

COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities

Course Development and Implementation Case Study

4. Belize - USA: English Literature & Composition

Abstract

Our first GNL collaboration (Spring 2012) connected a literature-based writing course (ENGL 1020) at Corning Community College with a Multicultural American Literature course (LITR 4507) at the University of Belize. Despite our courses being significantly distinct from one another in terms of academic level and many of the assigned readings, we developed several meaningful opportunities for students to connect internationally and achieve shared global learning outcomes. Using a CCC Blackboard discussion forum into which UB students were enrolled, at the beginning of the course participants introduced themselves using pictures and narratives and engaged in their first cross-cultural interactions for the course. Subsequently students were assigned to international partnerships, to which members were mutually responsible for arranging, conducting (using online video chat tools), and reporting in Blackboard on “International Interviews.” Students worked with the same partners in a multi-stage “National Anthems” exercise, for which they conducted research into the historical backgrounds of theirs and their partners’ national anthems, synchronously discussed the anthems, applied analysis to the anthems as literary texts, and offered constructive feedback on each other’s interpretive essays. Students also contributed regularly to international learning journals, encouraging personal reflection on their cross-cultural experiences and mindsets.

After this collaboration we immediately began planning a second course pairing, ENGL 2800: Special Topics in Literature at CCC and LITR 1157: Literature Survey, built around the theme of “Disease, Healing, and Transformation in Literature,” in which, in addition to some of the assignments described earlier, students discuss shared reading assignments (Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*, Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and Junot Diaz’ *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*) and contribute to “Absolutely True Diaries” as members of International Groups in Blackboard.

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Section 1: General Course Information

1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level
Multicultural American Literature	University of Belize	English	3rd year
Freshman Composition II: Writing about Literature: International	Corning Community College	English	1st year

2. The team

Team Member #1	
Name:	Ubaldimir Guerra
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	University of Belize
Position at Institution:	Lecturer
Department and/or Program:	Faculty of Education and Arts
Team Member #2	
Name:	Ryan Hersha
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	Corning Community College
Position at Institution:	Instructor
Department and/or Program:	English Dept.; Communications & Humanities Division

3. When?

Semester One (U of Belize); Spring Semester, Jan-May (SUNY CCC)

4. Number of students enrolled from each institution

UB - 8; CCC - 7

5. Is this typical for classes of this type?

University of Belize: 8 students were enrolled which is a typical size for third and fourth year English majors; however, due to the lack of technological resources at their homes and preparedness in using certain tools, only 6 participated. I empathized with the two students particularly because they also had a very demanding schedule at work and at school. Furthermore, since it was my first time doing this, I wanted to feel assured that I had students who could remain committed to the new challenge, which in many ways was an entirely new venture for students at the university.

CCC: Most ENGL 1020s at CCC are larger than this. All 7 who enrolled were former students of mine to whom, I'd advertised the class. My guess as to why no one else enrolled was that the course had

“International” in its name in the catalog, without any explanation, possibly deterring students. It wasn’t until my second collaboration that I advertised the COIL aspects to the college as a whole.

Section 2: Issues of Language

6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution
University of Belize: English is the language of instruction. CCC: English
7. Primary language of most students in each class
Belize Kriol is the primary language of most students in my class. CCC: English
8. Language of the course collaboration
Our course collaboration took place entirely in English; however, students were introduced to a couple works of Belizean literature, which included a mixture of English and Belize Kriol.
9. Language fluency
At UB, the students in my class were for the most part multilingual, with varying degrees of fluency in each language. At CCC, the primary language is English and I don't believe they had much familiarity with other languages in general
10. Language proficiency difference
There was no substantial difference in English language skills which facilitated the completion of several collaborative assignments.

Section 3: Curricular Information

11. Online or blended?
<p>At UB, my course was offered in a blended format with both online and face-to-face meetings in the classroom.</p> <p>It was the same at CCC--though technically we wouldn't call it "blended" here, which at CCC means there isn't the usual number of in-person classes. According to the catalog, it's a normal class, and we added supplemental online elements.</p>
12. Duration
9 weeks
13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period
Students did complete journal entries in which at the end of the semester they reflected on the collaboration.

Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

14. Tools
Blackboard was the LMS and various emails were used to maintain asynchronous communications between students. Students also used Google and Facebook to conduct their synchronous interview assignments.
15. Server location
Blackboard was provided by Corning Community College.
16. Technical problems
The only issue, which was promptly resolved by CCC staff and a little patience on the students' end, was the creation of student accounts to access Blackboard. In one or two cases, there was a slight mix up with usernames and passwords, but Prof. Ryan and I were quick to resolve these issues.
17. Frequency of use
Students participated regularly in asynchronous discussion boards. The assigned frequency varied through the semester, but I would say one to two posts per week was typical.
18. Information communication
Students were encouraged to develop peer relationships through email or chat services. Also, an introductory discussion forum was a space created on Blackboard where students from separate institutions could continue to learn more about each other and their professors. Here students shared their tastes in music, film, food and in a variety of other areas.
19. Re-use
Blackboard has proven to be an efficient tool for asynchronous assignments that may be either academic or less formal. Students also found Google chat and facebook useful, though these were not assigned per se.

Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

20. Tools
Synchronous tools used included gmail video and chat, facebook video chat. There was one assignment, a real time interview, which required them to use synchronous tools. After testing various tools such as Skype, gmail video and facebook, most students conducted their interviews through gmail video which proved to be the most efficient.
21. Server location
Cloud-based, though CCC students did use their CCC Gmail accounts.
22. Technical problems
The low bandwidth at UB made it difficult for students to conduct interview on campus. Therefore most of them had to conduct their interviews at their home, workplace or internet cafe.
23. Frequency of use
After students connected in real time for their interview, most used chat rooms to continue to engage each other on a personal or collegial level to follow up on collaborative assignments.
24. Informal communication
As mentioned before, students used their own initiative to engage on an informal level. They did this through a variety of tools ranging from becoming friends on facebook to chatting in gmail.
25. Re-use
These tools proved to be effective on multiple levels so, yes.

Section 6: Assessment Information

26. How?
We did not have access during that first collaboration to any standardized assessment tool, so my assessment was informal, based on student feedback and journals. - RH
27. Common Assessment rubric
No.
28. Assessment outcomes
N/A
29. Peer assessment
They could have been then and they might be during our current collaboration as well, though we haven't built anything formal into the course.
30. Charter or guidelines for student interaction
No, though CCC students were introduced to basic netiquette guidelines and we discussed related issues in class from time to time.
31. Attrition
1 drop from the CCC course, or 1 out of 7, so 14%. No drop-outs in the UB course
32. Is this typical for similar classes at your institution?
If anything, I believe the globally networked nature of the course gives students reason to stick with a course. I'm sensing the same thing in my second collaboration. (CCC) This is typical for students enrolled in UB's Bachelor Degree in English.

Section 7: Institutional Support

33. Type of support
<p>I am not 100% sure what CCC received or contributed at every phase financially during the first collaboration. Beyond financial support, however, COIL did offer significant pedagogical support, most importantly by connecting me with other COIL participants and their teaching experiences. I also believe COIL was helpful in presenting international collaboration as a viable and important teaching activity at the community college, which may have resulted in greater freedom and support for my COIL activities. Probably the most important thing COIL did, however, was to connect me with an appropriate partner. It is simply not likely for community college faculty to find appropriate and interested international partners without COIL or some other group facilitating it. - (CCC)</p>
34. Engagement with international programs office
<p>Currently, UB does not have such an office. There is no international programs office at CCC either.</p>
35. Importance given to globally networked learning
<p>N/A</p>
36. Commitment
<p>Administrators have repeatedly asserted their support for globally networked learning and have supported me in this work personally on an ongoing basis.</p>
37. Future iterations
<p>After reviewing the benefits and challenges of our first collaborative effort, we have built another course which is currently being taught and contains students at a similar academic level.</p>
38. New globally networked courses
<p>As stated in above, we are currently engaged in a new course, that has a different dynamic, taking into consideration some of the lessons learnt in the first collaboration. We will continue to gain feedback from students to also plan future globally networked courses. At UB, in my department I have engaged other faculty members who seem to be interested in doing the same. If given the time and resources, I plan to develop workshops based on my own limited knowledge and experiences; but I think the ideal situation would be for others in my department to possibly become fellows in COIL.</p> <p>Prof. Guerra and I plan on offering another COIL course in spring 2014, and I am interested in facilitating the development of new COIL partnerships between CCC faculty and other international institutions, including UB.</p>
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
<p>At UB, chairs, deans and the provost have anecdotally expressed their support in my own pilot course.</p>

UB is just making attempts to develop online programs, which should bring about developments in technology which certainly would enhance its capacity to develop a broader program of globally networked courses.

At CCC, I have also heard encouraging words from administrative leadership, though no formal expanded program has been proposed yet.

40. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses

CCC: Positively.

UB: Positively encouraging.

41. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning

CCC: I'd like to find a way to shepherd interested faculty into partnerships more deliberately and with clearly articulated support. Perhaps an annual budget for COIL-related release-time and a regularized means of granting it might be helpful.

UB: Developing an international programs office or committee and offering other faculty members the opportunity to engage in COIL workshops and conferences.

Section 8: Reflections

42. Goals set
I don't recall setting specific goals beyond course outcomes, which did include global fluency outcomes. But personally I wanted my students to begin seeing literary texts in a global/cross-cultural context, developing their global mindset, and opening their minds to new ways of thinking about their culture and their lives. I also wanted Prof. Guerra and his students to have a positive experience interacting with my own and for the collaboration to be successful enough that we both would consider trying something again, as we are! (CCC)
43. Goals achieved
Very well. (CCC) I agree. UB
44. Most unique aspect for students
My students emphasized that the collaborative experiences taught them how much they have yet to learn, not only about other cultures and history, but about their own culture and history. (CCC) My students really appreciated the freshness of opening their classroom to a global space. This concept was completely new to them, at times a challenge, but surprisingly and fortunately, most of them had sufficient technological experience to adapt relatively quickly. (UB)
45. Most successful aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
In my view, the intercultural exchange worked best and was a great motivational factor in engaging the classroom discourse as students were able to offer unique cultural insights on creative works from their partner's nation. (UB) Hard to say. Aside from enhancing student interest in what they were learning generally, I really saw the international aspects of the course prompting students to think about the texts from other perspectives, including other peoples' personal, historical, and political perspectives. And by bringing me more forthrightly into the role of co-learner with them, I was able to model writing, reading, and learning behaviors. (CCC)
46. Most problematic aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
Really the only thing I can think of is that adding in collaborative work necessarily increases the student workload or takes away from other work. I feel on balance, though, that the assignments had much greater impact overall, and heightened student interest helped them to complete the additional work. (CCC)
47. Changes for future iterations
RH: We're teaching it differently right now! Well, we crafted two new courses so they would match up better in terms of student educational levels.

48. Technical support

We do not have an instructional designer.--CCC
No designer at UB.

49. International programs person

We do not have an international programs person. Jayne Peaslee, however, served in this ad hoc role, and was helpful with arranging meetings and addressing roadblocks (for example with enrolling international students in Blackboard).

50. Time commitment

It's hard to estimate, but Prof. Guerra and I spent a great deal of time preparing for that collaboration and managing it throughout the semester. All things considered, I'd guess we invested the equivalent of at least 3 credit hours the semester before and 3 additional credit hours (above and beyond the regular course) during the collaboration semester. Really a wild guess though. (CCC)

51. Was it worth it?

Yes, it was worth it, which is why we're doing it again and looking forward to a third collaboration next academic year. I wouldn't say our current collaboration feels any easier, but that may be because we're building what seems to me like a more extensive collaboration with many more students. I do believe we're getting better at this! Prof. Guerra and I have discussed the possibility of new partnerships. We're both interested in welcoming our colleagues to globally networked learning.

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