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

23. South Korea - USA: Technical Writing & Communication

Abstract

The TTUMJU COIL collaborative course was a success. However, from the beginning of the course, instructors initially faced three key challenges in this globally connected classroom:

- Language differences: Students in these courses did not speak the same languages, so we had to find ways to communicate in spite of this difference.
- Institutional calendar differences: The semester calendars were quite different between TTU and MJU. TTU classes started earlier than MJU students. Additionally, holidays at each institution were quite different: MJU students had more holidays earlier in the fall semester while TTU students had more holidays at the end of the semester.
- Technology differences: Log-in and registration problems with the course blogs created a collaborative challenge, but, with instructor support, students were still able to collaborate on multiple assignments.

Because of these challenges,, we often had to find "just-in-time" solutions, identifying problems and making decisions about them through instructor email exchange. We discovered quickly that we needed to be flexible with the course schedule, assignment deadlines, and collaborative activities. We also learned that we had to address these challenges frankly and openly with students, so they understood why we needed to be flexible. These decisions allowed us to resolve most challenges as the semester progressed. Serendipitously, these challenges also allowed both instructors to discuss with their students the challenges that globally connected teams often face and to illustrate to their students how teams continue to work, in spite of challenges that arise.

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Section 1: General Course Information

1. Courses

Course Title	Institution(s)	Discipline	Academic Level
ENGL 2311 Introduction to Technical Communication	Texas Tech University	Technical Communication	Sophomore (second year) designation, but most students who take the course are juniors (third year) or seniors (fourth year)
KMA02104 Writing	MyongJi University	Technical Writing	Many of the students are freshman but some 2nd-4th year undergraduate.

2. The team

Team Member #1	
Name:	Kelli Cargile Cook
Role on Team:	Faculty
Institution:	Texas Tech University
Position at Institution:	Associate Professor
Department and/or Program:	English Department, Technical Communication and Rhetoric Program
Team Member #2	
Name:	Sokjin Jang
Role on Team:	International Partner
Institution:	MyongJi University
Position at Institution:	Adjunct Professor
Department and/or Program:	Bangmok College of General Education

3. When?

Fall 2012 (For both institutions, the semester ranged from September to December 2012)

4. Number of students enrolled from each institution

Texas Tech University--Twenty students enrolled, but eighteen completed: one dropped the course within a week of its beginning and a second quit attending because of a family health emergency.
MyongJi University-- Thirty one students enrolled and all of them are finished completely the course.

5. Is this typical for classes of this type?

Texas Tech University-- At Texas Tech, our online ENGL 2311 classes enroll twenty (20) students per semester. The enrollment for this class was typical.
MyongJi University-- This is typical for classes every semester. Class size of 30 students is good to teach and practice for writing.

Section 2: Issues of Language

6. Language(s) of instruction at each institution
Texas Tech courses are taught in English. MyongJi courses are taught in Korean.
7. Primary language of most students in each class
Texas Tech students speak English primarily, although three students in the class used other languages in their homes, most frequently Spanish. MyongJi students speak Korean primarily, although almost all of them also can speak and write in English as a foreign language.
8. Language of the course collaboration
We designed the class to allow students to use their native languages primarily. Texas Tech students did not know Korean, so they could not address the MyongJi students in Korea; however, MJU students did address Texas Tech students in English. Speaking both languages was not a requirement for the course. Students could complete the major assignments in the course without using language. Major requirements, for the most part, required technical images or video, not texts.
9. Language fluency
Texas Tech students had little, if any, familiarity with the Korean language. One student had a Korean high school exchange student in her home, which provided some assistance, but for the most part, Texas Tech students could not speak or read Korean. MyongJi students are not good to communicate perfectly with others in English. All of the university students in Korea, had been learned English from middle school. English had been taught by grammar oriented to pass the examinations not actual or practical. But many of them are some experiences to study abroad in a short time to learn English.
10. Language proficiency difference
Texas Tech--Surprisingly, students were more frustrated by time differences between the US and Korean than the language differences. Students were able to collaborate remarkably well in spite of language differences. I do think the amount of posting/corresponding, other than on major assignments, was reduced because of language differences. The MyongJi students seemed somewhat shy about their language use, but the Texas Tech students were impressed with the MyongJi students' fluency, given how few languages our Texas Tech cohort spoke. The Wordpress makes easy way for MyongJi students to understand Texas Tech students and trying their wishes to communicate each other's. Especially, the video project using YouTube is better way to understand how to explain to do something to others.

Section 3: Curricular Information

11. Online or blended?
Texas Tech students attended class fully online. We used a Moodle classroom environment for information specific to the Texas Tech course and for asynchronous work outside of the collaboration. We used Skype for weekly meetings (each meeting lasted between 1.5-3 hours). We used WordPress blogs and YouTube for collaboration between Texas Tech and MyongJi students. MyongJi students attended class fully offline face-to-face meetings.
12. Duration
Students were connected for about 12 weeks, but, with holidays, actual collaboration time was about 10 weeks.
13. Class work or discussion related to their collaboration before and/or after the actual collaboration period
Yes, Texas Tech students engaged in discussions about international collaborations in technical communication, virtual team development, and swift trust. MyongJi students discussed how to make team and allocate their role before collaboration.

Section 4: Asynchronous Technologies Used

14. Tools

Texas Tech students used Moodle all semester. The Moodle contained course requirements, a forum for questions related to the TTU assignments, and weekly assignment descriptions. We used WordPress blogs for the first two assignments collaborating with the MyongJi students, and we used YouTube for the final collaborative assignments.

MJU students used a course blog called 'knowledge hank cafe.' The blogs are used to publish the news and gathering the data depending on technical communications, uploading their assignments, QnAs, and useful tips.

15. Server location

The Texas Tech Moodle was provided by the Texas Tech English Department. WordPress and YouTube are free, cloud-based technologies.

MJU students used cloud-based their cafe blog.

16. Technical problems

The WordPress blogs were challenging to both Texas Tech and MyongJi students. We divided students into cross-institutional teams, but we struggled to get all students enrolled in the specific blogs they were assigned to. The blogs were hard to enroll in and Professor Jang had to post most of his students' comments and work. The WordPress blogs were not easily usable for Texas Tech students either. It took us several weeks to figure out. They were challenging to navigate and to post within. Students had trouble uploading images. Surprisingly, YouTube was a much easier technology for both sets of students to use. Students were easily able to upload their videos; each cross-institutional team created two videos (one original; the second a copy of the other's teams "translated" into their own language.) In future classes, Kelli would not use the WordPress blog configuration; she would seek a more usable platform for collaboration.

It is good to combine the functions of WordPress and YouTube.

17. Frequency of use

Students at both institutions logged into the blogs multiple times during the week. The challenge for our collaboration was the time zone differences. We had trouble establishing a rhythm for making assignments, giving students time to complete them (in both locations), reviewing the assignments, and responding to the other class's assignments. The technologies really weren't the main problem; figuring out the pacing of assignments, given the extensive time lag between institutions was a more significant factor.

It may be most barriers on the MJU class time that is separated 2 hours in Tuesday and 1 hours in Thursday when TTU students has 3 hours a day.

18. Informal communication
Students could engage in the blogs, and some did. Blog enrollment issues hampered this activity, in Kelli's opinion. MJU students can meet their group members at any time they decided freely and engage in the blogs too.
19. Re-use
The WordPress blogs, at least in the way we configured them, were not successful. In retrospect, I wish we had used a more easily accessible platform like the Moodle for our initial collaborations. Students could have easily enrolled in a Moodle and teams could have more easily collaborated once they were enrolled.

Section 5: Synchronous Technologies Used

20. Tools
Because of time zone differences, our students did not work synchronously.

Section 6: Assessment Information

21. How?
Each instructor assessed his or her students individually. Students were evaluated on their processes, the assignment deliverables, and with a final course portfolio and reflective statement. The final course portfolio reflective statement was the most directly applicable evaluation of student intercultural awareness. At TTU, students also completed an online evaluation form, but the university has not yet released these evaluations.
22. Common assessment rubric
No, each instructor used individual assessment measures.
23. Assessment outcomes
TTU--Twenty students began the online ENGL 2311 course at TTU. Of the twenty, one dropped the course immediately following the first meeting. A second student stopped attending after the sixth course meeting because of a family health emergency (her mother was diagnosed with cancer). Eighteen students completed. Of this eighteen, ten students earned an A, seven earned a B, and one earned an A.
24. Peer assessments
Students worked collaboratively with their globally connected partners to complete the first assignment,

which required them to exchange images of their house layout. Students also worked with their institutional peers to peer review drafts of each major assignment, except the portfolio. Peer reviews were completed asynchronously as part of the asynchronous participation requirement.

25. Charter or guidelines for student interaction

To guide students in their collaborations across institutions, we used a collaborative course blog where we posted assignments: http://mjuttu.wordpress.com/2012/10/08/house-description/

The blog was challenging for all students to find and use. I would not use it again (Kelli, TTU). I would use a Classroom Management System that more easily accessible and more centrally controlled (by one or the other institution).

26. Attrition

TTU--As mentioned above, two of twenty students of the TTU group dropped the course.

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

I do not think the globally connected nature of the course affected the number of TTU students who dropped.

Section 7: Institutional Support

28. Type of support
TTU--After winning the COIL fellowship, Kelli was able to apply for an internal grant to visit Korea. The grant paid for roundtrip airfare, hotel, and per diem for a five-day trip, which Kelli completed in November. Additional monies from the grant supported a trip to the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing national conference, where Kelli will present on her collaborative experiences. While in Korea, Kelli was able to speak at the Korean Technical Communication Association meeting and visit three universities. This work was sponsored through Sokjin's support. (not applicable in MJU)
29. Engagement with the international programs office
None during the collaboration at TTU--The International Programs officer assigned to our project resigned and the director was too short-staffed to replace him. Since returning from Korea, Kelli has made contact with the International Office about developing student exchanges but so far, no work has been completed in this area.
30. Importance given to globally networked learning
The interests of the two institutions resolved smoothly, the GNL will be a very desirable program. At TTU, the concept of globally connected learning is appealing, but, unfortunately, the staff is so overworked, they have little time or energy to contribute.
31. Commitment
MJU- It was primarily a singular commitment on the part of the participating faculty Fellows. If the questionnaire 38 was covered, the continuity of the study will be guaranteed. The COIL project was primarily an individual commitment, but I expect more collaboration to follow.
32. Future iterations
We hope to offer the class again in the future, and we have begun to talk about additional means of collaboration.
33. New globally networked courses
Sokjin is expected strongly. Kelli agrees. We will collaborate again in the future. We are not yet sure of the actual means of collaboration at this time.
34. 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
At Texas Tech, the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program in which Kelli works is developing an awareness of the value of globally connected classes, and the faculty is working on several international initiatives to continue this kind of work.

35. Institutional commitment to further developing globally networked courses
TTU has evolving interest in this kind of work. The challenge is to find teaching release time for a professor to teach an introductory course. These courses are more typically taught by graduate instructors. Finding the right instructor to teach the course is essential.
36. How to nurture the development of globally networked learning
At TTU, the interest and desire to collaborate globally are present; the time is more challenging as the course we used is not regularly taught by full-time faculty. Finding a way to integrate graduate-part-time instructors into the mix may be the key to continued success.

Section 8: Reflections

37. Goals set
1 to have the ability to overcome language and teamwork challenges and 2 to have a positive attitude about cross-cultural team experiences
38. Goals achieved
TTU-- Most TTU students left the class with a greater awareness of cross-cultural team challenges and strategies for overcoming these challenges. They were positive about their classroom experiences.
39. Most unique aspect for students
I think actually communicating with students in another country was a unique and compelling learning experience for the TTU students. They enjoyed their interactions with MJU students and requested additional interactions. I think future class iterations could provide even more collaborative working experiences successfully.
40. Most successful aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
The assignments were particularly effective in overcoming language barriers. The video exchange assignment was the most effective. Students developed technical communication skills, language skills, technology skills, and cross-cultural collaborative skills through this assignment.
41. Most problematic aspect(s) from a pedagogical perspective
The initial exchanges in the blog were most problematic, not because of any failure on students' participation but because the blogging format was too challenging and incomprehensible from a cultural standpoint for the Korean students. The WordPress blogs simply did not work well as an international collaborative tool.
42. Changes for future iterations
As I noted earlier, I would build a more closed learning environment where students did not have so many pages and passwords to navigate and use the system.
43. Time commitment
This is hard to say. At TTU, Kelli worked with a graduate student to create the collaborative spaces and she and the student met weekly to prepare course materials and grade. So the time was double for this class. In addition, Kelli and Sokjin exchanged lengthy emails weekly and posted in the instructor's blog. I would estimate that the collaboration doubled typical class preparation time.
44. Was it worth it?
From the TTU perspective, Kelli thinks the collaboration was absolutely worth it. She would definitely repeat the experience with the MJU team and is looking forward to developing other partnerships with Korean universities.

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