



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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EAST-WEST GAME: A VIRTUAL TIE?

During spring 2000, I received a grant from the International Education Group at Illinois' College of Lake County (CLC) to plan, deliver, and assess a series of workshops to help faculty utilize the Internet to internationalize instruction. Disappointed that the workshops were cancelled due to low enrollments and anticipating that the workshops might be cancelled again during the fall semester, I planned a contingency project that would meet the International Education requirement, impact students directly, and possibly make virtual history.

Planning the Project

My online Introduction to Business course (<http://clconline.clc.cc.il.us/bus121>) offers students three extra-credit discussion opportunities on the course's WebBoard. For eight consecutive semesters, these discussions galvanized online students in an entertaining and educational dynamic. Seeking to refine and expand the online discussions, I decided to plan, facilitate, and assess a multicultural, collaborative project during the fall semester that would connect my online students with students globally.

Locating faculty partners in other countries presented the first of many hurdles. After several unsuccessful online attempts using ePals Classroom Exchange (<http://www.epals.com>). I located a partner at the Telford College of Arts and Technology in the U.K. with help from the co-coordinator of CLC's International Education Group. Thanks to a Polish colleague at Chicago's National-Louis University, I found a second at Poland's Wyzska Szkoła Biznesu/National-Louis University. With the cooperation of a Ukrainian program coordinator in CLC's Department of Continuing Education, the Manager of the Information Technology Center at Zaporozhye State Engineering Academy in the Ukraine completed our faculty foursome. This seemingly endless partner hunt began in March and did not end until October.

Choosing a mutually relevant discussion topic was

equally intriguing. Students at the four schools understood business concepts and spoke English with varying proficiency. While most of my students were taking their first undergraduate business course, Polish students were enrolled in a more advanced Management Strategy course, British students were studying for their Higher Education Diploma, and Ukrainian students appeared to be more computer-oriented. With my colleagues' approval, I selected an Internet-based article about Fairleigh Dickinson University's (FDU) requirement that new students take at least one course a year online and developed seven related discussion questions for my own use.

The discussion questions were: 1) Do you agree with FDU President J. Michael Adams that online learning is a transforming learning tool? 2) Do you agree with FDU President J. Michael Adams that global citizens must be facile with the Internet? 3) Do you agree with Bob Burdick, spokesman for EDUCAUSE, that not being able to talk to a professor after class and not having the peer-learning experience that students get inside a classroom could be drawbacks to online learning? 4) Do you agree with FDU President J. Michael Adams that distance learning, when it's done right, can be as effective as classroom instruction? 5) Should online students pay the same tuition as offline students? 6) Should faculty teaching online be paid the same as faculty teaching offline? and 7) How can faculty verify that their online students, rather than others, have done the assignments they submit? Students were asked to defend their answers.

Facilitating the Discussion

To facilitate discussion, I constructed two spaces on the WebBoard. The first, East-West Discussion, included the FDU article and discussion questions. The second, Café Paradiso, promoted socializing.

East-West Discussion's instructions read: "Hello Onliners! You're about to make virtual history! Students in Poland, the UK, the Ukraine, and the USA are invited to participate in this online discussion, which officially begins on Monday, November 6. Here's how the discus-



sion works: 1. Read the article below, University To Require Online Class. 2. Post your answers to the questions that follow the article. 3. Reply to other students' answers. 4. Each time you post or reply, include your full name and country. The discussion officially begins on Monday, November 6, and ends at midnight, Friday, November 10. A special place/chat room, Café Paradiso, has been constructed for socializing."

Café Paradiso's instructions read: "Hello, Onliners! This place/chat room was constructed and is reserved exclusively for socializing among students in Poland, UK, Ukraine, and USA, who are participating in the East-West Discussion, which officially begins on November 6. Each time you post or reply, please include your full name and country. In order, the Web sites for the students' schools are <http://www.wsb-nlu.edu.pl>, <http://www.tcat.ac.uk>, <http://www.zgia.zp.ua>, and <http://www.clc.cc.il.us>. Have fun!"

To facilitate discussion further, I replied to several students' unexpected posts and e-mails, invited technosavvy students from my traditional sections of Introduction to Business to join the online discussion, and—by popular request—maintained Café Paradiso beyond its scheduled close. Continuing to chat with a Ukrainian student, which began one day in my office at 7:30 a.m. (3:30 p.m. in the Ukraine), in my 8 a.m. traditional section of Introduction to Business, was a special treat for the student, my traditional students, and me.

Assessing the Discussion

Does this *Innovation Abstracts* question the outcome of a game between geographically diverse teams? To the extent that the East-West Discussion included rules, activities, outcomes, and teams, it could be characterized as a game. And, to the extent that 12 U.S. and 17 U.K. students represented west longitude countries, while 14 Polish and 12 Ukrainian students represented east longitude countries, the teams were geographically diverse.

A third space I constructed on the WebBoard and maintained during the week of November 12—Discussion Evaluation—questioned the discussion's outcome: 1) What did you like about the discussion? 2) What did you dislike about the discussion? and 3) What are your suggestions to improve future discussions?

What students liked about the discussion included a Polish student's comment [unabridged]: "Hello Jim!!! I want to tell you how much your idea of East-West discussion helped me yesterday during my oral exam in English. I could spoke with the teacher who examined me about it. My conversation was about my impression and new observations which helped me more clearly

understood different opinions about online learning. I told the teacher that the most beneficial fact from this kind of learning is that we students are less exposed on stress. We do not have to think about meeting face to face with teacher, which always makes students anxiety. We do not feel a fear that we make silly mistakes and the teacher scolds us."

In addition to repeated complaints about limited chat opportunities due to time differences, what students disliked about the discussion was included in a Ukrainian student's comment [unabridged]: "I would like more discussion topics," and a Polish student's comment: "I think that it was great fun connect with learning, but I didn't like some things. These are: students were writing in not this same time and when we wrote something, we had to wait for answer the next day. We had one topic of discussion, but after participates made more." Another Polish student lamented: "What a petty that we cannot see our faces."

Students' suggestions for improving the discussion included this from an international student studying in the U.S. [unabridged]: "I really enjoyed this incredible experience, and history creating discussion. This is kind of web discussions defines new dimensions in learning today's world. Without the virtual discussion it is almost impossible to interact with students around the world, this kind of discussion is very inexpensive and priceless for the education. I have invited several of my friends and family to log in as a guest to the webboard discussion and view what students have to say. Almost all of 'em found it very unique and incredible thing which is revolutionizing this global village."

Finally, a U.S. student captured the sense of the East-West Discussion, which ended in a virtual tie [unabridged]: "I think it was fine just the way it was. Would like to suggest that you let all the news people who are writing stories know about this important event in this classes history! Listening to them talk about money makes me appreciate what I have even more. My husband and I have been thinking about inviting a foreign exchange student to our home next year. If Poland, the Ukraine, or England would like to send one of these students to the U.S., they can look me up!"

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