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**NEH White Paper for
“Internationalizing Humanities Education through Globally Networked Learning”**

Submitted by Project Director: Prof. Jon Rubin on July 7, 2010.

For two years prior to receiving this Digital Humanities Start-Up grant, the SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning had been working to develop models and support structures for faculty who were developing globally networked learning environments (GNLEs). These networked learning environments bring cohorts of students from different countries together to collaborate and learn with their peers in a shared online classroom supported by teachers at their local institution. One purpose of a GNLE is to enhance disciplinary learning by bringing a global perspective and framework to the cohorts of students as they interact experientially and collaborate through shared coursework.

Prior to our receiving this start-up grant our efforts were mainly grassroots in nature, and we had never been able to systematically support a group of humanities faculty - who had never before taught online - through the entire developmental process from conception through partnering with an international faculty peer, through the details of online international collaborative course development, to teaching the actual course and finally to assessing their results. The Digital Start-Up grant allowed us to work with three SUNY Purchase College Humanities scholars through this entire process, helping them to find international partners and then working with them as they developed, offered and assessed their courses. This grant has provided an opportunity for us to better understand how to support faculty (and staff) as they adapt existing courses or develop new courses with a partner faculty member in another country. This understanding has resulted in the development of The COIL Faculty Guide for Online International Learning Course Development (version 1.0), which is available through the COIL website (<http://coilcenter.purchase.edu>) and is attached here in the appendix. This white paper will review some of the steps we went through to get to the point where we could create such a guide, highlight some of the issues we encountered along the way, and describe the ways that we adapted to these challenges and learned from them.

Our process began prior to applying for the NEH grant, as we surveyed humanities faculty at Purchase College to see who was interested and technically competent to participate in the project should it be funded. At that time our college did not offer any online courses (other than Jon Rubin’s hybrid Cross Cultural Video Production course, which Professor Rubin managed with almost no technical support from the college), and the survey revealed that most faculty members were unsure of the potential learning curve that would be required to create such a course and even of the ultimate value of online learning. Nevertheless, a few faculty members expressed strong interest at a preliminary organizational meeting and I tentatively selected a group of junior faculty members whom I thought might adapt more easily to online teaching than might older, senior faculty members who may be less comfortable with technology.

The first issue that arose for the project came from within the NEH application process itself. In applying we found that Purchase College's definition of humanities is somewhat different than that of the NEH. One of our most enthusiastic applicants was a journalism professor who wanted to develop a course with a colleague in Prague. Unfortunately, because his course would have a large video production component we learned it would probably not fit the NEH guidelines, so this candidate had to step aside. He was replaced with an equally enthusiastic senior literature and medieval studies professor and we submitted our application.

When we were notified of the grant award we re-contacted our three top candidate faculty to establish course development guidelines and to re-affirm a timeline for our work together. However, it quickly became apparent that two junior faculty members who had been part of our application were now hesitant to move forward. Upon further discussion we learned that both of them were approaching their tenure decisions two years down the road and were concerned that the time this new endeavor might take away from their primary research and teaching could reflect badly on them when this critical review took place. While we argued that initiating innovative new courses should have the opposite effect on their review, we had to agree that our college had not identified such technical and pedagogical innovations as central to receiving tenure, so with some sadness we parted ways. We now understand that for innovations to take root amongst junior faculty such initiatives must become a valued and stated part of the tenure process. This seems crucial to the nurturing of innovation in the digital humanities.

Our search for new candidate faculty led quickly to a senior European history professor and another junior faculty member in social psychology – who was about to go through his tenure review during the very semester he was proposing to offer a challenging online collaboration in the Psychology of Terrorism with a professor and class in Iran! So, although for many junior faculty the standards for tenure may be an obstacle to their innovating – for other less risk-averse faculty members this may not be the case. In any case, we had our three faculty cohort and moved forward into a faculty development phase where we needed to develop partnerships and then define the shared syllabi that would be the basis for the collaborative courses.

In fact, this initial partnering stage seemed to move almost effortlessly forward as both senior faculty members were able to reach out to peers with whom they had earlier worked on research projects and were quickly able to define a suitable focus for their coursework. On the other hand, our junior social psychology professor who had moved so bravely forward ran into a major problem. When the Iranian election occurred last spring all international faculty contacts in Iran were suspended and he found himself with registered Purchase College students – and no partner or students with whom to work! Fortunately, the same industriousness which had led this junior faculty member to locate his erstwhile Iranian partner also led him to another faculty member at Dublin City University and he was able to re-develop his syllabus for an Irish cohort, rather than for an Iranian group. Quite a shift, but both cultures have been very much affected by a history of terrorism.

At this point the COIL team created a developmental timeline for participating faculty members; established a schedule of face-to-face meetings between our staff and the three Purchase faculty members; and a set-up a schedule of online videoconferences for all participants using Flash Meeting software. We also created a Digital Humanities blog that we asked all participants to update regularly as they developed and taught their courses. Because none of the participating faculty had ever taught online before we began this process with a structured introduction to online teaching. Because each faculty member had release time from a course or received some other form of direct support to aid in their professional development we assumed that our participating faculty would be responsible “students” as they got up to speed: Big Mistake.

While the enthusiasm of our cohort was unmistakable, their unwillingness or inability to work on a common schedule in an online modality became equally apparent. We had outlined a loose lesson plan and tried to support the six faculty members as they moved through the different developmental steps that we had outlined. Unfortunately our faculty were each tied so closely to the syllabi from which they were developing their collaborative courses, that they had trouble letting go of the more lecture-oriented approach with which they were familiar. They were interested in the more student-centered and constructivist model that we were presenting, but they could not or would not jump through the hoops that we had put in place to modify and embed activities in their syllabi on the schedule that we had outlined. They were also often caught up in their other courses, in departmental or university politics and processes that ultimately each developed their own courses on their own schedule, sometimes leaving major revisions until weeks or days before the course began. We learned how difficult it can be to manage an extended faculty development process. In retrospect, it is difficult to assess whether imposing a strict timeline at this stage is necessary. Perhaps a concrete commitment of time is required for course development, and this should be indicated at the initial stages of the selection process.

Another aspect of the process that was problematic and which exacerbated course development issues was the difficulty that some administrators had in adjusting to the needs of globally networked courses. For example, the registrar had trouble coming to terms with the idea that a Purchase College course would have students in it who were actually enrolled at universities in Ireland, Turkey or Canada. Deans and registrars are used to having absolute control of class enrollment minimums and were not used to hearing that cancelling a course could lead to an international “incident” as it would have repercussions on a non-Purchase College course abroad. As GNLEs increase in popularity across campuses both nationally and internationally, hopefully there will be less discussion required with administrators in regard to their value and their effect on a college’s image abroad. Until then, however, it is important to familiarize administrators with the course model and the implications, both positive and negative, of administrative decisions regarding the course.

We had argued for smaller class sections of about 15 Purchase College students for faculty teaching such online collaborations - at least for the first time. Each course was therefore offered with their Purchase College enrollment at the lower end of permissible student head count but even so, the participating

faculty felt some pressure about enrollment - in sometimes uncomfortable and unnecessary ways. We learned that administrators who will be overseeing such courses need pragmatic training as much as do the teaching faculty. Nevertheless, despite these developmental difficulties, all three globally networked courses went forward on schedule – and with great success - as measured primarily by anecdotal comments from all six faculty and their students. Below are three short descriptions of these three collaborations, from the faculty in their own words, followed by a few excerpts of student comments about the impact of the course:

Collaboration 1: Psychology of Terrorism/ Introduction to Terrorism (US-Ireland)

“In the Fall of 2009, students at Purchase College, SUNY in the U.S., and students at Dublin City University in Ireland participated in a course on the psychology and politics of terrorism. At Purchase, the course was listed as psychology, and at DCU, as political science. Thus, in addition to being a collaborative, online, and international course, it was also interdisciplinary. Using the Moodle learning management platform, students shared readings, videos, and other course resources. Based on these shared resources, students participated in weekly discussions that engaged them in critical discussions of sensitive topics in the context of terrorism studies. The international aspect of the course provided a particularly rich and compelling element, in that it allowed the discussions to take a more inclusive, comprehensive, and nuanced form.

As the students became increasingly accustomed to the online learning environment, their participation reflected increasing levels of both quality and engagement, with both the course content as well as their peers. Around the midpoint of the semester, they embarked on small group projects where the final product of their collaboration was a wiki that profiled a terrorist group. In this context, students were able to conduct in-depth research, while incorporating a range of resources that they identified over a 6-week period. The final products that were produced reflected the quality of the overall collaborative efforts, and were viewed as a unique and engaging way to foster such a high level of interactivity and interdependence. Overall, the student feedback for the course was overwhelmingly positive both in quantitative terms (based on data collected as part of a regular course evaluation process conducted at Purchase) and also based on qualitative data from both Purchase and DCU students. This data was gathered from responses to questions that asked students to provide critical and constructive feedback about the course, through online responses on the course Moodle page, as well as essays that were incorporated into the final exam of the Purchase students.

Student Comments:

“Working with American students definitely added to my experience. It was an invaluable resource and allowed the class to engage in a productive discussion about terrorism and its implications. It was fundamental to the success of the course. The opportunity to converse with a different culture and the sheer diversity of opinions that we were able to access was a fantastic resource.”

“Collaborating with the students in Ireland enhanced the course. It allowed for me to see terrorism through the eyes of my peers living in another country and experiencing a different culture. The media shapes the way people think whether they want it to or not, the cross cultural aspect of the course allowed us to better analyze terrorism objectively.”

“Overall I really enjoyed this course, I thought it was something completely different and a whole new way of learning which I really enjoyed. It was great that we were encouraged to have our own views no matter what they were and also communicate with each other about these views and question each other. I thoroughly enjoyed this course and would love to engage in further study”

Collaboration 2: Religion and Politics in Europe (US-Turkey)

Students from Purchase College (NY, USA) and Koç University (Istanbul, Turkey) participated in a collaborative project by taking “Religion and Politics in Europe” course. The course started with a conceptual framework to analyze how religious motives were used to justify violence. It continued with a presentation of case studies from different time periods in Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The course was based on in-class and online teaching and group projects. 18 students at Purchase and 15 students at Koç shared the syllabus, course requirements, discussion forums and group projects. Simultaneous online classes were held by using Skype and data projectors in the classrooms every two weeks. Through this method, students had a chance for face to face interaction and followed lectures simultaneously. Using the Moodle learning platform, students shared course readings, lecture notes, narrated power point slides and videos. The Moodle page was useful to students as one of them stated: “I must also say that I really liked the Moodle page. Because through Moodle page we can keep up with readings, and if we want, we can share things with the rest of the class.”

In addition to simultaneous online classes, students participated in online discussion forums and completed two wikis in which groups of students identified religious inclusion, exclusion and dissent in different parts of Europe and the Ottoman Empire. This comparative aspect and application of concepts to analyze religious violence to different cases improved their scope of learning. As one student said: “The collaborative framework of this course changed my ideas of understanding the world around me.”

Overall, student evaluations are highly positive. The following examples of student evaluations reflect this point.

Student Comments

“It was good that we met online to students in the US. It was good because we had a chance for gaining and learning different kinds of information, comparing our staffs and information and establishing empathy for different kind of cultures.”

“After taking this course, I started thinking that the other courses I take are too plain and boring. If I weren’t a senior student, I would definitely take such courses. The reason for this is mainly the online discussions.”

“This collaboration made the course more entertaining and attractive to attend because to be in contact with people overseas and getting their opinion about a subject which contributes to all cultures and people is very interesting.”

Collaboration 3: Medieval Culture and Society: Reading the Pre-Modern Text (US-Canada)

Our course, cross listed as Literature and History and titled Medieval Culture and Society at Purchase and Reading the Pre-Modern Text at McGill, was very successful, both from the point of view of student achievement and its value to us, the instructors. We were connecting two classes of students at rather different levels of experience. My McGill students were a small group (7) “Honours Seminar” (an advanced course which is part of the McGill history “honours” degree program, and is open to graduate students for graduate credit as well), with four undergraduates and three M.A. students. They were, notably, a committed self-selected group with strong history backgrounds, but none of them in early European fields, and only a couple of them had taken a medieval or ancient history course of any kind. The Purchase class were also self-selected and attracted to a course with intensive writing demands, but they were less experienced college students on the whole than the McGill students—five were graduating seniors and three were second-semester sophomores, the rest were juniors whereas all four McGill undergraduates graduated this spring. However, all of the Purchase students had taken at least one medieval course before this one, and several had taken two.

Working closely together, we devised a systematic and demanding series of reading exercises that brought our history-major and literature-major students into the process of scholarly analysis of texts written about 800 years ago. Our larger purpose was to make students self-consciously aware of what it is to “read as a historian” and to “read as a literary critic” and how these related but distinct purposes are achieved. In both our classes, our students did intense and increasingly sophisticated work. In every case, the student left this course a smarter person, with interiorized instruments and strategies for understanding history and culture. We both were struck by the rapid and clearly observable progress that our students made.

The process of collaboration in which we created this course was very close and immensely satisfying to both of us. We discussed the choice of each medieval text, the appropriate scholarly readings to accompany it, and the exact reading exercises for class discussion, as well as the written assignments. The collaboration among the students consisted primarily of their reading and commenting on a Moodle blog, reading each other’s work and using it to further their own. The really explicit collaboration was between the two faculty members and it was ongoing and extensive: the advantages of modern IT are

significant, but we both have to applaud the ordinary telephone for its unfailing and irreplaceable usefulness. We spent hours on the phone during the term, discussing and refining the course, and our students had the full benefit of this deepened, enriched resource, even when they didn't know about it directly. We both would point to this aspect of the COIL project as exceptionally valuable – the possibility for academic engagement with a collaborator in another school, another country, is something that should not be ignored. To be able to work continuously and intensely with a professional colleague to develop an undergraduate course was an invaluable opportunity. We both want to stress the immense value for the teachers in a COIL project of being able to work intensely with a true collaborator at a distance. Our course was extremely successful, judged by any standard [and it demonstrated] the value of international collaboration without a strikingly topical subject to which cross-border interaction is an obvious pedagogical asset.

In Conclusion: Next Steps

In addition to our goal of supporting faculty in engaging this innovative model of teaching, one major achievement that will supported this goal in the future was the development of the **COIL Faculty Guide for Online International Collaborative Course Development**. This comprehensive 30+ page document is designed to help faculty partners gather the tools and information needed to get started. It has been organized around key questions that partner faculty should ask as they proceed with a shared module or shared course development. It begins with some background information about globally networked learning, followed by more specific information to help faculty engage the process, including how to locate a faculty partner, how to gather institutional support and how to negotiate course content with your partner faculty. Within the document, and at its end as an appendix, the key questions previously identified have been collated in a form/worksheet format to facilitate your negotiated module or course development. There are also *COIL Process Suggestions* accompanied by *Stories from the field*, obtained from experienced COIL faculty (including faculty that participated in this project), that elucidate some of the key points in developing and teaching in a globally networked environment. Currently the guide is available on the COIL website (<http://coilcenter.purchase.edu>), and is password protected. To retrieve the password, please contact the project director, Prof. Jon Rubin (jon.rubin@purchase.edu).

In addition to the COIL Faculty Guide as a tangible outcome of this project, another outcome that is still under development is the creation of a comprehensive assessment tool for globally networked courses. This is not a simple matter as each pair of collaborating professors needs to define the goals and outcomes that they hope to achieve from their specific shared course; which may include such areas as intercultural competence in addition to traditional learning outcomes. Though not an identified outcome of the grant project, this integrated assessment tool with data tables will better facilitate evaluation throughout these courses and provide an output that will aid in future course development.

Overall, this project had a major impact on the SUNY COIL Center's mission and on its future. In January of this year (2010), partially based upon the impact of the NEH grant, COIL received a major award¹ from the American Council on Education (ACE) for its innovative approach to enhancing university internationalization through technology. Then in April, based on our success with the NEH grant and other initiatives, SUNY's Vice-Chancellor for Global Affairs, Mitch Leventhal, invited COIL to become part of the new SUNY Global Center in Manhattan. COIL will be moving in September and this change of venue should dramatically expand our role at SUNY and internationally. Most recently, building upon our success with the Digital Start-Up grant, the NEH awarded COIL an Institute in Advanced Topics grant: *Internationalizing Humanities Education Through Globally Networked Learning – Stage Two – Establishing an Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities*. So we thank the NEH for its support so far and we look forward to working with the Digital Humanities Program for another three years.

¹ http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/Technology_Award.htm