

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

2. Australia - USA: History & Anthropology

Abstract

Dr. Effy George, Lecturer at Victoria University (VU), Melbourne, Australia, and Irma Victoria Montelongo, Lecturer at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), partnered to create the VU-UTEP Global Learning Community (GLC). The GLC project linked two first year Liberal Arts core curriculum classes that resulted in a transnational co-course entitled *Imagining Nations, Imagining Regions: The Making of Cultural Diversity in Australia and on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Topics of study included colonialism, nationalism, culture, migration, gender and sexuality in Australia and on the U.S.-Mexico border. The UTEP-VU GLC provided a rich environment for inter-institutional teaching and learning as the two institutions became curricular design partners, sharing problems and resolutions, in an ever deepening knowledge transfer relationship.

Contents

Section 1: General Course Information	1
Section 2: Issues of Language	3
Section 3: Curricular Information	5
Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used	5
Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used	8
Section 6: Assessment Information	9
Section 7: Institutional Support	12
Section 8: Reflections	14
Section 9: Student Feedback	17

Section 1: General Course Information

1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level
Imagining Nations, Imagining Regions: The Making of Cultural Diversity in Australia and on the U.S.-Mexico Border	Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia and The University of Texas at El Paso	History and Anthropology	Freshmen
Stories Across Cultures: Mobile Worlds and the Politics of Belonging Amongst Communities in Australia and the United States	Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia and The University of Texas at El Paso	History and Anthropology	Freshmen

2. The team

Team Member #1	
Name:	Irma Victoria Montelongo
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	The University of Texas at El Paso
Position at Institution:	Lecturer
Department and/or Program:	Entering Student Program
Team Member #2	
Name:	Dr. Effy George
Role on Team:	College of the Arts
Institution:	Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia
Position at Institution:	Instructor
Department and/or Program:	Liberal Arts (Foundation course)

3. When?

UTEP - VU: Fall and Spring 2010-2012

4. Number of students enrolled from each institution

UTEP - VU: Approximately 20-25 per class, per semester, per university

5. Is this typical for classes of this type?

At UTEP the average freshman foundation class is 28 students, but for the purpose of the Global Learning Community we capped the class at 20. The main reason was that video conferencing was part of our collaboration and UTEP's video conference rooms accommodate approximately 20-25 people comfortably. The other reason that we capped the class enrollment was because we wanted to be sure to maintain an intimate environment that fostered discussion and collaboration between students at both universities.

Similarly, at VU the average Liberal Arts foundation class is 30 students. For the first iteration of the Global Learning Community the class was capped at 25. However, this class size was not sustainable due to internal faculty funding. At first, I thought it would create a problem, especially for the interactions of the collaboration. However, a larger video conferencing venue was provided and it did not lead to any significant change in terms of communication with the UTEP students.

Section 2: Issues of Language

6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution
UTEP: English; Victoria University: English
7. Primary language of most students in each class
<p>At UTEP the primary language is English but about 10% of our student body utilize English as a second language. In my Global Learning Community classes I would approximate that I had 2-4 students who were in the process of learning English with their primary language being Spanish.</p> <p>Similarly, at VU, the primary language is English. However, approx. 70% of the student cohort are from non-English speaking backgrounds. The majority of students are second generation migrants and the others are recently arrived migrants who have studied several prerequisite courses in ESL (English as a second language). Typically, the former group are from Europe, Southern Europe and Vietnam. The latter are from Africa and elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific.</p>
8. Language of the course collaboration
Yes, our collaboration took place in English.
9. Language fluency
<p>Most students were very fluent, again at UTEP may 2-4 students per class lacked some proficiency in the English language. At VU (Liberal Arts), most students had a good command of English. However the students articulating into Liberal Arts from the ESL courses lacked confidence in speaking and writing English. For me this was an interesting situation as the collaboration required students to independently upload posts and comments to the site. I instituted a private email editing service for these students, whereby students emailed me with their draft posts and ideas. This turned out to be a confidence building exercise and soon enough, these same students began independently posting.</p>
10. Language proficiency difference
<p>I would say that for the UTEP - VU collaboration it wasn't so much the potential in language skills but rather the lack of experience with cultural diversity. On one occasion we had the students make a digital story of how they "imagined" each other's nations/regions and there were some rather unpleasant stereotypes that emerged. This made for an initial tense and somewhat uncomfortable exchange of ideas that blossomed into a positive teaching and learning moment as we worked together to sort out ideas and perceptions.</p> <p>As stated for VU in question 11, differences in English language skills were mainly due to a lack of confidence amongst recently arrived migrants and this was dealt with in a one to one situation. However,</p> <p>as Irma has said, what was more salient, was the cultural stereotypes that the students brought with them to the collaboration. Indeed both groups reacted, and at times diplomatic civility was lost. Yet it</p>

was this affront to their cultural sensibilities which yielded greater communication and indeed the desire to rekindle communication. Some student in fact took on the role of mediators!

Section 3: Curricular Information

11. Online or blended?

It was a blended format with face-to-face time at each university, as well as a NING social networking site, and two live video conference meetings.

12. Duration

7-8 weeks per semester.

13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period

In the fall semester Victoria University began their class 3 weeks before UTEP. This was a valuable time to explain the collaboration and to impart a little background information about t El Paso. This was followed by several homework exercises where students were asked to provide further information for discussion in the upcoming classes. These were fruitful exercises for introducing the broader themes of the collaborative course and the idea of imagining nations. For many of my students what they knew of their own country and El Paso or America was equally steeped in popular stereotypes. This was the kick start for the collaborative course and the critical inquiry of how nations are formed.

In the spring semester UTEP began class 3 weeks before Victoria University and so we would start by introducing our students to the nation of Australia. We engaged in a general survey of the geography, history, peoples, cultures, and politics of Australia. I also had the class engage in a scavenger hunt of sorts where they did an exercise where each student had to find three different facts about Australia. This encouraged early collaboration amongst their fellow students as well as learning about the peoples and the nation they were about to engage with. After attending COIL in September of 2012, I implemented the DIVE exercise as well to further their thinking on cultural diversity and it was very successful.

Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

14. Tools

We created a Web 2.0 platform using NING that consisted of our lectures, readings, discussion forums as well as a video link that allowed our students to upload the short digital stories that they created throughout the collaboration. Additionally, the NING site allowed each student to create their own personal pages where they were able to communicate with one another on a personal level. This was important because it allowed them to form personal friendships, which enhanced their trust in one another and made their experience more comfortable.

The Ning site catered for all asynchronous communication. Prior to the collaboration there were many discussions about how we were to approach this. What did eventuate was a well-planned design architecture which anticipated many different types of communication. This I felt would serve students

with special needs (i.e. recently arrived migrants reluctant to post their work in a public forum). So the most important consideration was to create public and private spaces on the site, not only for assessment tasks but also for informal conversations between students. As Irma has stated above personal pages served their purpose. In short, private and discreet communication was allayed with semi- public and public spaces.

I also used email communication. This became a direct line to remind students of upcoming readings or postings.

15. Server location

The site was provided by UTEP but designed by both faculty members and the multimedia specialists from both universities.

The Ning site is an open source site and therefore cloud based. This proved especially useful for both institutions. If a LMS system was used it (i.e. from VU or UTEP) this would have created many problems with regards to logging on students. Initially both VU and UTEP offered an internal LMS configuration, but I strongly believed this would have compromised the collaborative nature of the venture. A UTEP member of staff suggested Ning, and after exploring this and paying a price to remove the advertising, both VU and UTEP created a unique site without borders.

16. Technical problems

No, we did not encounter significant problems our video conferences ran smoothly and the NING site did not encounter any down time.

17. Frequency of use

The students were broken down into groups of 3 and each week a particular group was expected to post their critical reponses of that week's readings and/or videos. Then after the critical responses were posted, all students at both universities were expected to comment and discuss the responses, videos, and films together for the duration of the week and even collaboration if they found the topic interesting and felt the need to continue collaborating on a certain topic even if we had moved on to another. Neither Effy nor myself ever felt the need to stop a conversation that continued to grow and expand their knowledge.

Irma and I worked very closely on the structure of the collaborative course and assessment tasks. It seemed rather incongruous not to employ similar strategies. Students were divided into work groups for particular readings and set screenings. I also used the major themes of the readings as a springboard for promoting further research by students. As Irma states, there were particular themes which captured the students' imagination and this in itself created a flurry of conversations and further explorations. This was the hallmark of the GLC. Students sharing personal knowledge and learning from each other.

18. Informal communication

We created a discussion forum that was not intended for academic discussion. We entitled it the UTEP-VU Forum. In this forum the students could discuss their weekend events, their jobs, entertainment venues, hobbies, music, etc. It often turned itno a vibrant site where our students began sharing videos

of themselves and their passions. For example there were some very good photographers who shared amazing photos, and some students who danced competitively and shared videos of their dance competitions. It often became a venue for introducing themselves to one another in a more relaxed environment.

The information architecture of the site was planned to provide informal and formal forums. As Irma has noted, students were most willing to share their personal interests and activities. Additionally, one particular assessment task was aimed at the sharing of individual family histories.

19. Re-use

Yes we would. As it stands right now UTEP is in the process of creating a new Learning Management System but there is still much work to be done with it so in the meantime I believe that the NING sites created thus far will continue to serve the purpose of the UTEP-VU Global Learning Community. Once we perfect the new LMS then we will probably change.

Ning is the perfect platform as it is cloud based. It reflects the spirit of a collaborative framework beyond borders.

Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

20. Tools
<p>We videoconferenced twice during each collaboration. The first time that we ever videoconferenced we scheduled our meeting for one hour. After our initial meeting our students complained that this was not enough time. We then increased our meeting times to an hour and a half and sometimes they extended as long as two hours because the conversation was lively and exciting.</p> <p>Despite the rather archaic nature of video conferencing, students respond well to seeing each other in the `flesh' In fact with each collaboration, the students always ask for more time to video conference!</p>
21. Server location
<p>Each institution had their own video conferencing facility</p>
22. Technical problems
<p>No we did not. UTEP and VU have been collaborating for a number of years now so their video conferencing equipment is very compatible.</p>
23. Frequency of use
<p>The classes collaborated for 7-8 weeks and in that timeframe the classes collaborated twice by video conference. Outside of class they were expected to access the Discussion Boards on NING and they did. Most students were quite active on the discussion boards.</p>
24. Informal communication
<p>We provided a separate discussion board that was strictly informal where the students could discuss anything but class assignments. They discussed movies, music, they asked each other questions about their respective locations, like how much is minimum wage and what do you do on weekends, ...</p> <p>NING also allows students to create personal pages and many of them communicated informally in this venue.</p>
25. Re-use
<p>Yes until we find something that provides more than what NING provides us we will keep using it.</p>

Section 6: Assessment Information

26. How?

We administered a pre-assessment survey to measure the student's knowledge of both Australia and the U.S.-Mexico Border and we also queried their technology skills. Then we administered a post-assessment survey to measure knowledge gained. At UTEP we also had focus group sessions with the students. We put the students in two groups of 10 and each group met with our Research Associate where they discussed their experiences based on a set of predetermined questions.

Over the 7 week collaboration the students developed intercultural awareness in a number of ways. After attending COIL we used the DIVE exercise prior to them meeting each other. We also placed the students in groups of 3 and their first assignment was to create a digital story on how they imagined Australia (UTEP students) and the U.S.-Mexico Border (VU students). Near the end of the collaboration the groups made another digital story but this time they presented their region and/or country to the international students. The students also shared readings over the 7 weeks and each week a different group from each university was responsible for leading discussion for that week's reading.

I undoubtedly believe that the class assignments facilitated a deeper learning of different regions and cultures. The students began doing research on their own and creating their own digital stories to further inform one another of their cultures and homelands. They also asked us to keep the NING site open for a period of time after the semester ended so that they could continue communicating with one another.

Additionally, the website and video conferences provided a forum for UTEP and VU students to exchange ideas related to global issues. I think that the VU students showed more interest in the border region but I also think that the media and its reporting of the drug violence had a lot to do with this because often that was what they asked about. For my UTEP class, however, this turned into a teaching and learning moment as we discussed the manner in which the media constructs political and cultural spaces and borders in particular. UTEP and VU students also enhanced their knowledge of technological resources and developed social and academic networks.

VU and UTEP students were also asked to write a reflective essay and to consider the course content, the collaboration and their personal experiences. This proved especially worthwhile and indeed was a measure of the success of the collaboration.

As one student wrote; "To conclude, it was a very enlightening experience for me with UTEP students who are on the other side of the world and our students. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and its sad that it has come to an end...I would like to thank Effy, Irma, UTEP students and my group for a wonderful experience and great discussions and thank you for allowing me to share my views."

27. Common assessment rubric

The pre and post-assessment surveys were common to both universities and the digital stories and group discussion posts were common.

The group discussion posts were based on the shared reading(s) for the week and students were assessed on their analytical and comprehension skills and their ability to produce a short summary of

the key ideas of selected texts.

As for the digital stories, students were assessed on their ability to do research on either Australia or the U.S.-Mexico border and put together a creative 2-3 minute digital story. The UTEP students also received a workshop training to learn the necessary software. In this training they were assigned a short exercise to familiarize them with the necessary tools and they received a grade for that as well.

Unfortunately, the resources at VU were rudimentary at best. Film skills were harnessed from the students themselves or from students doing one of my other units. But this did not dampen VU student enthusiasm.

28. Assessment outcomes

The activities exposed the students to multiple cultures and environments and expanded their cultural literacy through structured interactions and academic content. The role of technology was important in enhancing their access to global and multicultural interactions and we managed to pique their interest in participating in study abroad.

Moreover, the assignments increased student knowledge about Australia and the U.S.-Mexico border and assisted them in addressing and clarifying stereotypes about the U.S.-Mexico border and Australia. I think that the group discussions about the readings and the video conferences increased engagement in the course content and created an “energized” class atmosphere.

The students also improved their communication skills and gained an ability to examine multiple perspectives.

29. Peer assessment

No at UTEP

At VU, students were asked to submit a confidential individual report about their group work (either film or written summaries) via email. The details of the report were read only by me. My main objective for the exercise was to allay the concerns of some group members who felt that some of their peers had not contributed to the required task. The dynamics of group work was a subject that I addressed directly in class in order to promote student collegiality. Interestingly, the exercise of confidential reports was abandoned some time after. Most students worked well.

30. Charter or guidelines for student interaction

This is from the UTEP syllabus:

Student Conduct: [From the Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Affairs]: Each student is responsible for notice of and compliance with the provisions of the Regents Rules and Regulations, which are available for inspection electronically at <http://www.utsystem.edu/bor/rules/homepage.htm>. We will have frequent discussions and students are expected to tolerate and respect the opinions of others. All students are expected to behave as responsible adults.

31. Attrition

UTEP: 1-2 students out of an enrollment of 20

VU: 2-3 students out of an enrollment of 30

32. Is this typical for similar classes at your institution

At UTEP this is not typical, the drop-out rate is higher in other classes and I definitely think that globally networked nature of the course had a lot to do with it. Once the class started and the students became aware of how it was going to function, they were comfortable, and attentive.

At VU the dropout rates are the result of extraneous factors. Difficulties at home or financial constraints do matter. Students often juggle paid employment, the demands of family and study. However, it is rare for a student to drop out of the GLC. Those who have were for the above reasons.

Section 7: Institutional Support

33. Engagement with the international programs office

At UTEP we are now working closely with the Director of Study Abroad who comes to the class every semester to discuss study abroad options with the students. The International Programs Office and Study Abroad are located in the same office so there is contact with both.

VU has worked closely with UTEP in order to foster study abroad programs. The International Programs Office facilitates these activities through grants and scholarships. Most students who have completed the collaborative course desire to visit UTEP. Typically, those who have taken up the exchange give a lecture to the next GLC cohort.

34. Commitment

Yes, both institutions have made substantial commitments at the administrative, teaching, and technology levels to keeping the global learning collaborations intact. There is one in session right now and two more planned for fall 2013. We are also looking to expand the classes with new faculty members and themes.

35. Future iterations

It is being offered again this semester and there are two classes scheduled for fall 2013.

36. New globally networked courses

We do. It is my understanding that the directors of the units that are implementing the classes are discussing the expansion of the classes. They are in the process of identifying faculty members and possible themes.

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

At UTEP there is strong support for globalization and there has been positive response to the Global Learning pilot. Presentations on the GLC have been done all over campus to a number of deans and chairs who are willing to host a GLC. If a faculty member is willing to create such a learning space there is support. Health Sciences has a similar learning collaboration with VU at the graduate level.

The VU charter embraces internationalisation. Indeed the GLC has inspired many other faculties to adopt such collaboration. The creative writing faculty has already done so.

38. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses

Overall UTEP's relationship with Victoria University is well-established and the GLC is just one of many commitments that the universities have with one another and there is no doubt that the work we have begun will be further developed.

The VU GLC is one among many initiatives that have developed between UTEP and VU. To echo Irma's sentiments, we have plans for many more!

39. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning

Connections to more international partners.

Section 8: Reflections

40. Goals set

- To find a way to examine the differences and commonalities of peoples located halfway around the world.
- To build a collaborative learning experience between two classrooms
- To compare and organize themes for successful student interaction
- To identify the tools that would allow our students to share and exchange experiences and perceptions of their different cultures

41. Goals achieved

I think that we achieved the vast majority of our goals. There is always room for improvement and this is a work in progress. We have a solid and stable array of technological tools but we have changed readings, videos, and weekly themes at times to accommodate a change in discussion.

42. Most unique aspect for students

Meeting and interacting live with people who are on another continent. Learning about new cultures, languages, foods, music, art, history, etc.

The most unique experience of the GLC was the cross-cultural dialogues between students. This served to lessen cultural stereotypes. For the VU students, their knowledge of the US was confined to popular culture as seen in Hollywood westerns. The distinctive and diverse culture of the El Paso region shattered many of their preconceptions and led to many embracing the diversity and heterogeneous nature of American society. In short, many of the VU students not only saw similarities in the formation of the two nations but were able to historically contextualize their differences.

Another unique experience was the personal and academic collegiality that blossomed between students (and staff for that matter!)

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

The video conference discussions were usually designed around a film that was screened by both classes prior to the conference.

From a pedagogical perspective, ideas about teaching and learning developed well beyond the confines of the institution. This was an exhilarating experience. With regards to the practice of teaching, it enabled a more reflective approach to the processes in which students learn. For example regular classroom teaching is bound by weekly class times and the course schedules i.e. a two-hour class per week and a course calendar. At times, there is a tendency to over-elaborate and intervene so as to get through the course material. Clearly, the amount of time left for student reflection or problem solving is confined to assessment tasks. With the GLC this process of reflection and problem solving for students was not bound by class time and in fact was turned upside down.

As we found out, the forums also were a great pedagogical tool for instigating critical thinking and reflection. Students were conversing 24/7. The process of reflection and problem solving was ongoing

with students sharing personal knowledge inspired from the course readings and then networking these ideas through the forums, which created peer collaboration. Often, students would reflect back to the course readings to substantiate their comments. The tendency of the instructor to hold back and not intervene in this process was a new experience.

44. Most problematic aspects from a pedagogical perspective

At VU, the 8 week collaboration needed to be longer. The possibility of extending the collaboration for an entire semester would be terrific. Other than this there were no problems at all.

45. Changes for future iterations

It would be terrific to extend the collaboration for an entire semester.

46. Technical support

The UTEP instructional designer was a hands-on person who responded to our requests and our conception of how the site needed to be organized. These pedagogical requirements were taken with utmost seriousness and facilitated a smooth communication between all parties. As this was the development of the first GLC it does not compare to any other course offered at either universities.

47. International programs person

For VU once the platform had been decided upon, it was clear that the input of the instructional designer from UTEP was invaluable, as he had used the platform previously. However, in terms of organizing the type of forums, and catering for private and public areas on the site, this was largely conceptualized by the teaching staff. His invaluable contributions of site-specific graphics for the collaboration was inspirational.

48. Time commitment

Planning started several months (3-4) prior to the collaboration. Possible collaborative courses were discussed. Once this was agreed upon, the teaching staff collaborated on course content. Irma and I brought in mutual themes from two separate courses, in order to consolidate the material into one course.

Planning the timeline and length of the collaborative course was essential. Difference in semester dates and the coordination of these was vital for the success of the project

The HOW? Discussions on how to deliver the course and the type of platform to be used was paramount in ensuring the success of the collaboration. It took approximately a month to decide which was the best option. Instructional designers from both UTEP and VU were called in and they showcased possible options especially existing LMS at VU and UTEP. We felt these options compromised the spirit of the global collaboration and that the platform needed to be cloud based. Suggestions for creating an independent website were touted until the instructional designer suggested the Ning site, an open source cloud based platform. This was perfect for students. They could log on without any institutional licensing barriers and the sharing of resources became non problematic. It was a site without boundaries. The only pitfall was a fee charged for the removal of advertising. Initially this was a meager

fee of \$40. However, this has changed once Ning became a fee-paying site.

49. Was it worth it?

Most definitely! For both students and staff, the collaboration enhanced cultural flows across borders. The course; *Imagining Nations, Imagining Regions: The Making of Cultural Diversity in Australia and on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ran smoothly during the UTEP fall semester and the VU semester 2. The delivery was well coordinated and well received by the student cohort. What is important to note here is that any new iteration of the same course will render different results largely as the student cohort brings with it a different set of interests and personalities and thus changes the nature of each iteration. This unexpected quality gives this form of collaborative teaching its dynamism.

We believe that such collaboration has limitless possibilities and a different faculty member would also bring a new sensibility, just as a different/additional institution would. Therefore these types of collaborations are staff , student and site specific.

Section 9: Student Feedback

UTEP Comments:

“Besides gaining friends, this was a new experience that most people haven’t experienced yet. Even though it was an “experiment,” I believe it turned out to be very successful. We learned together and we could ask each other for help. I think we learned tolerance, too, because of so many topics we had to express. Everyone had different opinions and point of views.”

and

“Prior to taking this course, I had a very vague and incorrect view of Australia...however, with this [GLC] collaboration, I was fortunate to learn many things about the country. It is incredible for me to have realized that our region [U.S.-MX border] has noticeable similarities than I would have never imagined.”

VU Comments:

“My understanding of other countries and cultures has been enriched so much as a result of the GLC. I felt being able to interact with the UTEP students allowed me to gain more knowledge of the US-Mexico border, especially because it is coming from their personal perspectives.”

“ I believe interacting with UTEP students helped me to achieve my course objectives. Their questions and curiosity about our issues, history, culture etc. made it even more interesting and motivating to research the information myself with the intent of sharing it with everyone. I felt it was a good relationship and we all contributed well.”

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