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AUAS began their first COIL project in 2014. A partner university in Finland and our department were both looking for ways to set up an international collaboration but we could not ask the students to travel. After Jon Rubin presented COIL at AUAS, I pitched the idea of a virtual project to Finland and after one brainstorming session, we came up with a pilot project. After some promotion within the department, we got the green light not only to continue this project (which is now in its 3rd year), but to expand to other projects as well.

Implementation of COIL

Next, we included this format of internationalization of the curriculum, through virtual collaboration, in the policy plans and strategy of the Faculty of Business and Economics where I am based. This step ensured us long term commitment from the management team. After that it was important to share this experience with my colleagues, within the department, but also university-wide. I gave numerous presentations illustrating best practices. This initiative was very successful, since we have grown from 1 COIL project in 2014 to 29 in 2017! Most collaborations are 4 to 6 weeks long.

Importance of a combined bottom-up and top-down approach

In developing this COIL project, I learned the importance of a combined bottom up and top down approach. It's essential to get management support and to formalize COIL targets and methods in policy plans. At the same time, it's important to create a community of COILers and to show evidence of its possibilities, while being honest about its challenges.

Organization

I am at present the only one responsible for managing the COIL project, although I delegate some of the responsibilities to project coordinators, once contact with the partner institution has been made and a COIL project has been designed. Officially, my COIL responsibilities are allocated as 1.5 day per week, but unofficially, I need more time to coordinate this endeavor. Hopefully, this need will be acknowledged so the project can continue to grow.

We develop and sustain international partnerships needed for COIL courses by attending conferences, by organizing international events for our partner network, and by sharing COIL expertise with our partners during staff mobility. We find that exchange in COIL experiences and expertise enrich our partnerships which, in the past, were merely based on student mobility.

Positive Outcomes

After participating in a COIL, course students are more open to the idea of study abroad. For example, after participating in a COIL project with Finland, a one student decided to do a Master in Scandinavia. In a few other cases students have gone on to do a semester abroad. And partnerships formerly based only on mobility are intensified and strengthened by COIL projects. By engaging COIL, three of our institutional exchange partners have become active COIL co-creators. Their students and lecturers collaborate on COIL projects, exchange e-lectures and in two cases have benchmarked their programs.

COIL has provided an embedded way to internationalize the curriculum and enrich the student experience. Preparing students for transferable and employability skills is one of our main tasks and COIL projects enable us to better prepare students for their global careers. Another positive outcome has been that COIL enables us to offer lecturers an international experience without stretching the budget. Even small efforts, like mutual e-lectures or very short COIL projects, motivate lecturers to develop their skills and learn from peers abroad.

Elements of COIL Training Program

To support instructors developing COIL courses, an instructional designer and I have created a training program that runs for 2 afternoons with some preparatory assignments. The program includes the following elements:

- Introduction to intercultural sensitivity (working in a diverse team);
- Connecting with your partner and setting up a COIL module;
- Internationalizing learning outcomes and assessing a virtual collaboration;
- Coaching virtual teams;
- Tips & tricks for collaboration tool; and
- Assessing & grading with an international partner.

One outcome of our COIL work is a hybrid Summer Institute developed with SUNY Ulster Community College. The program consists of a 3-week COIL module (completely online) followed by a 2 week on-campus program.

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