

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

## 20. Russia - USA: History

### Abstract

The newly-created George Mason University - National Research University Higher School of Economics history course on how states and societies have or have not dealt with the aftermath of mass violence was operated primarily as a face-to-face course via two video conference classrooms. On the whole, the faculty members were pleased with the results, especially with respect to in-class activities which included lectures, class discussions, and group student presentations. Out-of-class activities, primarily online discussion boards and the process of creating group presentations, were considered less successful areas for improvement in the next iteration of the course. The largest sources of difficulties were logistic, including an unanticipated offset of the course times after the U.S. ended daylight savings times and the difficulties of getting students to meet together synchronously given their extremely busy schedules and the time difference. On the whole, the faculty were so pleased with the results of the course that they already plan to teach the course again in the spring 2014 semester.

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## Section 1: General Course Information

### 1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level
Coping with the Aftermath of Violence	George Mason	History	Undergraduate - any level

### 2. The team

<b>Team Member #1</b>	
Name:	Steven Barnes
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	George Mason University
Position at Institution:	Associate Professor of History
Department and/or Program:	Department of History and Art History
<b>Team Member #2</b>	
Name:	Irina Filatrova
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	National Research University - Higher School of Economics
Position at Institution:	Professor of History
Department and/or Program:	Department of Political History/Optional Inter-Faculty course
<b>Team Member #3</b>	
Name:	Rick Reo
Role on Team:	Instructional Designer
Institution:	George Mason University
Position at Institution:	Instructional Designer
Department and/or Program:	Division of Instructional & Technology Support Service (DoIT)

### 3. When?

Fall 2012

### 4. Number of students enrolled from each institution

GMU - 30 students; HSE - enrolled - 14, dropped - 7

### 5. Is this typical for classes of this type?

Probably about average for a George Mason course of this type.

This is an average size class for an optional course; however the dropout rate was exceptionally high.

## Section 2: Issues of Language

<b>6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution</b>
English at George Mason Russian and English at HSE
<b>7. Primary language of most students in each class</b>
English at George Mason Russian at HSE
<b>8. Language of the course collaboration</b>
Entirely in English.
<b>9. Language fluency</b>
Students at Mason are English speakers; those at HSE had moderate English language skills.
<b>10. Language proficiency difference</b>
<p>From Steven Barnes's perspective, the differential language skills had a relatively small impact on the course. I overestimated the problems from language skills and underestimated the problems caused by logistic issues. In classroom discussions, the Russian students as a group more than held their own. I would estimate that they easily did 50% of the talking and usually without any extra prodding--certainly no more than the prodding that was sometimes necessary to get the George Mason students talking. The Russian students were slightly less adept in written English and seemed more reticent in the online discussion boards. All in all, I think the Russian students did an amazing job with their English usage in the class.</p> <p>From Irina Filatova's perspective language was a problem. Students with poorer English were not coping with required reading and as a result their contributions were not as good as they would have liked them to be. Some felt shy because of that (though this was certainly not the general problem). Language was also one of the reasons for a high dropout level. Those whose English was better from the start, blossomed, others felt that the course required too much effort without bringing the pleasure of success, and as the course was not obligatory, they simply left.</p>

### Section 3: Curricular Information

<b>11. Online or blended?</b>
The course was really more of a face-to-face course with an online component for some of the assignments.
<b>12. Duration</b>
12 weeks, I think was the final number depending on how you count due to various holidays.
<b>13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period</b>
<p>The George Mason semester started about two and a half weeks before HSE. Steven Barnes used that time with his students to prepare them to some degree for what they would face in the collaborative aspect of the course--giving them some basic background on Russian history and culture, discussing the challenges faced by students in both classrooms in such a course, orienting them to Blackboard and having a training session in the use of Blackboard Collaborate--a potential tool for them to use in meeting their Russian counterparts for project preparation. The George Mason students were also asked to prepare group presentations on their daily lives and the best three were chosen in a class vote to be presented to HSE students in the first joint meeting.</p> <p>HSE students only had one meeting before our first joint session. Irina Filatova asked a few of her students to make a presentation to the George Mason students during that first session. They did not have as much time to prepare as did the George Mason students, but it still made for a nice introduction of the students to one another.</p>

## Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

<b>14. Tools</b>
Blackboard was the primary method, although the students on their own made use of some other technologies--primarily e-mail--to communicate with one another.
<b>15. Server location</b>
We used the George Mason Blackboard system and HSE students were given access for the semester.
<b>16. Technical problems</b>
Reports on the use of Blackboard Collaborate from the students were decidedly mixed, as some students loved it and others hated it. Otherwise, I know of no significant technical problems using the discussion boards on Blackboard.  Russian students were slow to engage in a meaningful debate on the blackboard; some never did, because they thought that their English was inadequate. But all read other students' comments, so it was a useful tool.
<b>17. Frequency of use</b>
We don't really understand what is meant by engaging "on a classroom level." We can say that Blackboard was primarily used for hosting discussion boards in the course. Students were required to write at least one post and one response during each case study.
<b>18. Informal communication</b>
I don't think Blackboard was useful in an informal sense during this course. Part of that is the technology itself. (Students noted, for example, that they might have gotten to know each other better if their posts were connected with a profile picture--allowing students to put faces with names.) Part of that was that we could have used it in different ways. (For example, I think we could try hosting an additional discussion board for general discussion instead of just the ones on each case study which lended themselves to formal responses to specific assignments.) This was one area (informal contacts) where the course did not succeed as hoped.  Yes, there was, indeed, very little personal contact between the students. One of the reasons for this was the time difference. When they tried to engage via skype while preparing their common presentations it turned out an uphill task, as they could not find time when they could connect. Facebook could be a good idea.
<b>19. Re-use</b>
I think Blackboard could still have a role in a future iteration of the course, though the features used could also be found in other LMS systems or merely through hosting a course blog outside of an LMS altogether. Students indicated a desire to perhaps have a Facebook page for the course. This might also enable them to make additional informal connections beyond the confines of the course.

## Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

<b>20. Tools</b>
Approximately 3 out of every 4 class sessions were held jointly via videoconference.
<b>21. Server location</b>
Tech support was utilized at both universities.
<b>22. Technical problems</b>
Tech problems were quite rare. For one class session, we were never able to connect due to technical problems. Fortunately, this was a day in which Steven Barnes gave a lecture. We recorded the lecture and made it available to Russian students via internet. For one class session, we had significant audio difficulties. This was more difficult, as it was during a student group's presentation to the class. Tech support was able to lower the video quality part way through the class which improved audio quality, and the students handled the situation well, but it was not ideal. Otherwise, technical connection of the two classrooms was high quality without significant delays, losses of video or audio, etc.
<b>23. Frequency of use</b>
<p>For each case study, we met with the two classrooms together three times and had one face-to-face session in two separate classrooms. We had hoped students would meet synchronously when preparing group projects. For the most part, they handled preparation asynchronously, and in fact, all too separately. Here, the logistical issues proved a major hurdle. From the George Mason perspective, our students largely live extraordinarily busy lives--often taking a full course load with significant hours of employment or being full-time employees while taking significant numbers of courses (and not uncommonly, they combine "full-time" work with "full-time" student schedules.) As a result, they have relatively few unscheduled hours for synchronous meetings with other students, even when only among George Mason students. Then, when one adds in the 8/9 hour time difference with Moscow, the logistical impediment to synchronous meetings was usually too large to be overcome..</p> <p>Busy schedules were a huge problem for HSE students too. Many also work, some full time, and at some point during the course they had an exam session. In addition to this HSE buildings are scattered around Moscow, and it took some students up to an hour to get to the venue where classes were held: quite a big sacrifice on their part.</p>
<b>24. Informal communication</b>
This is an area in which the course did not succeed as we wished.
<b>25. Re-use</b>
I would definitely stick with the videoconference format for the course. This part worked quite well. It is in the area of student contact beyond classroom time that improvements are needed. We will be interested to hear experiences from others in this area.

## Section 6: Assessment Information

<b>26. How?</b>
We evaluated the students primarily through their written work and oral presentations. In addition to sharing the main course assignments, we had slightly different examination practices. The students were required to make contributions to online discussion on each of the course's case studies and to participate in one group presentation (with a mix of Russian and American students) on a case study. Students wrote individual papers to accompany their group presentation. George Mason students wrote a final paper and took a final written in-class examination. I would not say that any of the course evaluation was aimed specifically at the issue of the development of intercultural awareness.
<b>27. Common assessment rubric</b>
We chose to do assessment for our students separately.
<b>28. Peer assessment</b>
No. I (Steve) am not sure what might have come from such peer assessment but will be interested to hear of others' experiences. I (Irina) discussed my students' contributions to collaborative presentations in class. Other students participated in these discussions.
<b>29. Charter or guidelines for student interaction</b>
No. Students were informed in class of the need for respect of opposing viewpoints. Having more informal time with my students at the beginning in the class sessions held prior to the start of classes at HSE, I (Steve) did make a particular point to inform the students that the subject matter of the course was difficult and could lead to strong emotional responses. I urged them to come to me with problems and to treat one another respectfully, to treat the classroom as a safe space in which people of good will would exchange possibly conflicting opinions, and warned them in particular of the possible discomfort that might come when hearing criticism of one's own country from students in another and to think about that issue also when we discussed the Russian case study.  No particular problems developed in the realm of student interaction. In fact on HSE side we have not had any.
<b>30. Attrition</b>
At George Mason, 2 students out of 30 failed to complete the course. In one case, the student showed up most of the semester and disappeared right at the end.  For HSE, as described above, the drop-out rate was significantly higher at approximately 50%.
<b>31. Is this typical for similar classes at your institution?</b>
This was typical for a George Mason course.  This was atypical for an HSE course.

## Section 7: Institutional Support

### 32. Type of support

At George Mason, the Office of Global and International Strategies initiated the participation in the Institute and contacted Dr. Barnes about being part of this. Their support in preparing the application was critical. Dr. Barnes took care of initiating contact with the History Faculty at HSE and the chair of that faculty brought him and Dr. Filatova into contact. They corresponded to decide on a potential course topic. The course was new for both professors. Attendance of the George Mason team at the COIL Institute workshop was supported financially by COIL. The workshop, attended by Dr. Filatova remotely, was critical to working out the outlines of the course. Course development was primarily completed by Drs. Barnes and Filatova. The George Mason provost's office provided one course release both as incentive for Dr. Barnes to participate and to provide adequate time for course preparation (which proved absolutely critical when Dr. Barnes severely broke his leg and ankle in the spring of 2012). Rick Reo, instructional designer, provided training and advice to Dr. Barnes on using the Blackboard LMS system along with ways to think about structuring assignments on Blackboard, group presentations, etc. He also helped with the process of getting HSE students enrolled into Blackboard. The Global Office provided financial support for hiring a student to run cameras at George Mason during the course. This may not be absolutely necessary in the future, though it did help. The Video Conference Technologies staff at George Mason handled connections of the two classrooms--including opening their office early when a sudden mid-semester realization that Russia no longer changes time in the winter forced the class to move from 9am to 8am for the remainder of the semester. Most important for future renditions of the course is continued availability of one of the two video conference classrooms on the George Mason campus.

The main failure in support came in the area of access to the resources of George Mason Libraries, as they were not able to provide HSE students with access to our journal databases. This made finding appropriate, open-access readings critical to give the students a shared knowledge base for the course. Continued search for better open-access readings will be important to further development of the course.

Irina Filatova received a lot of support from the staff of HSE History Faculty and the University's Foreign Relations Department in advertising the course. Without the assistance of the Videoconference Technologies staff the course would have been impossible. Irina also received financial incentives from the University which are common practice for such courses: HSE remunerates lecturers who teach in English and particularly those who teach videoconference courses with foreign universities.

### 33. Engagement with the international programs office

At George Mason, the Office of Global and International Strategies brought the COIL program to my attention. They helped write the application to be part of the Institute. They provided financial support to hire a student to run video cameras in the George Mason classroom. Representatives of that office twice came to observe the class.

Foreign Relations Department at HSE was important at the initial stages of correspondence between the universities and was prepared to fund Filatova's trip to New York for the workshop, but the trip did not work out because of logistical problems

#### **34. Importance given to globally networked learning**

Yes, this initiative is certainly relevant to the mission of our Office of Global and International Strategies. We are in the process of developing strategies to include this form of learning as part of strengthening Mason's global education curricula.

I (Irina) am not sure about the opinion of the international programmes officer about this particular course, but it is well known fact that HSE is deeply interested in internationalization of its teaching and does a lot to promote globally networked learning. In that sense HSE is a pioneering institution in Russia.

#### **35. Commitment**

Yes, our partner institution, the Higher School of Economics, was very eager to continue such collaborations. They have expressed their interest through co-teaching another globally networked linked course with our Sociology & Anthropology department as well as committing to teaming with Mason again for Spring 2014.

HSE has a number of globally networked courses in different disciplines with different partners. It certainly is interested in developing this experience

#### **36. Future iterations**

The course will be taught again by Professors Barnes and Filatova in the spring 2014 semester.

#### **37. New globally networked courses**

Yes, the work of Profs. Barnes and Filatova has already generated similar courses in Mason. Another course on human rights and inequalities partnered with the Higher School of Economics also took place in Fall 2012. Other globally networked linked courses are being planned and discussed.

#### **38. 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**

Our Vice President of Global Strategies, Dr. Anne Schiller, is very interested to expand globally networked courses to George Mason's curricula. She has identified this as one of its priorities to promote globalization in Mason.

As I said, globally networked courses are one of HSE's priorities. Prof. Alexander Kamensky, Dean of History, is certainly interested in developing this initiative.

#### **39. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses**

The Office of Global and International Strategies is very committed to plan and develop a viable strategy to continue the work that Mason's team has started.

HSE as an institution is highly committed to developing and promoting this experience.

#### 40. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning

Developing globally networked learning requires strong partnerships (internal and external), our institution will benefit from COIL's community of practice as a resource to move globally networked learning forward. Ideas on securing funding to help faculty build more effective partners and building sustainable globally networked courses would be ideal as well.

I (Irina) taught two videoconference courses with GMU in 2012. In my experience one of the most important things for the success of the course (apart from the technical side of it) is the human factor: two partners have to be able to work with one another, understand one another's ideas and agree on basic things. No amount of assistance (which is necessary, of course) can help if there is no such mutual understanding. I think that in that sense Prof Barnes and I were lucky - we could work together well.

I (Steve) would like to second Irina's comment here. She and I had never met before we started on this venture. I was put in touch with her by her department chair, whom I had met with at HSE in Moscow in 2010. In many respects, we were just lucky to find that we were very compatible in our approaches to teaching, our thinking about the course subject matter, and the like. The entire course would probably go quite poorly indeed if the two faculty members were not so well-matched. I think we also benefited from the fact that this was a new course for both of us. As such, we developed it together in its entirety rather than trying to take a course one of us had already developed and fit the other faculty member and student body into the confines of something that already existed.

## Section 8: Reflections

<b>41. Goals set</b>
<p>HSE - I wanted the students to get the experience of an open debate with their American counterparts as equal partners, despite the impediment of the language. Of course, I wanted them to be interested in the course and to "advertise" it by word of mouth.</p> <p>GMU - I think I had two goals when we started. 1) To give the students a firm understanding of and ability to analyze different incidents of mass violence and ways to try to deal with their legacies. 2) To acquaint the students with Russian peers and to show the American students some of their own unexamined assumptions about the world by showing them the same in others.</p>
<b>42. Goals achieved</b>
<p>HSE - not quite. Some students shied away from both written and oral discussions until the end. But they spoke highly of the course both to me and to their peers.</p> <p>GMU - I feel as confident with the subject matter knowledge gains as I ever can feel. That is, they understood the material relatively well during the course and much of it came as a genuine surprise to them (especially with regard to the public spectacle nature of many lynchings in the American case study), but I am left wondering what if anything they will keep from the course in the long run. On the intercultural interaction, the results were more mixed. Students did not get to know their Russian colleagues as well as I would have liked, but I think the students gained some respect for their peers (though again, what long term impact that might have is unclear.)</p>
<b>43. Most unique aspect for students</b>
<p>HSE - The opportunity to listen to lectures of an American professor and to compare it with what they are getting at their own university in term of intents and presentation, as well as to speak directly with American students in class. I also think that they learnt a lot from the course, taking into consideration the fact that the majority were not historians and thus did not know much even on the history of Stalinism.</p> <p>GMU - I think the students found the very nature of the course unique. They did make comments from time to time in our separate classroom discussions that made me feel the discussions with Russian students were opening their eyes to another world beyond the United States. They seemed particularly impressed that these Russian students were undertaking significant college level work in a second language. I tried repeatedly to impress upon them that the Russian students were doing the same work as the Americans but doing it as if at the same time in a foreign language class. This really did make an impression. I also think from our discussions that they found the course topic deeply moving and often troubling.</p>
<b>44. Most successful aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective</b>
<p>HSE - Definitely work in class: lectures, discussions and student presentations. The Blackboard discussions did not work very well.</p> <p>GMU - I completely agree with Irina. It is primarily in the things that happened outside of the classroom</p>

that improvements are needed. The classroom discussions were on the whole terrific. The student group presentations got significantly better as we proceeded through the course. (Initially, they were to a significant degree a mere repetition of the lectures and class discussions, but about half-way through the course, the students really took them to another level, really bringing in new topics that we had never mentioned in class. It was really the initiative of one particular group presenting on Cambodia that made this change. Subsequent groups were never quite as good, but definitely saw something of an exemplar in the Cambodia group. I think next time we can make our expectations on the group presentations clearer from the beginning, especially that they bring something to the table beyond the lectures, readings, and discussions.)

#### **45. Most problematic aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective**

HSE - Blackboard discussions, as I said.

GMU - And, the lack of any real personal connection among the students, as discussed above.

#### **46. Changes for future iterations**

HSE - I think both professors should engage in the non-class discussions with students. My students definitely saw it as a drawback that we didn't. I would attempt a better non-class communication between students. I would also introduce admission criteria for the course, selecting students with a certain level of English. There were a couple of first year students who attended but could not really participate in the discussions.

GMU - I would leave the basic structure of the course material unchanged, but give some additional thought to these outside-of-class interactions as discussed repeatedly above.

#### **47. Technical support**

One of my early insights from the COIL institute workshops was that the majority of the work required to develop and implement a GNL course was similar to that required for any online or hybrid course. And typical with my experience assisting non-GNL faculty, most of this work was performed up front in the design/development phase. Intercultural interactivities can be treated as any other learning goals and so follows the same process to develop effective activities based on proper alignment of teaching strategies to assessments to technologies.

The GNL aspects of the course were related to choosing appropriate intercultural learning goals and working with faculty and logistics that involved another campus, culture, language, course and time zone issues. This makes the faculty-instructional designer collaboration a little more complicated but not unlike other online courses. Many of the course design and logistics issues were simplified with the decision to use classroom videoconferencing as the central mode of interaction for the course.

#### **48. International programs person**

This is the first time the Office of Global and International Strategies has partnered with faculty to support a globally networked course. We are in the process of learning how to better support such efforts. We see challenges but there are also lots of potential to expand learning across cultures in

creative ways so we are eager to see how far ahead we can enable this in Mason.

HSE - no international programmes person participated.

#### **49. Time commitment**

HSE - development of the course did not take longer than it normally does with any other course.

GMU - I would agree. Things were more compressed than one would have liked for extraneous reasons (i.e. I broke my leg and ankle severely at precisely the point in the spring when I would have ideally devoted time to preparing the course.)

#### **50. Was it worth it?**

Absolutely worth it. We already plan to teach the course again. I (Steve) am not sure about developing another new course along these lines--not because I did not get something out of it, but because I am not sure if it would fit into the range of courses I feel a need to teach. I will certainly think about it. I would particularly like teaching a graduate-level seminar in a connected classroom like this, but the logistical hurdles may be too high in that case. (For example, doing so with a Russian university would be impossible, as the nature of our graduate student body demands that all history graduate seminars are taught from 7-10pm at night--in other words starting somewhere between 3-4am in Russia.)

HSE: my other videoconference course was at postgraduate level on our side, but undergraduate on the American side. This simply did not work. A common post grad seminar in history would be really great, but obviously this cannot be done.

## Section 9: Course Collaboration Narrative

We created this new course on how states and societies coped (or didn't) with the aftermath of mass violence with the intention that it would run largely like a traditional face-to-face course but with the two classrooms joined into a single classroom via video conference. We were largely satisfied with the course and with the use of video conference and face-to-face methodology. Neither of the faculty had experience with teaching online courses and were mostly uncomfortable with using that type of methodology for this course.

Immediately prior to the beginning of the course, the first of a few logistical obstacles occurred. The course at HSE was relocated from one building to another. While on most U.S. university campuses, this would be a minor hassle, it was more serious at HSE where the university is spread among a number of different locations across the city of Moscow. It can easily take an hour to get from one HSE building to another. As a result, enrollment was lower than initially expected at HSE, as some students who would have otherwise taken the course were no longer able to do so simply for geographic reasons. In the end, this left us with a large imbalance in the size of classes with 30 students at George Mason and generally around 10 at HSE. (The HSE numbers changed during the course as the dropout rate was unexpectedly high.) The primary impact was on our group presentation assignments. We had hoped to have groups of four or five comprised of approximately 50% Russian and American students. In the end, we went with larger than ideal groups of eight in order to ensure that no Russian student would be the sole Russian student in a group. The size of the groups may have been one feature that had the students work on their "group" projects in a more "individual" fashion than we would have preferred. (See below.)

George Mason started classes approximately 2 ½ weeks earlier than HSE. We very much wanted the students to start on the same level, so the GMU classroom devoted this time to some getting-to-know-you activities, some discussion of Russian history and culture, and the preparation of small group presentations on the daily life of a "typical" George Mason student for presentation to the HSE class during our first meeting. Relatively little on the substance of the class was discussed during this first period. This gave the GMU classroom a bit of a feeling of "suspended animation" during these initial class periods as we really were biding time until the class came together.

The HSE class met once separately before the first meeting together.

The first joint session was largely devoted to introductions to the professors and via the presentations on student life. The HSE students had not as much time to prepare these as the GMU students. (One of the GMU groups had even created a video introduction complete with some touring around the campus.) Nonetheless, I think it gave the students a little sense of life at the other university. Unfortunately, the class size was really too large to get the students acquainted on an individual basis through this activity.

Next we started the series of case studies that made up the heart of the course. Generally, the case studies were divided into four class sessions each (with a few modifications due to holidays and Hurricane Sandy interruptions). The first session was devoted to an introductory lecture by one of the faculty members. The second was separate group discussions in each of our two classrooms. The third was a joint class discussion. The final session was a group student presentation. (Each student was assigned to a group for one of the five case studies.) The cases discussed in order were South Africa after Apartheid, Europe after the Holocaust, Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge, the United States after lynchings, and Russia after Stalinism. We specifically left our two countries for last in order to let the students approach the topic on more neutral ground before launching into potentially more sensitive

discussion of our own countries.

The joint class discussions were for me (Steve) the highlight of the course. I found the level of student engagement in the discussions to be quite high with participation from large portions of both classrooms. As a group, the Russian students held their own and were quite easily understood by the American students. I do not think this was always the case in the other direction. I repeatedly reminded the American students to speak slow, loud, and clear, but they still often spoke too quickly or too quietly and were often bringing in pop culture references that probably were not easily understood by the Russian students. (I think particularly of one student's extended comparison with American football with which Russian students are unlikely to be familiar enough to have followed the full measure of his analysis.) Hopefully at least reminding the American students frequently of these kinds of things had some impact in opening their minds to how one must communicate with people from outside their own country.

/On the HSE part I (Irina) agree with Steve's appreciation of the joint class discussions. HSE students had an additional benefit from them, that of improving their English. They all started to understand American students better by the end (there has never been any problem understanding the lectures). They also started to communicate better, as they felt less shy about their language. I would still try to select students with better English next time./

In addition, during each case study, students were required to write one original response to the assigned readings on Blackboard and to respond to at least one other student's post. Due to the size of the class, we created two discussion boards for each case study and assigned students to one or the other. After the first case study, we tried to institute a requirement that students respond to the post of a student from the other university. This did not work as well as hoped. The Russian students were a bit less active in the discussion boards, and at times American students complained that they had no post from a Russian student to which to respond. All in all, the discussion boards were the least successful part of the course. I (Steve) do not believe I was clear enough with the students about expectations, and I never fully settled for myself the question of whether and how much I should be part of the discussions. I simultaneously worried about being an overly dominant voice in the discussion that I hoped would be free flowing while also failing to provide the feedback that would impress on students the importance of the activity. If we continue this practice in the next course iteration, improvements need to be made.

/HSE students made it clear to me (Irina) that they would have appreciated our interventions, comments, suggestions. They said that in other classes such interventions by professors invariably made the discussions more interesting and valuable. It's a pity that this conversation happened only after we finished the course./

Finally, during each case study, the students that created the group presentation were required to write a short paper devoted mostly to the subject matter but also including a page on the work process of the group. We each graded these separately, and I (Steve) was mostly disappointed in the quality of the papers. Again, here, I think I was not clear enough about expectations, and students did not take the papers as seriously as I would have liked.

/Exactly the same at HSE. The papers were not great, as the students did not try very hard: there was definitely a feeling that by completing the "joint" part of what they needed to do by participating in discussions and presentations and writing in the blackboard they have made a fair contribution to the course which was not obligatory. Papers were perceived as an extra and not very exiting burden. We'll have to think how to make this task more interesting for the students./f

We also asked the students to discuss the process of creating the group presentations during the Q&A session following their presentation. Here we learned that the students were largely handling the assignment individually and contact was asynchronous mostly by e-mail. Basically, the students split up the assignment into eight discrete topics and each student essentially did an individual presentation on that topic. This was one area where we had really hoped for student interaction across classrooms, and it largely did not occur. It is an important area for improvement next time.

In early November, we ran into the biggest logistical hurdle in the course. We had failed to anticipate the impact of the change in Russian law in 2011 that eliminated the winter time change. As a result, once daylight savings time ended in the United States, the time difference between GMU and HSE changed from eight to nine hours and the course was no longer scheduled to occur at the same time. Since I (Steve) had often arrived early for the class, I knew that there was nobody using the GMU classroom before our class meeting. In addition, I knew from early discussions that none of the students in the GMU class had an earlier class. As such, I forced the GMU students to start one hour earlier (going from a 9:00am start time to an 8:00 start time). This was mostly handled smoothly, though the number of students arriving late increased after the change and absenteeism rose slightly. (For one student, I had to make special arrangements as she was a divorced mother who needed to be home to get her children off to school and could not reliably arrive before 8:30. She was one of the best students in the class, and she handled the issues splendidly.) I obviously felt I could not penalize the students for absence and lateness, as this was quite a sacrifice on their part given almost no GMU classes start before 9am.

/The Russian students were very grateful for this sacrifice on the part of the Americans/

Hurricane Sandy and a variety of holidays in each country through the month of November also caused some shifting around of schedules. As a result, one additional class session was devoted to the US case study in the GMU classroom; and one additional class session was devoted to the Russian case study in the HSE classroom. We were also left with only a single class session for wrap-up after finishing the case studies.

Final assignments were handled separately. GMU students wrote a final paper in which they were instructed to advise a fictitious country emerging from a situation of mass violence on how they should cope with the problem. They were to draw on specific evidence from the case studies in making their case. They also took a written final exam which was primarily focused on judicial versus non-judicial methods of coping with the aftermath of mass violence. On the whole, I (Steve) was pleased with the results of these final assignments, as the students showed good familiarity with basic concepts we had studied, with the various case studies, and with drawing together elements from multiple historical examples in analyzing and making an argument.

Russian students did not have a final exam, but had a colloquium instead. It was an interesting reflection of what they learnt from the course. The most important conclusion of the discussion was that there were no simple solutions to coping with violence.

## Section 10: Student Feedback

Unfortunately, Steven Barnes is on research leave and out of the country this semester. As such, he does not have access to the student evaluations no doubt sitting in his mailbox at George Mason. We did spend the last joint session of the course in discussion with the students about what worked and what didn't. Like Irina mentions below, I found the students on the whole quite positive about the course with some specific criticisms, especially as Irina notes on the issue of personal contact with the Russian students. Clearly there is some desire for personal contact, but it needs to be easy enough that the students are willing to fit it into their busy schedules.

I (Steve) do have access online to the numerical data on course evaluations done by the American students. Particular areas of note (all responses have a maximum score of 5):

- 1) On the statement, "the course was well organized," the students gave a 4.10 where the department average was 4.57 and the university average 4.42. This no doubt came from two things. First, we were a little disorganized at the beginning as HSE suddenly had the course relocated to a different part of Moscow, creating upheaval for Irina in enrollment. As a result, we were making a number of shifts as the course started to deal with a mismatch in class size. (30 at GMU and in the end around 10 at HSE). This caused us to rethink some of our assignments. Second, after the U.S. changed time in early November, we suddenly realized that our synchronous course was no longer synchronous as Russia recently eliminated the bi-annual time changes. As a result, for the last month of the semester, the George Mason class was pushed back from a 9am to 8am start-time. Only a small number of classes at George Mason start before 9am and this was seen as a major imposition by students, but given our classroom was empty prior to our class, it was easier to move the GMU class than it would have been to move the HSE class.
- 2) On the statement, "the instructor showed respect for the students," the students gave a 4.95 where the department average was 4.76 and the university average 4.71. I think this speaks to the rapport in the classroom while discussing difficult topics.
- 3) On the statement, "the instructor made the course intellectually stimulating," the students gave a 4.95 where the department average was 4.47 and the university average 4.32. Hopefully this means the students felt that they were forced to think.
- 4) On the statement, "the instructor encouraged the students to be actively involved in the material through discussion, assignments, and other activities," the students gave a 4.95 where the department average was 4.40 and the university average 4.43. This is particularly gratifying given the nature of the video-conference class could have led to student disengagement, especially given that we were often running group discussions involving some 40 students.
- 5) On "my overall rating of the teaching," the students gave a 4.75 where the department average was 4.53 and the university average 4.37.
- 6) On "my overall rating of the course," the students gave a 4.37 where the department average was 4.35 and the university average 4.17. The distinction between the teaching rating and the course rating is worth thinking about and probably reflects a lot on point (1) above.

Of course, we will learn more once we see their narrative comments.

Irina Filatova is in South Africa and is unable to provide such evaluations either. However both during the course and at its end the students said that they found it very interesting and useful. Each lecture ended with applause. However, they found that preparation and travel took too much of their time (for an optional course). They also said that they were disappointed by the fact that there was very little personal contact.

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