

Globally Networked Learning in a University Classroom: A Pilot Program

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Benefits of Study Abroad

- Study abroad brings tremendous benefits to students. Three academic advantages may be quickly singled out.
- First, students who participate in a study abroad program display better overall academic achievement.
- At Texas A&M University, students who study abroad have better graduation rates and have better GPRs when they graduate.

Four-Year Graduation by Study Abroad Flag, Campus-wide

Cohort Year	Study Abroad Flag	Cohort Headcount	Four-Year Graduated	% Four-Year Graduated	Graduation GPR
2008	N	7,262	3,267	44.99%	3.22
	Y	1,638	1,060	64.71%	3.37
2009	N	7,237	3,322	45.90%	3.24
	Y	1,608	1,051	65.36%	3.37
2010	N	7,358	3,455	46.96%	3.26
	Y	1,706	1,083	63.48%	3.37
2011	N	7,206	3,444	47.79%	3.26
	Y	2,023	1,377	68.07%	3.39
2012	N	6,895	3,354	48.64%	3.27
	Y	2,144	1,468	68.47%	3.39
2013	N	8,093	3,933	48.60%	3.27
	Y	2,677	1,830	68.36%	3.39

Benefits of Study Abroad

- Every year the difference in four-year graduation rates for students who do not study abroad and students who do is between 15% and 20%. The patterns exist for five-year and six-year graduation rates and six-year rates, and grade point averages.
- Students who engage in an overseas experience also stay in college. Students at Texas A&M who go on study abroad stay at the college at a rate of more than 10 percent.
- Given Texas A&M's annual freshman class of 10,000, international experiences could result in the retention of about 750 students each year.

One-Year Retention by Study Abroad Flag, Campus-wide

Cohort Year	Study Abroad Flag	Cohort Headcount	One-Year Retained	% One-Year Retained	One-Year End of Term GPR
2008	N	7,262	6,406	88.21%	2.85
	Y	1,638	1,601	97.74%	3.20
2009	N	7,237	6,266	86.58%	2.89
	Y	1,608	1,570	97.64%	3.22
2010	N	7,358	6,388	86.82%	2.92
	Y	1,706	1,657	97.13%	3.20
2011	N	7,206	6,225	86.39%	2.95
	Y	2,023	1,974	97.58%	3.20
2012	N	6,895	5,980	86.73%	2.98
	Y	2,144	2,088	97.39%	3.22
2013	N	8,093	6,975	86.19%	2.88
	Y	2,677	2,603	97.24%	3.03
2014	N	8,804	7,595	86.27%	3.00
	Y	2,443	2,422	99.14%	3.25
2015	N	9,344	8,271	88.52%	3.10
	Y	1,173	1,144	97.53%	3.29
2016	N	9,878	8,893	90.03%	3.16
	Y	367	353	96.19%	3.20

Study Abroad and Employability

- Employers value study abroad experiences, and so students who study abroad have an advantage on the job market.
- Study abroad enhances skill-sets that include:
 - cultural awareness
 - global understanding
 - the ability to work in a diverse environment
 - the means to adapt to change
 - open-mindedness, and
 - a basic knowledge of the world outside a limited view.

Benefits of Study Abroad

- Texas A&M University has been very proactive in promoting study abroad.
- It is currently second in the nation for the number of students who study abroad, eclipsed only by New York University.
- In the 2016–2017 academic year, Texas A&M sent 5,539 students overseas.

Obstacles to Study Abroad

- The cost of higher education is increasingly on the minds of students. Reports show that two-thirds of college students are “food insecure,” that is, they have limited adequate food, and about half are “housing insecure,” that is, they must often move because they cannot pay rent or they cannot afford decent housing.
- Also, some students do not want to miss out on extracurricular activities. Some students simply wish to stay home and enjoy an on-campus experience.

Obstacles to Study Abroad

- Many underrepresented groups and first-generation students do not study abroad. My first-generation students miss contact with their family and their support system, need to travel back and forth on weekends to help supplement family income, and have no history of study abroad in the family.
- On the minds of students and parents is terrorism, especially in Europe, which is the preferred choice most of our students.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- To deal with these impediments to study abroad, and to expand the types of international experiences for students, I developed and implemented collaborative international courses.
- “Collaborative Online International Learning,” or COIL, is a pedagogy that is international and also interactive and virtual; it is best defined as globally networked learning.
- Students from two countries use communication technologies to work on common assignments or on collaborative projects. Faculty in each country work with their own students but also work closely with each other.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- COIL courses may involve semester-long work, or as little as three or four weeks.
- The interaction between students is conducted through technology, such as Skype and Google hangouts, networks like Facebook, and document-sharing programs like Google Docs and email.
- Through such collaborative work, a student can have a meaningful, intense, and high-impact international learning experience without ever leaving her campus.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- In January of 2017 at Texas A&M, I created a pilot program for COIL courses. Selected were two proposals: “Communication Leadership and Conflict Management,” and “Senior Seminar in Classics.”
- The Communication professor collaborated with a professor of law at the University of South Wales.
- For four weeks, the students engaged in legal test cases that involved conflict and mediation.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- The A&M students role-played as CEOs; their Australian peers role-played as corporate lawyers who acted as legal advisers to the CEOs, or as adversaries in arbitration and negotiation talks with the CEOs.
- The students participated in asynchronous email negotiations as well as synchronous Skype mediations.
- The second course involved a classics professor working with a colleague in the Dipartimento di Filologia Classica at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- The A&M course was a seminar for graduating majors in classics and focused on new theoretical approaches to classics, while the Italian students, who were in a masters program, were enrolled in a course on traditional classical philology.
- The Texas A&M students worked separately at the beginning of the course, writing their research papers.
- Later the Neapolitan students joined and formed two-person teams with the American students.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- For two weeks the Italian students were peer reviewers of the Americans' research papers through email, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Common class discussions on the theory and methodology of reception theory were also held through Skype.
- Language was not a problem, as the Italian students are comfortable with English and both professors are fluent in Italian and English.
- The A&M students gained an appreciation for the Italian students' grasp of traditional models of philology, while the Italian students were challenged by the innovativeness of new theoretical approaches to traditional philology.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- Did these courses succeed in providing students with a high-impact international experience?
- First the *Australia/A&M* collaboration.
- Both instructors and students felt that the project accomplished course objectives and learning outcomes.
 - The *Australians* learned the negotiations strategies and tactics that communications majors are taught.
 - The *American* students were introduced to the relationship between law and conflict and negotiations management.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- There were problems because of the time difference, which is 16 hours, and this made real-time, face-to-face conferencing extremely difficult. Thus, students found it easier to use email and Google docs for communication.
- The classics course produced terrific results. Both professors deemed the papers from the team projects of very high quality.
- The papers were collected into a volume entitled *Classics Transformed*. This collection was recently published by Edizioni ETS, a reputable publishing house in Pisa, in its series, Testi e studi di cultura classica.

Collaborative Online International Learning

- I have renewed the COIL program, not only to provide a unique international experience for Liberal Arts students but also to improve the retention of our first-generation students.
- First-generation students are two times more likely to leave college after the first year.
- But international experiences through COIL programs, as assessment data at other universities have proved, increase retention significantly for first-generation freshmen.

Conclusions

- International experiences are critical to student success.
- They result in
 - better retention rates
 - higher grade point averages
 - significantly greater four-year, five-year, and six-year graduation rates.
- International experiences can assume many forms, from a weeklong field trip to an internship to a semester-long or year-long study abroad program.
- Some students hesitate to participate in study abroad. Costs are a big factor, especially for low-income students. First-generation students are reticent about leaving their families. Students and parents have concerns about safety.

Conclusions

- Courses with a collaborative online international learning component (COIL) offer a pedagogically viable alternative to physically leaving a country.
- At minimal cost, students can have an intensive, interactive experience with students of another culture.
- The pilot program at Texas A&M demonstrates that students can have meaningful high-impact learning and acquire intercultural competencies through social media and interactive media platforms.
- Three weeks in Barcelona or Bonn can offer students academic, cultural, and career benefits, but so can three weeks of collaborative online work with Catalan or German students.