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Crisis as Opportunity: Reimagining Global Learning Pathways through New Virtual Collaborations and Open Access During COVID-19

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Abstract

In the spring of 2020, as COVID-19 forced the suspension of most U.S. education abroad programs, study abroad students returned home, summer programs were canceled, and international educators pondered the unlikelihood of resuming fall 2020 study abroad; larger questions about the future of international education and global learning with limited student mobility weighed heavily, Dickinson and Haverford colleges in Pennsylvania and the membership of the Community-based Global Learning Collaborative started reimagining the future of global learning. What drove us was our collective commitment to building just, inclusive and sustainable communities, a spirit of collaboration and a desire to seek out future-forward and innovative opportunities for continued global learning. Around the world, xenophobia and nationalism were on the rise. One of the clearest continuous mechanisms for

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combating those horrors, student international mobility, would cease. It was clear that global educators had to do something, but what? This article is a case study about how we began to answer the question of what we could do. It follows the evolution of our thinking, emergent projects, lessons learned and new collaborative pathways.

Abstract in Italian

Durante il semestre di primavera del 2020, a causa della pandemia da COVID-19 che ha portato alla sospensione della maggior parte dei programmi statunitensi di studio all'estero, gli studenti che partecipavano ad uno di questi programmi all'estero sono tornati a casa, i programmi estivi sono stati cancellati e gli educatori internazionali hanno iniziato a prendere in considerazione l'improbabilità di riprendere le loro attività nell'autunno 2020. Allo stesso tempo, questi stessi educatori hanno iniziato a porsi altre, più grandi, domande sul futuro dell'educazione internazionale in una situazione in cui la mobilità studentesca era fortemente limitata. In tale contesto, i Dickinson e Haverford College (Pennsylvania, USA) e i membri del Community-based Global Learning Collaborative hanno iniziato a immaginare un nuovo futuro per il global learning. Ciò che ci ha guidato è stato un impegno collettivo a costruire comunità giuste, inclusive e sostenibili, uno spirito di collaborazione e il desiderio di cercare opportunità innovative e future per un apprendimento globale continuo. In tutto il mondo, la xenofobia e il nazionalismo erano in aumento. Era impossibile mettere in atto uno dei meccanismi più chiari e continui per combattere tali orrori, cioè la mobilità internazionale degli studenti. Era chiaro che gli educatori globali dovevano fare qualcosa, ma cosa? Questo articolo è un case study su come abbiamo iniziato a rispondere a questa domanda. A seguire, l'evoluzione del nostro pensiero, i progetti che sono emersi, le lezioni apprese e i nuovi percorsi di collaborazione.

Keywords:

Education abroad, Open access, Virtual learning, Interdependence, Sustainability

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, as COVID-19 forced the suspension of most U.S. education abroad programs, study abroad students returned home, summer programs were cancelled, and international educators pondered the unlikelihood of resuming fall 2020 study abroad. Likewise, there were lingering questions about the future of international education and global learning with limited student mobility. Dickinson and Haverford colleges in Pennsylvania and the membership of the Community-based Global Learning Collaborative (the

Collaborative) started reimagining the future of global learning. What drove us was our collective commitment to building just, inclusive and sustainable communities, a spirit of collaboration and a desire to seek out future-forward and innovative opportunities for continued global learning. Around the world, xenophobia and nationalism were on the rise. One of the clearest continuous mechanisms for combating those horrors, student international mobility (Paige, et al, 2009; Murphy, et al 2014), would cease. It was clear that global educators had to do something, but what?

Crisis as Opportunity

This article is a case study about how we began to answer the question of what we could do. It follows the evolution of our thinking, emergent projects, lessons learned and new pathways. It focuses on the benefits of and lessons learned at Dickinson College from contributing to a multi-institutional initiative coordinated through Haverford College and the membership of the Collaborative to develop open-access, online teaching materials—The Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Action Toolkit (Hartman, 2020)—and from teaching a remote summer course. The case study focuses on new external and internal collaborations, on team-teaching and teaching online across 5 countries and 3 time zones and on new global learning pathways at Dickinson and beyond as a result of these experiences.

Open Access- The Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Actions Toolkit

Eric Hartman, the Executive Director of the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship at Haverford College and co-founder and director of the Collaborative, started talking with friends and colleagues about pooling capacities to create an online educational toolkit that would do what many associations and scholars had been urging them to do for years (AAC&U, 2014; Hartman & Kiely 2014; Hartman et al, 2018; Longo & Saltmarsh, 2011; Sobania, 2015; Whitehead, 2015). That is, recognize opportunities for advancing global learning in diverse contexts, including our own home communities. The spread of COVID, followed soon thereafter by mass movements against police violence and global white supremacy, heightened attentiveness to our unavoidable interdependence, everywhere, even - perhaps especially - at home.

The question frequently asked in education abroad conversations, “Do you consider yourself a global citizen?” began to recede away in favor of a more appropriate and pressing query, “How do we better recognize our actual

interdependence, in spite of the many forces attempting to convince us that we might not be interdependent with one another and our ecology?” During the months of April and May of 2020, as this question focused, numerous colleagues rushed in to collaborate on developing related online teaching materials. It was a coalition of the willing, including a range of individuals and institutions.

At the same time, Samantha Brandauer, Associate Provost and Executive Director of the Center for Global Study and Engagement (CGSE) at Dickinson College, was managing the suspension of Dickinson’s spring programs abroad and the subsequent crisis of getting all students home quickly and safely as well as the need to support students’ academic continuity through a pivot to remote course work. The pace and intensity of this work instantly pushed the entire team in the U.S. and abroad in our programs around the world closer together. Communication between us in our various locations increased dramatically as we discussed and supported each other during the ongoing situation. Although a high level of trust in our international collaborations already existed (thanks to directors’ meetings, conferences, campus visits), this phase of regular online meetings contributed to an organic shift in the way we approached collaboration between U.S.-based and international Dickinson colleagues. The uncertainty and stress were weighing on the whole team, and it became evident that we needed a project that was both generative, hopeful and future-forward. Colleagues in the CGSE (in the U.S. and Europe) and in the Center for Sustainability Education saw an opportunity in crisis and readily pounced to build something new in collaboration with colleagues – the toolkit.

Access—The Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Actions Toolkit

The multi-institutional collaboration with the Collaborative to create teaching/learning content to be included in the online open-access *Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Action Toolkit* naturally, and quite simultaneously, expanded to another type of collaboration, the creation of a summer course. At Dickinson, six higher-ed professionals (three based on the U.S. campus, one in France, one in Italy and one in Spain) began a conversation about designing and offering an online course, *One Earth, Multiple Worlds: Engaging Student Action for Global Solidarity and Sustainability*, to students that would touch upon relevant topics at the core of their college’s mission: diversity, equity and inclusion, interdependence and global citizenship, sustainability, activism and social movements. In addition to our diverse locations, we also brought diversity in expertise - international education, language teaching,

intercultural praxis, DEI, community engagement, sustainability and as well as backgrounds as practitioners, scholars and practitioner/scholars. Material for the latter three sets of topics had been explored and developed for the online toolkit so, at that point, designing a new summer course really meant building on something that already existed and creating the necessary framework and syllabus (Grazioli, Carnine & Brandauer, 2020a; Grazioli, Carnine & Brandauer, 2020b; Lyons & Brandauer, 2020, Lyons, Brandauer & Hartman, 2020).

The team comprised those who had created material for the toolkit and other colleagues working both in the U.S. and in Dickinson's European programs in Spain, Italy and France. The driving factor in the success of this collaboration and of the course was the passion and interest that the instructors had not only about their own topics, but also about the other themes taught in the course. Two additional, but equally as important, factors must also be noted: the team members' flexibility, and our keenness to share, negotiate and ultimately learn from the extended cooperation with each other.

With six instructors in this course, a course coordinator was vital to ensure the smooth implementation of the entire course from its preliminary designing stages. A course coordinator was also needed to uphold academic rigor and to guarantee consistency from beginning to end. Finally, the course coordinator would also play the role of connector between one week and the next, between one group of instructors and the following one, thus strengthening the general sense of course continuity.

Such close collaborative way of course designing and teaching did present practical challenges and obstacles for everyone, primarily the fact that the six members of the team-taught course – some of whom were experienced administrators while others were accomplished instructors – had first and foremost to accept to be equal partners in this project. In the survey team members completed at the end of the course, one instructor claimed that the biggest challenge was “to recuse myself of being the lead teacher as I have been in that role much more often.” Therefore, having a course coordinator to mediate between each team member on the one hand and between instructors and students on the other seemed to work really well as it encouraged a more open and inclusive atmosphere.

Another challenge that team members identified in this course where they would take turn in teaching online classes, reviewing students' work and providing feedback, commenting blog posts and simultaneously working with all other members and with the course coordinator throughout the summer

month was to find a good balance between all these different roles and responsibilities. One instructor admitted to occasionally feeling stretched because of the “time commitment necessary to read/review/analyze/develop each source” and because it took “time to do this at scale and be thoughtful and responsive to all their [students’] work.”

With all that in mind, one aspect of our collaboration that was borne out of the necessity to find new meaning and new teaching/learning pathways in a global lockdown situation was precisely that it opened the doors to unexpected results. Particularly, the course content developed thanks to the wide range of expertise of the six higher-ed professionals unified and strengthened the pillars of the college including global education, DEI, sustainability and civic engagement, in a way that had not been done before.

However, given its specific focus and the type of students (the pre-requisite was study abroad or other significant international/intercultural experience), the course presented itself as a movement to action; a concrete step towards understanding what we can all do with our newly acquired information, our intercultural experiences, and our passion for the greater good. Students need some direction in operationalizing their education and beliefs and the ability to reflect on where they are in the world and how they relate to others. This course brought the liberal arts education to the next level, capitalizing on where rising seniors or recent graduates were in their growth and development.

Lessons Learned

Without any doubt, digital technology has opened the door to new forms of instruction, allowing for the creation of completely new methods of course delivery, content design, and thus new ways of engaging students. Most importantly for international education, it has created new ways to collaborate and teach students across continents and time zones. Below are some of the most important “lessons” we learned throughout the process.

Lessons #1: Team Up

Do not be afraid to reach out to colleagues with whom you might create interesting course content. The creative process of designing a new course and of negotiating what each team member can (or cannot) do opens a plethora of possibilities. This is where we can push ourselves to find new meaning in our role as educators; precisely where we can rewrite our mission as mentors.

Lessons #2: Trust Your Team

In a situation where more than one instructor is involved in a single course, trust is of the essence. We must rely on our colleagues' experience and ability to successfully deliver what, as a team, was decided when specific tasks and responsibilities were assigned to each member. Trust is what allows everyone on the team to be at the same level and collectively aim for the same teaching and learning goals.

Lessons #3: Build A Community

At a time when we all had moved to remote classes, our computer screens represent a real barrier and can enhance the impression that there is *us* and *them*. At the post-introductory level (where instruction necessarily takes place in a more unilateral way) located in a digital environment, designing our classes around a group of people who came together to share, discuss and learn (instructors and students alike) helped minimize the impact of this barrier and encourage students' participation.

Lessons #4: Be Inclusive

Inclusion is a process, not a methodology to be applied. In this digital environment, we must not forget that we are all, in different ways, disadvantaged by our inability to interact with each other. Some of us (especially students) might be particularly disadvantaged because of connectivity problems or lack of physical space. Building a community also comes from the awareness that we are all in this together and must support each other.

Lessons #5: Revamp Your Style

Use a wide(r) variety of communication styles and delivery methods. Use different channels for different purposes and be consistent. Open your class up to the real world and try, whenever possible, to help students see the connections between what you teach and what they experience in their daily life. Keep this flow going and assign tasks that are meaningful and real (i.e. that show a strong connection with life outside of class).

Initial Outcomes

Student and Instructor Feedback

In the context of the objectives we set up for this course, we discovered that online can be as effective as in-person meetings. Passion, commitment and

flexibility are key factors in this process. To make this collaboration work we needed to be able to have real time conversations as we asked questions, brainstormed and debated approaches to our topics. Meeting at the intersection of necessity and creativity, we all had ideas and suggestions about how to make it work. Simply put, we had to learn how to work with each other towards achieving common goals. This would not have been possible if we had not exercised empathy and understanding throughout the entire process, both amongst ourselves and towards students.

The sudden move to remote instruction imposed a process of re-thinking of the way content is delivered and of how we engage students. In the digital environment, teachers' role and responsibilities are different (as much as the expectations that are put on students) and available information and communication technologies must be used to assist instructors and promote cooperation between members of the teaching team.

In the final course evaluations, students stated that they benefited from having so many different instructors coming from different backgrounds. One student positively remarked on the balance of teaching and learning throughout the course. Another student commented favorably about our co-teaching model and suggested that having multiple instructors is valuable especially in a situation of online teaching and learning ("It was valuable that this class had multiple instructors, who each had their own experience and expertise. I feel like similar courses set up this way would be valuable in general for courses at Dickinson, especially if courses are taught again online"). The quick pace of the course and plurality of voices helped students maintain focus and interest.

Students also indicated some challenges of this model, such as not being able to get to know each instructor on a deeper level or having to adapt to different teaching styles in a short amount of time, especially in an accelerated course like this one.

From the very beginning, one of our goals was to create a community of people interested in coming together around themes they cared and had something to say about. More so now than ever, our role was that of facilitators, stimulating students' thinking and helping them make connections on the basis of their own personal experience and observations. At the same time, we were also part of this exchange of learning as we not only benefited from the close collaboration among team members, but we also witnessed students making connections between course themes and their own personal experience, and, as a result, observed their growth during the course. Student progress was most

apparent in the high level of academic work generated; from blogs, journals, to mind maps to shared facilitation responsibility, and culminating in a final project. The high quality of students' participation in the summer course is further borne out of the feedback they provided at the end of the four-week period.

- Course participants said they felt they had expanded their self-awareness by exploring the course topics and how they applied to their personal lives.
- They also said that the four modules helped them analyze and understand global issues in a comprehensive manner.

A further confirmation of the effectiveness of our small learning community comes from the feedback we instructors provided at the end of the course to capitalize on our collaboration.

- Instructors noted how resilient students were in spite of the fact they had been quarantined and were facing huge social tumult post George Floyd incident with the subsequent uprising. At the time they took this course (summer 2020), they were observing monumental shifts in their world and remained hopeful, productive and thoughtful.
- One instructor claimed that this collaboration created lasting partnerships and that the course was much more than just teaching together as "We all learned from each other. We all got new ideas and shared our strengths in a welcoming environment."
- Another instructor underlined how international education is intrinsically interdisciplinary and that this course brought to the surface what was already at play, but still latent. Study abroad is not just about the mobility of students but can be a powerful tool towards acquiring meaningful global citizenship and especially, given the current climate in the USA and globally, to spur broader anti-racism education and dialogue.

Students' Final Projects

Inspired by Problem based learning (Duch, Groh, & Allen, 2001), or a way to thrust students into active problem solving and learning roles, around real-world issues, students were challenged with the following question/problem at the beginning of the course: "Think of a wicked problem. Describe something you are passionate about but that you think isn't quite working as it is and it

needs to be changed.” The final project required them to circle back to this initial question, creating a written narrative about the wicked problem. Further, it focused on community-based solutions with which they applied the analytical lenses acquired in the course. Ultimately, students presented a pre-recorded video presentation; a summary of this narrative to share with their instructors and peers.

This project was designed to allow students to reflect holistically on the critical tools they had acquired during the course. It was also intended to offer students the opportunity to create a credible “useful product” that they could use for personal or professional growth (job/internship interviews, civic engagement, research etc...). In these projects, students successfully managed to demonstrate a much deeper level of understanding of their own “wicked problem” than they had shown at the start of the course. In addition, they were able to indicate how the course had supported them in this growth. For instance:

- Ch. connected the historical and contemporary implications of the AIDS epidemic through the themes of identity, civic engagement, interdependence and sustainability. Through class discussions, Ch. realized that HIV/AIDS has highlighted demographic-based inequality both historical and in contemporary times, as it disproportionately affects queer and low-income people, and impoverished people in non-western countries.
- S. said that the themes addressed in this course – interdependence, identity, sustainability, and civic engagement – can help to explain global wicked problems and their local solutions. This course has shown that although there is but one planet earth, it is composed of multiple worlds, spread out over many interdependent communities. Each community has a different identity and positionality influencing positions of power and privilege [...] The realization that individuals have obligations towards other individuals can help in encouraging civic engagement and local action to promote global solutions.
- C. was interested in addressing the problem of overfishing in a meaningful way after studying abroad in Turks and Caicos. She indicated that this course strengthened her idea of what doing so would look like. Understanding the interdependence between South Caicos and the U.S. illustrated the power consumers hold [...] She also claimed that exploring her own identity as well as the cultural identities on South allowed her to better comprehend the tension between fishermen and students or

researchers on the island. S. noted that such insights around positionality could inform future more inclusive communication processes.

New Global Learning Pathways and Next Steps

Moving Forward at Dickinson College

These new collaborations and global learning opportunities have already paved the way for new possibilities for global education at Dickinson. Here are some highlights:

- Creating a new *Washington, DC internship* semester program in partnership with a CET Academic Programs focusing on equity, global solidarity, sustainability and interdependence. The internship and experiential core course invites students to critically examine how national and global issues play out on a local level in the nation's capital and to reflect on how these themes play out in the workplace.
- Building summer study abroad programs for high school students with CET Academic Programs grounded in a hybrid, team-taught course across program locations incorporating toolkit themes of interdependence, solidarity and sustainability as well as examining global issues through the local lens of the host site.
- Teaching and team teaching remotely from our sites abroad – international center staff and faculty abroad are teaching courses in French and Francophone Studies, Italian Studies, Spanish and Portuguese, and Russian Studies. As well as bringing professors and experts from our partner universities and communities abroad into the classroom virtually.
- Rethinking the ways in which we integrate study off campus and our staff and faculty abroad with the curricular and co-curricular on-campus experience before, during and after study abroad. In fall 2020, we incorporated international CGSE center staff and faculty abroad into language learning experiences, including classroom instruction, virtual language tables and some virtual cultural content informed by DEI, sustainability and civic action themes with our program sites abroad. These lead to stronger and more thematic curriculum integration.
- Enhancing collaborations across Dickinson's centers and pillars that weave a thread through global learning, DEI, sustainability and civic action.

- Re-vamping faculty development practices around interdependence, civic responsibility, global citizenship, and sustainability both supporting faculty in their teaching and advising on campus in addition to building out their leadership taking students abroad.

As we reflect on this work, we know that some of it was possible as our duties and responsibilities shifted without students at our sites abroad. COVID-19 has been a big disruptor of higher education and education abroad and as we build back, we realize there may be more limited resources and new challenges ahead. We hope to both keep doing the new and innovative and learning and collaborating together even as the desire to return to “normal” and the high demands of our work creep back in.

Next Steps with the Toolkit

Drawing on the Collaborative as a leading nexus in this work, we initially organized around the commitments of public and participatory scholarship. Although this case study elaborates on course development at Dickinson in a liberal arts college context, the intended scope is much larger. We continue to advance public scholarship as we ensure these toolkit pages are primarily open to all and deliberately designed for public consumption. True to the interdisciplinary and interdependent nature of the teaching approach, we advance participatory construction of these pages because anyone can propose a page, any time.

It was an emergent project from the beginning. We hope it will continue in that way. We have had new page co-construction from other scholars and practitioners. Ideally, the pages will become an ecology through which diverse people, situated around the globe, can connect using diverse forms of technology to engage in shared dialogue about the toolkit’s key questions, ultimately moving us all toward deeper thinking and better doing in respect to co-creating more just, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

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Julie Carnine is director of the Dickinson program in France and contributing faculty at Dickinson's French and Francophone studies department. She served as director for the LIU's Global College in Hangzhou, China until coming to France in 2002. Julia holds a doctorate in Sociology from the University of Toulouse II. She teaches in intercultural programs at the University of Toulouse and conducts research on international student mobility. She is a member of Europe's COST research group and APUAF (Associations of American University Programs in France).

Katie DeGuzman is the Dean and Director for Education Abroad at Dickinson College. Katie holds a master's degree from the University of Florida. She is an IDI Administrator, a member of the Forum on Education Abroad's Financial Models Working Group and NAFSA's Trainer Corps, a Fulbright grantee to Korea and served as co-chair of Diversity Abroad's subcommittee on First Generation/High Need students and on NAFSA's EA Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion.

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Lindsey Lyons is the Assistant Director of the Center for Sustainability Education. Lyons completed her B.S. in biology from Lynchburg College and a M.S. in environmental education from Southern Oregon University. She strives to create greater clarity, commonality and deliberateness of purpose to infuse sustainability across Dickinson's curriculum, co-curricular programs, global education programs, campus life, and operations. Lyons' enjoys sharing best practices for proposing and implementing programs that guide institutions towards positive change.

Nedra Sandiford is the Administrative Director of Dickinson College's study abroad program in Málaga Spain. A native New Yorker, she has been based in Spain for over 10 years. The Dickinson College alumna also holds a master's degree in International Affairs from The New School. Nedra's interests include the role of media in shaping power dynamics in international society, permaculture and sustainability, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

Eric Hartman is lead author of [*Community-Based Global Learning: The Theory and Practice of Ethical Engagement at Home and Abroad*](#). He serves as executive director of the Haverford College Center for Peace and Global Citizenship and occasionally teaches in the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. Eric co-founded both The [Community-based Global Learning Collaborative](#) and the global engagement survey ([GES](#)), initiatives that advance ethical, critical, aspirationally decolonial community-based global learning.