Internationalizing the Virtual Classroom

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In late 2020, members of the International Mobility Office (IMO) secured funding from the Government of Canada's *Outbound Student Mobility Pilot Program, designed and administrated by Colleges and Institutes Canada*, in support of Canada's International Education Strategy. What followed has led to significant changes in the way the IMO team approaches their commitment to internationalization. With newfound comfort in the virtual world, we have watched the boundaries of the classroom become more fluid. With great ease, students from here and from there can join in the learning, and dedicated faculty members and interested partners around the world can incorporate new elements of internationalization into their classrooms. Let me tell you a few stories…

Let's play ball… online!
Sometimes, when you put two professors together who are passionate about their subjects, magic can happen. This was the case with Victoria Taylor, program coordinator of Seneca's new Esports Marketing Management (EMK) graduate certificate, and Guillaume Mariani, digital marketing professor from EFAP, L'école des nouveaux métiers de la communication in France. Their collaboration was simple yet effective: to guest lecture to each other's students on topics that would complement their own courses. Victoria lectured about the rise of the esports industry, with Guilluame noting that "many of my French students have asked me, or even begged me, to create such a specialization at EFAP in the last years, you can't even imagine!" Guillaume taught Seneca students about Search Engine Optimization – the 'most important marketing skill of the decade (2020-2030)' as ranked by LinkedIn and Microsoft. While the different time zones created a challenge, both professors and students greatly benefitted from the experience, and the hope is that this simple collaboration can grow into something bigger. "Just an overall fantastic initiative. Although it's common for us professors to have guest speakers, we rarely invite other professors into our classes. By inviting another professor, you are guaranteed to have someone who is confident in the setting and is passionate about teaching," explained Victoria.

What's the Pitch?

Sun-Kyung Yi, professor and program coordinator of Seneca's Documentary Filmmaking Institute (DFI), and Narce Ruiz Guzman, Documentary Production professor and film festival producer from Instituto Technológico de Monterrey in Mexico, decided to connect their classrooms. For seven weeks, documentary film students came together to research and develop story ideas that transcended borders, language, culture, and politics. In their final meetings, student groups pitched their documentary story ideas to industry leaders who provided valuable feedback. The time-commitment to create this Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project for her students was immense, but Sun-Kyung will facilitate this COIL again next year, noting that "International cooperation and collaboration is an essential piece of hands-on learning and experience."

Snakes, and monkeys, and iguanas... oh my!
This winter, program coordinator of Seneca's Veterinary Technician (VTE) program Kirsti Clarida opened up her classroom to an international collaboration with Universidad de Especialidades Espíritu Santo (UEES) and Fundación Proyecto SACHA in Guayaquil, Ecuador. SACHA, a non-profit organization that provides veterinarian services to wild species, showcased their facilities and some of their animal patients. Guest lectures were provided to students at both Seneca and UEES by faculty members Sarah Birch (VTE) and Julian Perez (UEES) who compared the different exotic species in Canada and Ecuador. "Connecting Vet Tech students to UEES through Education Abroad was a fantastic initiative! Students were able to travel virtually for a few short hours and learn how their education could provide opportunities in Ecuador. They had an introduction to the unique biodiversity, research projects, and animal rehabilitation efforts through UEES and SACHA. They were also able to hear how their program is received by others in another part of the world and where their education can lead," says Kirsti. SACHA welcomes VTE students to complete their field placement requirements in Ecuador.

Collaborations, guest speakers, inviting diverse perspectives and connecting classrooms with other classrooms globally… it's a whole new world and Seneca professors are taking advantage! Read more about how international education soared to new heights at Seneca throughout the pandemic, and get in touch with the IMO team if you are interested in adding an international component to your classroom.

View the June 2021 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

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