30. What were the outcomes of those assessment activities?

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

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.

At CCC, I spoke to students informally about their experience in the COIL parts of the course, and their feelings about the process. We did not ask our students in the two different colleges to assess each other, although they often offered each other informal encouragement and feedback in audio or Facebook posts. I observed that the Actors’ College students were very generous in posting self-assessments on the Facebook page regarding their Voice and Movement work. Our students were less forthcoming with those self-assessments, although in class they often offered each other feedback. In hindsight, a formal student peer assessment might have been useful to help students focus and reflect on specifics of their International Collaboration, as well as on their experience of the class work.

I utilize peer assessment in a classroom setting during almost every class. At the beginning the assessment is about observation, what can they see in someone else, so that they can develop an understanding of what might be happening in their own voice/body. Towards the end of the semester students are asked to informally assess the work of others with a view to increasing their voice and movement vocabulary/lexicon (how they speak about the voice and its connection to the body), to demonstrate development in their awareness of performative tasks and develop their critical/analytical skills.

The scoring guides described above facilitated student revision of essays, and were not used to evaluate the cohort as a whole. Although a typical Writing Seminar focuses primarily on issues of rhetoric, composition and research, increased intercultural awareness was added as a goal of our globally linked version of the course. Included among the student learning outcomes normally listed on course syllabi, our learning outcomes indicated that students would directly address issues of language difference and the varied sources of discursive resources:

- Students will recognize, analyze and synthesize cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences, and use those differences as available means for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening.
- Students will identify and analyze a range of influences – social, linguistic, cultural, technological and national – that have shaped them as writers, students, and individuals.
Adding these learning outcomes was based on our belief that by directly engaging with one another in writing, students would have to negotiate meaning with each other in academic discourse. In the process, reified notions of the homogeneity of language and academic discourse could be challenged directly and indirectly. We are in the early stages of a project to evaluate the student writing as a means to understanding the effectiveness of our class activities for achieving these outcomes. We have completed an initial assessment of our use of the discussion board. A summary of that assessment and its outcomes follows:

During the first iteration of the course, only one of the six discussion topics posted to the Café Bar directly prompted reflection on issues of cross cultural communication. After introducing themselves in a post entitled, “Welcome to My World” in the first week, students were asked in the second week to share their “cross cultural resume,” detailing their previous contact and experience with “various cultures and languages other than your own, perhaps related to your family background, travel, friendships or reading.” None of the other discussion topics prompted reflection on issues of culture directly, but rather offered students the opportunity to get to know each other better by sharing photos, recommending music videos or books, or describing hobbies. We expected that issues of cultural and language difference would surface as a result of these conversations, but we were more concerned that these low-stakes interactions establish a tone that would provide students familiarity with one another so that they would feel comfortable working with one another on the more academic writing tasks.

To encourage open communication, discussion posts were assessed, as described in question 29 above, on a credit/no credit/resubmit scheme. Students who submitted thoughtful posts according to announced deadlines and followed instructions typically received full credit no matter what they wrote. The table below shows the students’ high level of participation in the discussion forum, the difference in numbers of original posts relative to the number of students enrolled in the course, the posting activity of both classes and instructors (see Table 1).

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACMT - 18 students RIT – 16 Students</td>
<td>ACMT - 16 students RIT – 6 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>33 Original posts</td>
<td>31 Original Posts</td>
<td>22 Original Posts</td>
<td>22 Original Posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 non response (ACMT)</td>
<td>7 no responses (2-RIT, 5-ACMT)</td>
<td>0 no response</td>
<td>0 no response</td>
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<tr>
<td>105 Posts (total) ACMT – 58; RIT – 47</td>
<td>79 Posts (total) ACMT – 51; RIT – 28</td>
<td>111 Posts (total) ACMT – 68; RIT – 43</td>
<td>81 Posts (total) ACMT – 51; RIT – 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 instructor responses</td>
<td>3 instructor responses</td>
<td>29 instructor responses</td>
<td>5 instructor responses</td>
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Table 1. Student and instructor participation in online discussion forum.

In the first round of Café Bar discussions, while some students chose noncontroversial topics, such as summer vacations, others in both sections showed an immediate interest in issues of social justice. One female student shared an image of the men’s rugby team that she played on, describing her experience being a woman playing a stereotypically male sport at a traditionally male-dominated institution. While this student also commented on the overall percentage of female students at RIT, and noted the small number of women enrolled in her section of Writing Seminar, another student in Dubrovnik responded...
with stories of her own experiences as a woman in male-dominated martial arts practice. A third student, from RIT, described his experience as a member of an ethnic minority overcoming disadvantages in high school and now college.

According to self-characterizations, many students in the spring section came to the course with a relatively high level of awareness of “cultural difference,” and seemed to value cross cultural experience for its own sake. When given an opportunity to introduce themselves to the group, or to take a photo of a text from their everyday lives, several students also spontaneously chose to address issues of social justice and demonstrated knowledge of, and interest in, the wider world around them. In addition to the issues regarding diversity in US higher education, one student, for example, wrote about a controversial gay pride parade that had been held in Split, Croatia. Demonstrating a general interest in promoting equality, justice, and tolerance other students wrote about female participation in college athletics, environmentalism, homelessness, consumerism, and humanitarian responses to the earthquake in Japan.

In the Café Bar prompt entitled, “Cross Cultural Resume,” students in both groups discussed their family roots and significant life experiences with different cultures and languages, including Ghana, Vietnam, Korea, Spain, Germany, inner-city Rochester, and New York City. Even with all of the attention on broad-based linguistic and cultural experiences, five of the 16 students in the Rochester class identified themselves as not having much cross-cultural experience and/or identified themselves as somewhat impoverished in this regard. These were students whose experience was limited to brief vacations or foreign language study in high school or who felt estranged from immigrant family roots over generations. When writing about his limited experience one student wrote: “I cannot honestly say that I’m a particularly culturally knowledgeable person [...] Which is actually kind of sad.” Other students wrote about their cross-cultural as “not much to say,” it was the “bare minimum,” that they were “sheltered culturally,” or of their “unfortunate” lack of experience. There seemed to be a general consensus, however, that cross-cultural awareness and experience was to be desired, and that students could only benefit from such experiences.

Based on our experiences during the spring term, we decided that the issues being raised in the Café Bar were too generative to leave as informal writing meant primarily to improve the relationship among the students in the class. For that reason, we altered the Café Bar prompts to address specifically the issues raised in course readings. Because we didn’t alter our own approach to responding to the posts, we again observe numerous missed opportunities to bring the discussions occurring in the Café Bar into broader class discussion.

The fall offering of the course started out similarly to the spring, with icebreaker activities meant to acquaint the two groups that included creating and exchanging introductory videos of each group, which students seemed to enjoy. Participation in the first café bar discussion was high, with students posting photos and commenting extensively (see Table 1). There were 22 original postings, and each student was required to response to two postings. Because the numbers of students in each class were so different – 16 at ACMT and only 6 at RIT – the participation of the instructors were also high. Roje Charry and Martins, for example, wrote a combined 29 responses to student posts.

Generally speaking, as the examples above demonstrate, we saw that some students in both sections came to the course with an already established interest in cross-cultural issues, and felt free to express opinions which could be considered provocative. Their posts seemed to invite the kind of larger discussion that could have helped students investigate and even question some of their own cultural values. However, these potentially provocative ideas were rarely responded to in the online environment. Rather than provoking useful discussion, the online forum tended towards what we have come to think of as “Pleasantville.” The silence in response to these posts suggests that students seemed reluctant to offend, disagree, or rebut, instead focusing on creating an atmosphere of polite...
civility. We understand this to be the result of students’ concern about presentation of self in a public forum to their peers and their teachers; that is, especially in these discussion posts early in the class, students are presenting their best selves, engaging in polite conversation and demonstrating to their teachers that they can effectively complete the assigned tasks which require response to issues raised by their peers. While there is clearly some risk avoidance within the written posts, students in both sections openly expressed interest in some of the more substantial issues addressed above. The issue for us as the instructors is how to facilitate more substantive reflection on such topics through the structure of assignments, our own responses to discussion posts, and class discussion.

A more complete analysis can be found in Roje Charry, Rebecca, and David S. Martins “High Quality (Transnational) Learning Environments: Promoting Authentic Intercultural Dialogue on Social Justice Issues On-line.” In Globalizing On-line: Telecollaborations, Internationalization, and Social Justice. Eds. Nataly Tcherepashenets (State University of New York, Empire State College) and Florence Lojacono (Universidad de Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Spain).

Student Learning Outcomes:
Students applied their individual course readings to the common readings and exchanged ideas through the blogs. Students also shared other environmental concerns on the blogs. This enhanced their local-global perspective, particularly with the addition of the photos and insights from the students in Ecuador. The common readings correlated with the timing of the student trips to various sites in Ecuador – glaciers, Andes, Amazon, Galapagos.
The most significant outcome of the course was the deep connection of student reflection to the readings as both groups were personally exposed (either live or digitally) to the environmental issues being covered in class.
The blogs by USFQ students created a number of CCU in-class discussions on the reality of environmental politics in pristine areas like those visited by the USFQ students. For example, James Clark, a USFQ student, posted photos and wrote about his deep disappointment in what he saw near the Tiputini Biosphere Reserve in Yasuni National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon. While this is classified as one of the most pristine places on the planet, just next to it, local residents are selling endangered species and meat in market. James posted pictures of the market. CCU students, who had only read about Tiputini from their professor’s (Martin) writing, could not fully understand the complexities of development in the Amazon until they read another student’s accounts and saw the photos.
This exchange also impacted the midterm simulation of the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, which is a global initiative on the part of the Ecuadorian government to have the international community contribute to a UN multilateral development fund to keep oil underground in this Amazonian park – the same park that USFQ students visited and about which they blogged and posted photos. Additionally, CCU and USFQ students reviewed the Convention on Biodiversity and the International Convention on Endangered Species, both of which cover issues relevant to the Amazon and the meat market that USFQ students visited. They immediately recognized and made the real world connection between complex international conventions and the difficulty of enforcing them in remote, local areas of developing countries.

Another example can be garnered from two experiences: Dr. Quiroga’s in-person talk to our CCU class on the reading of his article on the Galapagos and the “myth of nature,” and a common reading on Ecuador’s new constitutional approach toward sustainable development, called “buen vivir,” or well-being. Dr. Quiroga explained the complex science of the Galapagos archipelago and the societal challenges of mixing fishing, tourism, and Darwin’s legacy in this fragile environment to our CCU class. Students also read an article on the national and global impacts of an alternative approach to sustainable development, being implemented in Ecuador.
While CCU and USFQ students enthusiastically endorsed a new approach to sustainable development – a concept that has been both controversial and difficult to implement globally – they doubted the ability of Ecuador to actually develop a workable solution to creating a truly sustainable country – meaning protecting the environment and alleviating poverty through the creation of a new economy that melds humanity and nature. CCU students doubted that anyone in Ecuador actually knew this constitutional term existed. In fact, USFQ students saw it all over the country, and posted pictures of it in the Galapagos. Yet USFQ students also noted the ironies of such a concept as they observed increased pollution on the islands and a lack of concern among some residents and tourists for the protection of the fragile archipelago. At the same time, they noted policy changes in the Galapagos toward a new sustainable approach of “buen vivir.” This opened the eyes of CCU students who experienced virtually the deep inconsistencies and complexities of sustainable development and the struggle of local communities to make a living within some of the world’s most prized and pristine ecosystems.

As one would expect, opinions ranged. Clarke’s students were divided, as noted previously, between those who embraced the seminar’s opportunities and those who did not. Vanderbeke’s students were more united in their overall positive assessment. See the sample evaluations below in 35.

Students, who were already critically engaged or were developing critical engagement with the material of the course and the pedagogical method, responded using the vocabulary that had been provided over the course of the term rather than from emotional or situational reactions. The same percentage of students who seemed to have superficial knowledge or engagement with the materials from the course (see #11) remained fairly consistent with results.

Most students saw the course favorably. Some felt that some of the uses of technology were superfluous. Assessment method #4 above helped us adjust throughout the period of the course.

A common understanding of the expectations of students work and a shared view of what was valued as a disciplinary outcome.

Students who participated expressed learning about Jazz, the cultural impact resulting from Jazz and the particular aspects of the Jazz music characteristic in each country.

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.

There were obvious signs that indicated that students acquired intercultural communicative competence (at least to some extent), and more in-depth appreciation of the target culture. ULPGC: The combination of two kinds of assessment, both direct and indirect, will hopefully help us understand students’ ICC capacities, providing an empirical basis for future studies in three areas: tracking development, examining outcomes, and indicating areas for instructional improvement within the field of social justice through an online environment.