community. The initial activities did provide a framework for participants to learn about each other. The process did create a discernible progressive development in the work of all participants. It has proved to be viable and effective.

44. Most unique aspect for students

NU: Again, the opportunity to work on a creative writing project with, essentially, a stranger from another country. It seemed to energize everyone.

Griffith: The opportunity for artists to work creatively with people from a different culture whilst being physically based within their familiar environment. There was considerable collegiate respect engendered by the mixture of distance and virtual intimacy of participants.

45. Most successful aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective

NU: The logistics of getting everyone together in and out of class meetings went surprisingly smoothly, with most students (some lagged at the beginning owing to outside work commitments) immediately enjoying the Skype sessions and Discussion Board postings. The level of intellectual and academic rigor was also very satisfying from a faculty standpoint, with students never at a loss for words! Also, the

willingness to collaborate and change and modify ideas based on each other's input in the student pairings was superlative.

Griffith: The contributions from students who had a different cultural perspective broadened the cultural base from which a work was created. There were times when this provoked discussion between the partners, which produced outputs that were the sum of both viewpoints. This broadening of the cultural foundations for creation of screenplays is enormously advantageous as the potential final function of a screenplay is a film that should ideally transcend cultural barriers. A distinctive feature of this course was that it enabled the locus of engagement to remain within a familiar environment: participants were able to create work from within their culture whilst allowing it to be scrutinized by colleagues from outside of that culture. The common alternative is for participants to physically relocate, however the very nature of creating artistic work in an unfamiliar context is likely to have profound destabilizing consequences. Both approaches have advantages. The central platform of creating expansively, from the Critical Axis, (or original point of inspiration for the story) outwards was a feature that made this course distinctively different from a more conservative approach. This appeared to synchronize with expectations to examine influences in the creation of a film script.

46. Most problematic aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective

Well, having a student drop was probably the most problematic, as Professor Napoli had to step in as a collaborator (although there was a good balance in which the "student" hat was worn pretty effectively without blurring the lines into taking on a teaching role when creative collaboration was the goal). Some students did report a little frustration with finding convenient times to Skype, and finding the right approach to grading individually in each institution, as mentioned, provided a few headaches.

A goal of the course was to provide course material and exercises that provoked reflection upon processes of creativity relevant to the field, in addition to the opportunity for students to collaborate in a supportive environment. The eight-week time frame for the course that was necessary to align with the unit structure of our USA partner meant that there was very little gestation time and students and staff had multiple simultaneous tasks. One solution would be to expand the course across two units of study and thus allow more time for reflection.

One point that slipped through the net in the development stage related to the term 'draft' the original intention was to create just three drafts: the final assignment would be the third draft. However a final (fourth version) was added, which did create additional work for the students and staff. So a reduction to just three would be advantageous.

47. Changes for future iterations

Different approach to grading. The issues around how to grade creative work were not unique to the COIL course offering. This is something the NU MFA faculty contends with often as NU is not primarily an arts college and therefore we must find unique ways to adapt the standard grading system to take into consideration the creative process.

Building in a Rubric that emphasized creative achievement would help to define and measure a key objective.

Expanding the course over two units to allow scripts to progress to a more advanced stage whilst building in some gestation time would be ideal.

48. Technical support

Del Mackey was the participating Instruction Designer. The courses I have worked on previously have mostly been in-house or specialized course flows, so having to design to a radically broad and dynamic audience was interesting. One of the biggest hurdles and challenges when approaching the course was the differentiation between the students from the different institutions, who had varying levels of experience in working in an online course framework. With that in mind, testing the tools and thinking about ease of flows was a big part of designing that I never had to approach previously. The thought was always for design from an immediate level, whereas the COIL course had to feature designing around a beginner level, and how those beginners would have to understand accessing and using the course.

49. International programs person

The person involved from the International Division is no longer part of the fellowship. There are no reflections from her.

50. Time commitment

I (Napoli) would estimate at least 100 hours. I would also estimate that the globally networked aspects added at least 20 or 30 hours to the process.

Hugh Burton spent in excess of one hundred hours on course design and planning. Implementation and assessment was an additional fourteen to twenty hours per week for the eight weeks. Taking the total to around one hundred and seventy hours. The collaborative aspect of course delivery would have added at least thirty hours to that process. Having said that, this would no doubt have been the case even if it had been a collaboration with another university within Australia.

51. Was it worth it?

Napoli: Most definitely worth it, and yes, much of what we learned in creating this course could cross over into another subject or institution to make the process less complicated the second time.

There is no question that what we delivered was an exciting, exceptionally engaging and rewarding course. Our students are continuing to develop the work that they began within the course. Burton believes that what we designed and implemented took full advantage of the ability to transcend physical space, and thus created a unique opportunity for the participants.

There is no question that what we delivered was an exciting, exceptionally engaging and rewarding course. Our students are continuing to develop the work that they began within the course. Burton believes that what we designed and implemented took full advantage of the ability to transcend physical space, and thus created a unique opportunity for the participants.

Section 9: Course Collaboration Narrative

One of the core objectives in designing the course was to foster contextualizing creative processes and outcomes of writing for the screen. Participants were at an advanced level and thus interested in refining their skills. Course content was therefore designed to encourage reflection upon creative processes and how they might affect outcomes.

The FlashMeetings that occurred as respective program leads Bettina Moss and Herman van Eyken and adjunct faculty James Napoli and Hugh Burton designed and prepped the course proved fruitful. We established that the first week would address sharing cultural experiences with family stories and favorite films, as well as having students from each country read (and comment upon to the best of their abilities) a critique of the film industry from the other's home nation as a way into experiencing how each country approaches independent film. From there, the course design included pairing the students into teams, brainstorming and, ultimately, the co-creation of a movie story in treatment form. Along the way we included critical analysis of films and of storytelling from the classic 3-act structure point of view versus a more theme-based approach. Drawing upon the unconscious as a source of inspiration via Dream Journals and the concept of the Critical Axis was intended to encourage powerful original ideas and story development.

After the substantial preparation and launch of the course the first and most encouraging experience was that our debut synchronous audio class meeting between the U.S. and Australia in the e-college platform went off without any technical glitches. It's natural to be concerned about the tech side not throwing things off too much, so having our first class meeting "work" was a great boost. The discussion covered lots of intriguing side topics, from ethnic identity to the need (or not) for a character in a story to grow and change in order to make the script satisfying to an audience. The framework for our first discussion was the response to a series of American and Australian short films that conveyed specific themes and whether or not, through the lens of culture, students might have experienced them differently. The most telling aspect of the conversation was when it veered into the idea of American romantic comedies being obsessed with the notion of a "soul mate," which was seen by some of the students as a uniquely American spin on movies that does not seem to be present in Australian storylines all that often.

There was an extremely high level of interaction on the Discussion Boards throughout the course, and our "Ice Breakers," were no exception. Students shared a "Family Story" in third person, talked about an all-time favorite film, and responded to readings about the film industries in each other's country. The opinions and stories were eclectic and far-ranging, but there seemed to be great commonality and sharing of experience in the family stories. There was an interesting level of camaraderie among the Australian students, who, although engaged in the online environment, all share a physical campus together. They are quick to send each other a quip on the chat board during our class meeting sessions and, delightfully, the National students joined in.

One of the most significant differences that arose between the two Institutions resided in philosophy of assessment. NU has a 'top down' approach where students start at a perfect mark and may lose points for errors, whereas in Australia the majority of students would receive an 'average' mark and the exceptional achievers would receive an exceptional result (above 85%). Having the entire class receive results in the "exceptional" category is unacceptable to Assessment Boards in Australian Universities. The dilemma here is where teams complete assignments (comprised of students from both countries)

yet the results are different, if grading parameters of the two countries are applied. It also seems problematic if students are submitting very similar quality work yet being given radically different marks. The students do chat with each other so the discrepancies would become known. As there did not appear to be any apparent solution in the short term Australia adopted the USA marking system. However it would be valuable to hear from others who may have encountered similar challenges and found a solution.

Hugh and James, who guided the class and did the hands on teaching came to a "meet halfway" point, in which they thought they'd each grade their own students when the assignment was "individual" (for example, a Discussion Board posting or a homework assignment), but would have conferences about the team assignments and decide on a grade/point score in tandem for those. In retrospect, especially in light of feedback given by Jon Rubin, director of the COIL Institute, it seems that simply having each professor grade their own students would have been the way to go.

One big challenge occurred when a student on the American side dropped out. In a course designed to pair one Australian with one American for collaboration on a written project (and in which students signed letters of agreement regarding their ability to commit), this was something that needed to be dealt with immediately, since one of the Australian students was left without a partner. After reviewing many options, most of which involved plunking someone down into the course to step in and were therefore impractical (since familiarity with the course and its concepts was crucial), the only course of action was to have James step in as the partner for the Australian student. We stared down the "blurring the lines" issue, by making sure only Hugh graded the final product, so that James would not be assisting in the creative process and grading at the same time. And, since it had already been determined that for non-collaborative assignments each professor from each country would grade their own students, it worked out reasonably well. But this was of significant concern. Fortunately, the Australian student had no problem with the new circumstances.

The course model of pairing students is crux of the creative and cultural sharing. It does however create vulnerability for collapse if a partner drops out or fails to contribute. This is an area where we need to attempt to build in a contingency, preferably one that does not require lead staff to step in to fill the void. It did solve the problem in this instance but a plan for any future occurrences would be strategically prudent.

The incorporation of a 3-step treatment approach (each step expanding upon the other) provided a great, gradual approach that took the pressure off the short time in which the students had to create. Another concept implemented was that of defining the "Critical Axis." This is separate from a film's "central idea" (such as "we all need love" or "man's inhumanity to man"), and is rooted more in the impetus for creating the story. Hugh stated it aptly when he elucidated that the critical axis is the aspect of the story that the writer wants to survive the development process. It comes from a larger overview of an idea as opposed to a "universal theme." In guiding students on how to define this it was suggested that they take a scene or moment connected to the critical axis and build their entire story around it, rather than starting at point A and going to the end – which is the more typical linear method of screenplay creation in American screenwriting practice. The idea was to let the emotion inspired by the key moment inform how the beginning and end unfold around it.

The Week 5 class meeting was the first implementation in the course of roundtable discussions of everyone's ideas, and it soon became apparent that it needed refining. It turned into one team presenting, getting feedback from faculty and then repeating the process. We learned that it would have been a more constructive teaching outcome if we had gotten everybody involved in the feedback in a

more active manner and the result would have likely been less "dead air" during the roundtable.

The model where James and Hugh guided students in the early weeks and then opened up discussion in the later weeks to the broader group did, at the end of the day prove to be very successful, we thought. It enabled all the students to listen to the discussion and development, whilst ensuring there was a clear and consistent thread for each team to build upon. If the discussion was opened to the larger community earlier it would have reduced the input from James and Hugh and could have introduced conflicting suggestions at an early and vulnerable stage of development.

In that same week, the students wrote their "dream narratives," describing a dream and analyzing it in terms of mythic images and their own lives. The plus side of this exercise was the level of trust shown by the students, who shared quite revealing thoughts from their unconscious and wrote about them fairly compellingly. They each gave their own interpretations of two other students' dreams and did so with caring and insight.

The intention of the Dream Diary and the Dream Narrative was to raise awareness of an expanded or alternative approach to how stories or elements of stories may unfold. Just by asking students to keep a Dream Diary, whilst explaining how it can assist (with video support from John Cleese) would be a learning process. In fact several students did incorporate elements of their dream material into their final stories.

On the down side, we had hoped for the outcome of the exercise to be more about how dreams contain stories and can unlock story structure, but looking back that was not as built into the description of the exercise as it could have been. It may also have been a casualty of the increased pressure on the students to crank out their treatment drafts. It's a constant gamble whether or not to continue academic assignments in the midst of the writing work, but in the end it likely elevates the academic rigor necessary in a graduate course.

As we wound down, we found one aspect of course design that should definitely be addressed in future incarnations. As the third drafts of the movie treatments came in it became apparent that some chinks in the armor of the students' stories were showing (character definition, story clarity, etc.). Upon reflection we realized we had nothing built in to the 3-tiered writing process to gauge these aspects along the way. While by no means a "deal breaker", it is something that showed itself over the three weeks of writing the treatment (weeks 6, 7 and 8). We realized a lack of interim assessment steps for the treatment made it more complicated for the instructors to gauge this overall grading process for the final deliverable.

Our focus had been more on the nuts-and-bolts aspects of two students from different countries collaborating, and, in service to that, we laid out the basic tenets of how we thought they should build out their treatments. Caught up in the idea that the very collaboration was happening, in hindsight we realized we lacked some specificity regarding artistic touchstones. More emphasis was put on their effective communication together and their willingness to let the story grow and change during collaboration. These are, to be sure, fine things on which to be basing a grade but in future designs of the course, we would do well to make a point to track the progression of the subtleties of the storytelling by implementing assessment touchstones above and beyond the collaborative-based elements. Given that an objective of our course was to foster innovation in screenwriting, it would be logical consequence that multiple assessment criteria reflect this.

Finally, a keenly rewarding aspect of the entire experience was the fact that many of the students we paired continued to collaborate on screenplays after completing their treatments. Included below is a recent update from one of the American students, Kristen Johnson (who explained that her Australian

counterpart would also have responded but he was coping with a very bad illness at the time):

"I was partnered with Nicholas Burgess, and what a great team we have made. We have continued collaborating, and are well into writing the first draft of our script, THE COMPANION PROJECT. Prior to Nick's illness, we made a point of Skyping once or twice a week….Now we text daily….We'll pick up again when he's ready. Ultimately, Nick and I have talked about being writing partners in the television area, should we be able to land a staff job at some point. He very much wants to come to LA and do that, and hopefully that will come to pass at some point. We also want to pursue writing more features, entering more competitions, and creating excellent careers. And we have you and COIL to thank for creating such a great opportunity so that we could meet."

Section 10: Student Feedback

Griffith University is still in the process of retrieving these. We promise we will have these written out when we are coming to the Capstone meeting in NY.

NU anonymous student responses:

"The past eight weeks have been an enlightening experience. Professors Napoli and Burton tackled a logistical nightmare, coordinating chats, assignment due dates, and feedback with ease. The course began with an ice breaker, favorite film, discussion instead of the typical introduction biography and stimulated conversation between students on both sides of the Pacific. The short films from Australia and the United States that we watched during the first week of the class illustrated the subtle differences between the two countries approach to storytelling. This became extremely important as I began collaborating with my writing partner. Professor Napoli was always available for questions and his timely responses to questions via emails ensured there was little to no downtime while working on our treatments. Professor Napoli also went a step further and followed up after providing his initial answer to verify his solution, advice, or guidance was understood. During the chat sessions, Professor Napoli was always prepared with thought provoking questions based on student comments. I was impressed by his strong facilitation skills and how he involved the entire class in his discussions. I was honored to be a part of this pilot course and I firmly believe the collaboration between the two universities should be continued. Although my writing partner and I got off to a somewhat rock start, we have agreed to continue collaborating on our project outside of school."

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"An excellent class. Here's hoping it will lead to future collaborative courses for the universities. One thing to consider tweaking in the course load- don't schedule the 3-Act Assessment and the Peer Review in the same week, as they are each very demanding and thus forced many of us to split time and attention, affecting the quality of both assignments. Perhaps push the 3-Act Assessment into early in the 8th week. Or maybe make that assignment's deadline flexible, so that students can choose when to turn it in. One of the things that really helped my partner and myself to work together was that we chose a story with multiple narratives. Because of this, we didn't step on each other's toes as much. If this class is offered again, that might be a helpful direction to steer students toward. Thanks!"

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"The time change between Australia and US was difficult to manage at times with schedules. Otherwise, I think it was a worthwhile endeavor."

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"I have found James Napoli to be an amazing professor, and he did not disappoint in this pilot program. I always appreciate that he pushes me to excel - it makes me feel like he believes in my talent. Additionally, we had Hugh Burton to add his perspective and wisdom, which was a lovely element to the course. The biggest hurdle was the time difference between us and Australia. Because of that, we struggled a bit with the deadlines, but we still managed to make it work. For the next group, I'd suggest allowing a bit more time to get those treatments off the ground, with some peer reviews earlier in the process. That said, I am so pleased with the results and very grateful that I had the opportunity. It was a fantastic experience."

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"For treatment feedback, please get them to us well before the next phase of the treatment is due."

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