

GLOBAL CLASSROOMS Year Two Faculty Course Design Interviews

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BACKGROUND

As part of the second year of the University of Washington (UW) Global Classrooms Program, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) conducted interviews with newly participating faculty on the course design and development process. The OEA set out to learn about faculty goals and accomplishments; what they learned from Year 1 faculty; how they plan to prepare students for participation, what future challenges lay ahead; how programs make use of technology; and what support they have received from the Global Classrooms Program. Moreover, faculty were 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 and they will become part of a larger case study of the Global Classrooms course/program design and development.

Year 2 courses comprise the following:

The Earth Summit: Program on the Environment (POE) is a collaborative program co-directed by Professors Craig Zumbunnen from the Department of Geography, Johnny Palka in Biological Sciences, and Sandra Chait, Associate Director of the Program on Africa. POE will participate in a yearlong collaboration with the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) in South Africa in which UW students will take an autumn quarter course focusing on sustainable development issues with two scheduled video conferences. This experience will be followed by a winter quarter seminar to prepare a group of UW students to travel to South Africa in the spring where they will engage in independent, faculty-directed research in an aspect of sustainable development.

Democracy in the Context of Globalization: Alternate Models will be taught by Professor Matt Sparke from the UW Department of Geography in collaboration with the University of Auckland, New Zealand. This collaboration will take place within the framework of a required introductory-level course, Introduction to Globalization. UW students in two autumn quarter discussion sections will study New Zealand's experience with Neoliberalism during and will engage in parallel coursework and electronic discussions with University of Auckland students in the spring.

Cross-cultural Design Collaboration: Revitalizing Historic Neighborhoods in Kogane, Matsudo and International District, Seattle is an international design project led by Professor Jeffrey Hou in the UW Department of Landscape Architecture and Associate Professor Isami Kinoshita with the Department of Landscape Architecture at Chiba University in Japan. During the fall, Chiba students will research a neighborhood and translate findings for the course website in preparation for collaboration with UW students via email and website exchanges beginning in January. During the spring charrette, students will have the opportunity to engage in face-to-face collaboration and will present their final work. They will also take part in a similar project based in Seattle's International District.

Communities in Transition: Examining Social Services in East African Communities and Across the Diaspora will be offered by Professor Nancy Farwell in the UW Department of Social Work in partnership with the University of Asmara, Eritrea. The spring quarter course plans to integrate research on population displacement issues in Seattle, horn of Africa, and East Africa with service learning.

METHODS

Interviewees included the five faculty members who designed Global Classrooms courses to be taught during the year two, 2002 – 2003, academic year. All were interviewed individually with the exception of one faculty team who met with the researchers together. Interviews were conducted in faculty offices and other on-campus locations and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. One OEA staff member facilitated the discussion while another took hand-written notes. After all interviews were completed, responses were compared across questions in order to examine themes across faculty experiences.

RESULTS

What We Did

The first two interview questions were 1) Why did you get involved in the Global Classrooms Program and what have been the major goals of your project/participation to date?; and 2) Who is working with you on the project (i.e., graduate students, other faculty)? How is that collaboration going?

Project Goals

Most faculty heard about the Global Classrooms Program through other faculty and graduate students involved in the project and all identified strongly with the program's emphasis on international collaboration. Several faculty discussed their interest in approaching their own research from an international perspective. Although the idea appealed to him upon being invited to participate, one faculty member explained that he has been critical of distance education, fearing that it would turn education into a "for-profit business." He was excited by the prospect of working with distance communities for a better purpose—to learn from differences.

Several faculty members had previous involvement in the countries they will collaborate with and had felt it important to bring these research issues into the UW classrooms. Others expressed prior commitment to internationalizing their curriculum, such as one faculty member who had been working with Eritrea for a long time and reported that she is invested in bring related issues to the UW classroom. Another faculty member felt that the Global Classrooms Program was a great idea and something that the Program on the Environment should be involved in since cultivating international links is important. POE faculty had already been inspired in this area by the World Summit on Sustainability that took place last summer in Johannesburg, South Africa.

One faculty member shared his goal of setting up a model for future international inquiry in his research area, including web design and digital tools and two faculty members discussed the possibility of approaching their courses from an action research perspective—perhaps interviewing students after the experience and publishing findings. Another faculty mentioned the goal of "keeping it together" while plans invariably needed to be shifted.

Current Collaboration

Faculty from three of the four courses mentioned plans to work with a UW graduate student from the country, and sometimes the institution, with which they are partnering. These graduate assistants appeared to be valued participants in the course design and delivery processes. The faculty team for the POE course consisted of one instructor from the partner country. Two faculty were receiving website development assistance from a graduate student who was involved with Global Classrooms last year.

Two faculty members discussed their reasons for selecting their international partners. One explained that he had options to work with other countries but chose a reliable partner who he had worked with before and had known for several years. Another explained that he did not feel he was “pushing the envelope too far with this collaboration,” since students at the partner institution speak English, have the resources of a developed society, and university structures similar to the U.S.

One faculty member discussed the difficulties inherent in working with a partner institution that has a very different academic schedule, saying that he thought of “throwing in the towel” while grappling with quarter scheduling problems. However, scheduling issues were ironed out and he was pleased that the partners quickly agreed on issues to address in the course.

Faculty from two of the courses shared that they had little interaction with their primary international partner. One had been away on sabbatical and another was not responding to email but was having his administrative assistant manage his email communication.

What We Learned

The next interview questions included 3) After looking at the report and attending meetings with former Global Classrooms faculty, how has information from the previous year helped you adapt your vision for the course/project?; 4) How have you restructured your class time and grading rubric to accommodate student collaboration/online communication?; 5) How have you prepared (or plan to prepare) students to be invested in the project?; and 6) Considering that technical collaboration was not entirely successful with previous projects, how are you adapting your communication plans for next year? Have you considered language/translation issues?

Adapting the Program Vision

Faculty reported that they received valuable information and insight in the Global Classrooms meetings, particularly from previous, Year 1, faculty participants. One faculty member stated that participating in the meetings helped him to have “the appropriate level of expectations” for his course. He discussed technical aspects such as making the website easy to use and accessible for both countries, as well as the importance of fostering a personal network between partner students by creating one-on-one partnerships. Another faculty member felt that “listening to other faculty in the Global Classrooms meeting taught [him] a lot.” He became very concerned with technical aspects and solicited website assistance from a Year 1 graduate student participant. He also noted ideological concerns that arose in the meetings. For example, from the Year 1 Eritrea project he learned that there was a danger for students to think that “America knows best,” and stressed that he will work to counteract this notion. One faculty member who described program meetings as “enormously helpful,” gleaned useful information on how to structure her course and form interest groups to guide web interaction. Although she was aware of problems with a previous Global Classrooms course in her partner country, she noted that “concerns

shouldn't preclude programming," although her project will merit special attention to issues of control and access to communications technology. Another faculty member commented on implementing a lesson learned from the previous year's courses: "This program is very different because it's all year, not just one quarter." Another faculty member reported that he gained valuable advice from Global Classrooms staff when he was struggling with designing his course website.

None of the Year 2 faculty members reported that they had adjusted their course grading rubrics to accommodate student collaboration and online communication. However, several faculty felt the structure of their courses contained built-in time and attention to student communication. For example, one faculty member commented that interaction was included in the process component of the course assignments and another stated, "Nothing has changed, really." He explained that course grades would be based on three papers with the third assignment relying on two scheduled 1.5 hour video conferences.

Faculty mentioned a variety of methods they would employ to incorporate partner collaboration in their courses. One faculty member shared that he would require students to work on teams with partners and would require that they place their work on the course website. Another faculty member reported that she will have parallel course content and assignments with the partner institution and will structure email exchange so that students provide information about themselves early on.

Student Preparation & Communication

When asked how they plan to prepare students to be invested in the Global Classrooms course, one faculty member commented that he wanted to take an academic and literate approach in which students view the project as research. He also wanted students to share personal stories in order to create a common bond with the partner students.

One faculty member noted that 15 UW students will participate in the global course with 15 Japanese partner students and plans to have partner institution students come to UW in the spring to participate in a two- to three-day charrette with UW students. For both UW and partner students, the faculty member explained that the experience will be part of their required design studio and not far from what is normally taught. During the fall, Chiba students will research a neighborhood and translate findings for the course website and they will collaborate with UW students beginning in January. Collaboration will occur via email and website exchanges. During the spring charrette, students will have the opportunity to engage in face-to-face collaboration and will present their final work. They will also take part in a similar project based in Seattle's International District.

Another faculty member who is partnering with New Zealand has designed the UW course to be part of a large lecture course by dedicating two sections to preparing students to collaborate with partner students in the spring. He also mentioned that he plans to prepare UW students with readings on the country's experience with Neoliberalism during autumn quarter and parallel readings on Neoliberalism with their partner institution in the spring. During the spring quarter students will go to bulletin boards to participate in structure online discussions with their partners. Students will have prepared for this academic online information exchange by sending electronic pictures and personal information to partners.

Another faculty member believes that having a community services link will attract students to her course. She also plans to cross-list the undergraduate course with the Master's program. She feels confident that UW students will have the necessary background in technology to take part in the online exchange but

expressed concern with their ability to assist Eritrean students with the exchange. However, although there are nine languages spoken in Eritrea, university instruction is in English, so she explained that language is not a major obstacle to communication. She does wonder, however, if university faculty place themselves at risk by taking students to the computer lab—a concern that indicates there may be political obstacles that will hinder course communication between the two institutions.

POE faculty plan to offer a one-credit seminar to UW students to serve as a bridge between autumn and spring quarters. During this time, UW students will think about sustainability topics in their field of interest that they may wish to carry out further research in at UPE in the spring. During autumn quarter, faculty are also preparing a leaflet, orientation plan, and engaging in course discussions, to prepare and attract students to further study in South Africa in the spring.

A Look Forward

The next interview questions included 7) How can the project support you thought the next phase of your program planning and development?; 8) What are the major challenges that you anticipate in the future?; and 9) Would you like to receive assistance/feedback from former GC faculty? Which faculty do you feel you might connect with?

Programmatic Support

When asked about programmatic support that the Global Classrooms Program could provide them, faculty responded with: assistance with continuing their courses in the future; materials, TA/RA, and travel assistance; developing university links that facilitate global projects; meeting with former Global Classrooms students and teaching assistants; and creating publication opportunities.

Several faculty members stressed that they viewed their projects as long-term efforts that they wished to continue in the future and that these relationships could mitigate the “colonial tendency” to “zip in and out” of international partnerships. To this end, one faculty member requested that university links be developed so that he could offer a similar class in the future. He also suggested that the Global Classrooms Program invite other campus contacts involved in international education to the Hewlett meetings and investigate what other universities with Hewlett grants have done. The faculty member further asserted that the UW could do more to consolidate its efforts in global education by pooling resources and working to create a website that would serve as a clearinghouse of information on campus entities engaging in international projects. He also stressed the importance of recording lessons learned from the Global Classrooms experience so that this experience does not “just evaporate” once the grant sunsets.

One faculty member commented that “travel is a big thing” and that it is important to go and see the partner country to compare the experience to the virtual communication exchange. In this way, he explained, you can note gaps in understanding among partners and attempt to overcome these issues. Another faculty member wanted to receive assistance with developing faculty exchanges and travel opportunities with partners. Another faculty member pointed out that travel to Third World countries is more expensive than to developed nations. She felt that her project would be most effective if she was able to travel to her partner university before and after the course, but does not have the funds to make more than one trip.

One faculty member suggested that the Global Classrooms Program could bring former students and teaching assistants to Hewlett meetings in order to talk about their experience with the program

Future Challenges

Future challenges enumerated by Global Classrooms faculty included logistical issues with partner institutions, effective course organization, student preparation, and culturally sensitive communication.

One faculty member expressed that he felt a major challenge would be for him to make student collaboration meaningful. He mentioned that although Japanese partner students are able to use email in English, he was concerned that U.S. students be able to communicate in a culturally appropriate way. He explained that that U.S. students are socialized to be critical about what is taught in studio and to generate ideas and interpretations, while Japanese students are predisposed to operate in more of a master/apprentice relationship with faculty. Furthermore, he noted that there is a danger that Japanese students will follow the lead of U.S. students who are more accustomed to taking control.

Another faculty member expressed concern over carrying out an effective course experience in a mere ten weeks. Her current challenge is to work on ways to link the course with Seattle community organizations and partner country institutions. She also noted that she does not yet know how sophisticated students will be and this complicates planning. One faculty member felt challenged to balance the three components of his Global Classrooms course—the course for UW students at the partner institution, UW research project, and UW students' field experience.

As the Global Classrooms Program evolves, relationships among previous partner institutions also continue to develop. For UW programs that are attempting to link up with an institution that had been involved in Year 1 courses, this history provides opportunity tempered with caution. For example, one faculty member was concerned with how “firm” the partner’s commitment was to the project since she had a bad experience with another department the year prior in which the partnership never came to fruition.

At times, it has been difficult for Global Classrooms faculty to have a realistic idea of their partner situation. One faculty team noted they are not sure who will actually be teaching the course at the partner institution and explained that their partner was not communicative over email and had his assistant answer his email in his stead.

Institutional politics also appear to impact course design and development with partners. While one UW faculty team felt that it would be appropriate to have partner institution faculty mentor individual UW students who are involved in unique projects, they thought that the institution may be financially motivated to advocate for a discrete course offering for UW students at the partner institution.

Faculty Assistance

While Year 2 Global Classrooms faculty appeared knowledgeable about Year 1 courses, challenges, and parallels to their Year 2 course design, they did not appear very concerned with receiving one-on-one assistance from former faculty. Two faculty members mentioned a few Year 1 faculty that they felt they had much in common, but only one mentioned that he would like to receive additional information on their experience with the project. Another faculty member responded that it was “hard to know” which faculty would be helpful to him because “the projects are so different.” He went on to explain that his main concern was his partner’s participation in the project and felt this was “nothing that [UW] faculty can help

with.” However, the same faculty member stressed the importance of a meeting that he attended with Year 1 faculty in the summer, noting that hearing from a visiting Argentinean faculty member and receiving a report on the China International Design trip was helpful.

CONCLUSIONS

As the Global Classrooms Program heads into the second year, faculty have been steadily working to develop their plans and to take the beginning steps for international collaboration this year. The faculty who were interviewed had prior interests in international collaboration and seem to be building on these strengths. Even though immersed in the strategies to carry out the collaboration, faculty are aware that culturally sensitive communication is extremely important for the success of their projects.

Using the Lessons Learned from the first year’s projects, faculty seem to be working toward what is possible and practical, not necessarily accomplishing all they would dream of. This is a satisfying outcome of the program, for learning from others should help year two faculty to attain their goals. The second year faculty find the Global Classrooms meetings helpful and would like to continue to use them to problem-solve with the first year faculty.

The next step in building the Global Classroom case study for year two is conducting focus groups with students. Students from first year projects appreciated the international component of their classes, yet voiced concerns about the additional workload involved with international collaboration and online communication which did not seem to be reflected in the grading rubrics. At the time of these interviews with second year faculty, no one had adjusted course grading scales. Instead, faculty felt they had built in more time for online communication and had planned to create student teams to share the workload. Year two faculty still questioned how to would promote meaningful student collaboration, sometimes in just ten weeks.