

GLOBAL CLASSROOMS Faculty Course Design Interviews

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March 2002

BACKGROUND

As part of the University of Washington (UW) Global Classrooms Program, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) conducted interviews with participating faculty on their course design and development process. The OEA set out to learn about faculty goals and accomplishments; what they learned; what future challenges lay ahead; how programs make use of technology; and what support they have received from the Global Classrooms Program. Moreover, faculty was asked how the program could assist them through the next phase of their program development. The purpose of these on-going faculty conversations is to chronicle program development. These faculty interviews will become part of a larger case study of the Global Classrooms course/program design and development. Interviewees included four faculty members, three graduate and one undergraduate student assistant. Most were interviewed individually but one faculty-graduate student team met with the researcher together. Interviews were conducted in faculty offices and other on-campus locations and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour.

What We Did

The first two interview questions were 1) What have been the major goals of your project/participation to date? and 2) What have you accomplished so far?

Project Goals

Articulation of project goals ranged from broad to specific, and from student-centered to self-evaluative. Faculty goals for students included having them gain an understanding of the cultural variation of academic disciplinary values and getting a sense of a different culture; having students gain experience working on complex research projects; teaching students multicultural life story writing skills and how to interact academically in a multicultural environment.

Personal goals for faculty and student assistants included building upon an interest in international experience and trying out a new pedagogical process that was described by one member as, "plastic, organic, and changing." Others mentioned gaining valuable experience from the Global Classrooms Program that would enable them to more effectively teach undergraduate students. One student assistant commented that he gained valuable research experience, and another mentioned that his goal was to develop a functioning web site and that he got involved with the project because of his interest in the use of technology in education.

Project Accomplishments

When asked about their accomplishments to date, faculty were pleased to report their projects getting "on line" and their "focus in gear." Several commented that they were communicating more frequently with their international partners and one group noted that they were learning how to communicate more effectively cross-culturally. This included learning how to coordinate with a partner university that had a

different system, language, and goals, and reaffirming the value of person-to-person contact. One faculty team was invited to write an article for a Chinese magazine after a weeklong visit to their partner institution. Another faculty member commented on the enthusiastic response she was receiving from her international colleagues. Other faculty and student assistants noted that they were creating syllabi and placing them on-line, making progress with web development, and setting up an interactive email program.

What We Learned

The next interview questions included 3) How have you adapted your vision of the project since it began? and 4) What have you learned?

Adapting the Program Vision

Since the Global Classrooms course design process is very different from faculties' normal practice, comments in this area convey a program taking shape amid change. One faculty member commented that he had not adapted his vision since the project began because he went in with the idea of "developing and exploring." He was, however, surprised by the difficulty UW students experienced working on teams and by all of the UW students' enthusiasm to visit China in June. Another faculty member emphasized the very different working styles of UW students versus their Chinese partners. He went on to comment that the UW program will try not to influence the Chinese in their practice, since it will be interesting to learn by comparing their work.

Other faculty members discussed making changes due to political crises and economic problems in their partner countries. Faculty members commented on the need to be "open and flexible" in response to their partner's situation. For example, the Global Citizen project needed to revise the syllabus to reflect Argentina's recently burgeoning economic crisis. The same group needed to speed up their course development since Argentina's semester begins on March 1, rather than UW's spring quarter start date of April 1.

Lessons Learned

While one member of the International Design team commented that it is too soon to tell what was learned from their Global Classrooms participation, he did express surprise that UW students have had difficulty adapting from structured, individual projects, to the more open teamwork required of the Global Classrooms project. One member also commented that the project is probably too open for UW students and "way too open" for the Chinese students, but another faculty member noted that this would provide a good growth experience for UW students to learn to work independently. One faculty member also noted that the Chinese partners have different goals for the program than their UW counterparts. The Chinese are interested in developing faculty and student exchanges while UW is interested in how to build an international design program.

The Global Citizen group has learned how to coordinate syllabi with their partner and are very satisfied with how their coordination is progressing. They have also identified hurdles such as money, lead time, and the partner country's debt crisis. The group also commented that they have had to make adjustments to their research plans to take Argentina's current history into account, and while they felt that they make a good team, they are now focusing on the question of how to absorb students in the process. The UW team also expressed the feeling that they are contributing more to assist their international counterpart at

the moment than they are receiving. The UW partner is also learning a lot at the moment about the Argentinean debt crisis, and about the country's government and economic policy. However, the UW partners anticipate learning more about each other and themselves through future interactions with their partner institution.

A member of the Life Histories/Eritrea project suggested that one must be "flexible, innovative, creative, and pragmatic" when working with international partnerships. Another student researcher commented that he has had room to work creatively on the project but has received little feedback from their Eritrean colleagues. He also feels that although not all of his work will be used in the course, both he and the faculty have benefited from going through the broader literature review. Another student member commented that he is not sure what he has learned yet since he has been working on things he already knows how to do. However, he's interested to see "how everything plays out."

A Look Forward

The next interview questions included 5) What challenges do you anticipate in the future? 6) How do you plan to use technology to enhance/support collaborative relationships within your project? 7) How has the Global Classrooms project supported your use of technology? and 8) How can the project support you thought the next phase of your program planning and development?

Future Challenges

Future challenges enumerated by faculty included logistical and ideological concerns. Logistical problems included making things "come together in the end and on time," "overcoming inertia in getting the project off the ground," dealing with technical problems involved in digitally transferring information, and problems inherent in asynchronous communication and response delays. Access to books, materials, and computers is a serious concern for some of the international partners. One faculty member is in the process of scanning materials to place them on line and will also be sending photocopies of course literature as a back up. UW undergraduates are also working to get computers donated for one of the Global Classrooms partners. A program that lost one of their partners was concerned with having enough partner students to virtually pair with the UW students.

Several UW faculty members expressed ideological concerns focused on effective communication and exchange. For example, the International Design faculty wanted to know if they would be able to have an impact on their partner's definition of design and mentioned that they will need to work on developing relationships, understanding each other's motives for getting involved in the partnership, and what each has to learn from their involvement. The Global Citizen project team mentioned that they are concerned with getting their students to interact with partners effectively, students' facility with technology, and finding the right projects for student research. Another UW member of the same team expressed concern about whether students in the partner institution will have adequate facility with technology usage to communicate with the partner effectively. Another faculty member commented that their partner is interested in establishing an exchange program and post-graduate study, but suggested that the UW will have to figure out what the UW benefits will be in the long run.

Technology Plans

Several partners mentioned multiple ways that they plan to use technology in their projects. These include teleconferencing, chat rooms, bulletin boards, catalyst tools for commenting on and revising work,

and streaming video. One faculty member commented that they would have to figure out what the role of technology is in their project as they progress. He noted that perhaps technology could be used to ask questions and develop instruction and felt that it could prove very useful in establishing one-on-one communication among students. An International Design team member remarked that China is in the midst of great technological growth and change. Cell phone use is now widespread but China still lacks fixed phone lines which makes it difficult to connect to the Internet. He noted that the program would like to transfer images on the web and communicate electronically between the partner institutions.

Technology Support

There was a wide range of responses from partners regarding how they felt their technology use has been supported by the Global Classrooms Program. Some felt they had received negligible assistance—that they had not received, or did not require, support—while others commented that they would have never attempted this project without the support of the program. Several partners mentioned that they did receive some helpful advice from the Global Classrooms meetings regarding communication, Catalyst tools, and bringing students into the process of setting up chat rooms.

Programmatic Support

Faculty made several suggestions for how the Global Classrooms program can support them through the next phase of program planning and development. One partner would like to have travel funds, translation assistance, visitor housing, and teleconferencing assistance. Moreover, the faculty member would like to have an information network established that would be a resource for faculty and include staff members who are knowledgeable about international exchanges. As well, another faculty member mentioned that there were a lot of start up costs necessary to get the project off the ground and that several teaching assistants were needed.

Several faculty members expressed an interest in sustaining the projects beyond this academic year. One mentioned that she would like to make her course part of her regular teaching load but is not sure how to do this. Another faculty member commented that she would like to institutionalize the project by documenting the planning process and sharing what they have learned with others. She would also like to have the opportunity to debrief with the partner institution once the course is finished. Other comments included the program should make better use of the meeting time and the program would benefit from getting new people involved.

CONCLUSION

As the Global Classrooms projects begin to take shape, faculty appear excited by the prospect of working with their international partners to create an innovative multicultural learning experience for their students. The planning process has also provided a learning experience for many who have had to make adjustments and be flexible in response to a number of challenges such as losing partners, coordinating schedules, coming up with communication strategies, and responding to the political and economic circumstance of partner nations. Technological disparities are also keenly felt by some of the partners who have to search for computer donations, provide back-up hard copies of materials, and figure out what facility partners have with computer use. In all, UW faculty look forward to seeing how their partnerships progress and seem willing to make adjustments as new challenges arise. Several faculty have also mentioned their desire to institutionalize their Global Classrooms projects and would like to document their planning process for future use.