

International Connections for Business Students: A Review of the X-Culture Project and Highlights from One College's Participation Perspective

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— *Review of* —
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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the first community college participation in a project called 'X-Culture'; a global virtual student team-based international business project. This paper provides an overview of X-Culture's history and project methodologies; presents the pilot group's current results, and gives recommendations for future student project participation. Additionally, the paper introduces higher-education instructors to the X-Culture research database and research opportunities surrounding the X-Culture Project.

Keywords: International Business Education, Global Virtual Teams, X-Culture.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Today's aspiring business professionals live in an increasingly interconnected world. The modern business professional must prepare for the challenges and opportunities that are present in an internationalized business environment, and many colleges prepare students through introducing international business concepts in course curriculum.

Including international business learning outcomes in college business course curriculum can be simple to do. However, translating these learning outcome statements to a successful experiential activity without international travel is where the complexities lie. Within the discipline of business studies, college instructors work diligently to transform these course learning outcomes from statements on a syllabus into meaningful learning outcomes. This pursuit often leaves instructors searching for experiential projects or hands-on learning experiences for students in order to accomplish this goal.

This paper centers on one college's experience in turning learning objectives into positive and impactful learning outcomes for students by participating in X-Culture; a global virtual student collaboration international business project. This paper reviews the implementation of the X-Culture pilot program at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College - the first two-year community college invited to participate in X-Culture. Along with an overview of X-Culture, this paper presents the pilot group's current results; and gives recommendations for future student project participation.

In all past X-Culture seasons (semester based tracks), participating X-Culture students were either; enrolled in undergraduate business courses through four-year institutions, or students enrolled in MBA or masters level of degree programs. (Johnson, 2014)

1.1 An Overview of the United States Community College

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, “community colleges serve almost half of the undergraduate students in the United States, providing open access to postsecondary education, preparing students for transfer to 4-year institutions, providing workforce development and skills training, and offering noncredit programs ranging from English as a second language to skills retraining to community enrichment programs or cultural activities.” (AACCC1)

“Community colleges are the gateway to postsecondary education for many minority, low income, and first-generation postsecondary education students. Community colleges also provide access to education for many nontraditional students, such as adults who are working while enrolled. The average age of a community college student is 29, and two thirds of community college students attend part-time. At the same time, community colleges are not only providing access for adult students, but also serving an increasing number of traditional age and high school students who take specific courses to get ahead in their studies. In fact, half of the students who receive a baccalaureate degree attend community college in the course of their undergraduate studies.” (AACCC2)

1.2 An Overview of the North Carolina Community College System

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) is one of 58 community colleges that is a part of the North Carolina Community College System. The mission of the NCCCS is to ‘open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of N.C. citizens.’ (NC Community Colleges, 2014)

1.3 North Carolina Community College System Business Administration Degree Learning Outcomes

At the NCCCS level, the Business Administration degree program curriculum states “students will be provided with a fundamental knowledge of business functions, processes, and an understanding of business organizations in today’s global economy. Course work includes business concepts such as accounting, business law, economics, management, and marketing. Skills related to the application of these concepts are developed through the study of computer applications, communication, team building, and decision making. Through these skills, students will have a sound business education base for lifelong learning. Graduates are prepared for employment opportunities in government agencies, financial institutions, and large to small business or industry.” (NCCCS1)

1.4 An Overview of Rowan-Cabarrus Community College

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) is an “open-door,” (NCSALL) higher-education institution serving the citizens of Rowan and Cabarrus counties and is one of the 58 members of the North Carolina Community College System. RCCC serves its students through four campus locations in Concord, Kannapolis and Salisbury North Carolina. (RCCC1)

1.5 International Business Course Level Learning Outcomes in All RCCC Business Curriculum

While all North Carolina Community College System courses share a common course catalog with all courses offering the exact same course description, each of the 58 North Carolina Community Colleges develop course learning outcomes at the local, college level to meet the individual college’s community needs. (NCCCS2)

At RCCC all courses offered in the Business, Marketing, and International Business tracks contain at least one course level learning outcome (located in course syllabi) that focuses on international business topics. Through the incorporation of international business course learning outcomes in each

business course in the college catalog, RCCC business curriculum prepares students to succeed in the ever-changing, interconnected, and increasingly internationalized workplace. Our particular concern was how to create an international business collaboration scenario without requiring student travel outside of our two-county service area.

2.0 SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION: INVESTIGATING BUSINESS PROJECTS

In preparing to teach business courses at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College for the spring semester of 2014, RCCC instructor, Karen Lynden, was searching for a experiential learning project that would connect her business students with real-world opportunities that centered on “international business” related learning outcomes.

“Experiential learning is a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting. Experiential learning encompasses a variety of activities including internships, service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other creative and professional work experiences. Well-planned, supervised and assessed experiential learning programs can stimulate academic inquiry by promoting interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development, cultural awareness, leadership, and other professional and intellectual skills.” (University of Colorado Denver, 2014)

Experiential learning helps “prepare students for their chosen careers and reinforce course content and theory...” as they “develop communication skills and self-confidence and strengthen decision-making skills by responding to and solving real world problems and processes.” (Northern Illinois University)

The author was focused on preparing students for the future, which might include working with local organizations that are connected to other organizations which are located outside of the country. Students could find themselves in jobs where a component of job responsibilities is to work with a client in Brazil, or to lead a team project, where team members are located in India and the Philippines. Being able to work through a real-world experience in coursework brings these concepts into application and into the students ‘world.’ In addition to grades and other performance metrics offered by colleges, students that show evidence of excellence through work on special projects may have an edge over other job candidates and may demonstrate superior job performance because of the impact of experiential learning. As stated through Michigan State’s Global Edge resource “... demand continues to grow for individuals who understand the global context of business: from the logistics of international trade and cross-border investments to the cultural and ethical issues that are imbued in the practice of business around the world. By studying international business, you will learn about world cultures and societies, and be challenged to approach issues from different perspectives. These skills are increasingly valuable to employers faced with the challenge of opening and integrating multiple markets and achieving cohesion and collegiality in increasingly diverse workforces.” (Michigan State University)

As noted by Dr. VasTaras (Taras, et al., 2013) “Writing business plans, developing job descriptions, and marketing strategies, analyzing business data... and other activities have helped enhance learning (e.g., Cheney, 2001; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005).” In virtually any business setting the typical challenges within international business dynamics involve communication at a distance; encompassing not only geography and technology, but cultural, linguistic and organizational challenges. These were the dynamics that the author was looking to incorporate into a project for business students at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

Finding real-world opportunities to incorporate international business and collaboration experiences for students can be problematic, particularly community college students. The average age of a

student in the NCCCS is 28 years old (NCCCS3). However, our students can range in age, from 17 to 70 (RCCC2). Anecdotally, we are aware that many of these students are enrolled in classes while also working, being parents, and/or engaged in extended family responsibilities. These time constraints, in addition to financial constraints, make international travel opportunities tied to course learning outcomes difficult to arrange and to execute.

2.1 Discovering the X-Culture Solution

Investigating a number of potential program options was important in finding the best fit for project integration within our business/marketing curriculum. We reviewed several ‘international business simulation’ opportunities for students, listed in Table 1. From which, X-Culture was selected as the solution for the author’s RCCC students.

Table 1: Comparison of Experiential Learning Projects and Games Reviewed at AIB Insights.

| | GMMSO ¹ | GEO ² | Globalview ³ | Global Business Game ⁴ | X-Culture |
|------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Setting | Individuals or teams of students from the same class | Teams of students from the same class | Teams of students from the same class | Teams of students from the same class | Global virtual teams |
| Task | Develop a business plan | Online software simulation of global trade between nations via decisions made by students | Online system with specific steps to complete activities related to analyzing a company and creating an international marketing plan | Web-based business simulation where students market and sell their products in a number of countries. | Develop a business plan for a global company |
| Tools | Specially developed online collaboration platform | Online simulation | Online system | Online simulation | Publically available on-line collaboration tools such as email, Skype, Dropbox, Google Docs, social media |
| Duration | | | | | 7-9 weeks |
| Cost | \$39.95 per student | Free | Variable Price | Variable Price | Free |
| Advantages | Guided learning in business plan development Easy progress monitoring and mentoring by instructors | Competitive spirit Simulates trading environment | Focus of the project is for a real business and students are judged by real world constraints via feedback from company as well as graded by instructor. | Integrative: it allow students to manage all areas of an international firm. | Interaction with foreign students |
| Outcomes | Students learn the steps to creating an international marketing plan. | Students learn the supply and demand issues associated with global trade | Students learn how to analyze information and create a marketing plan using internet based data. WebCT is used to allow communication between teams and instructors | Students learn about functions of an international company ,including manufacturing, marketing, logistics and finance. | Improved course ratings Improved cultural intelligence Reduced perception of inter-group differences and prejudice Networking opportunity |

For details see: 1 Janavaras (2012); 2 Thavikulwat (2012); 3 Alon and Cannon (2000); 4 Wolfe (2002).

Table 1: Comparison of Experiential Learning Projects and Games Reviewed at AIB Insights. (Taras V. , 2012)

(Taras, et al., 2013) shows that the X-Culture project “improves cultural intelligence, international and virtual collaboration competencies, global self-efficacy, increases interest in cross-cultural interactions in participants.”

3.0 X-CULTURE PROJECT

The information in the following section is a summarization of the X-Culture Instructor guidelines. (Taras V. , http://www.x-culture.org/how_it_works_instructors.html)

3.1 Overview

X-Culture (Cross Culture) began in 2010 by UNC-Greensboro Bryan School of Business and Economics college professor, Dr. Vas Taras. The project began when he sent a message through the Academy of International Business seeking an instructor in another country who would be interested in joining students on an international team-based project. The project was focused on providing students the opportunity to experience the challenges and learn best practices of international collaboration, with a focus on international business scenarios. After this first trial, the program continued and expanded. Currently, X-Culture connects about 2,500 students from 80 universities in 40 countries each semester. (Taras, et al., 2013)

Once students successfully complete a readiness test, X-Culture students are randomly assigned to Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). Each team is typically comprised of seven students, representing seven different countries and/or institutions. Students collaborate over a two month period to complete a project with their international team mates. (Taras V. , http://www.x-culture.org/how_it_works_instructors.html)

“The main purpose of the X-Culture project is to provide students with an opportunity to experience first-hand challenges and learn the best practices of international collaboration. Working in cross-cultural teams for several weeks, students develop a business proposal for an international company. The task and the format of teamwork, as well as the collaboration tools used by the teams, are reminiscent of those used in the modern workplace, making the project a very realistic preview of work in corporate global virtual teams.” (Taras V. , <http://www.x-culture.org/training.html>)

3.2 Project Engagement Benefits

The X-Culture project approach offers a strong fit for course learning outcomes connections, while being sensitive to time and financial constraints. In addition to offering students a project grade, there are many features of the X-Culture program that make this model the best fit for RCCC's business student engagement:

- Students participate in developing a multi-country learning project in team setting with students from around the world.
- Students gain the experience of working on a virtual team and practice communication using publically available (online, no cost) tools.
- Student teams have two choices on approaching the business problem:
 - (1) develop a market entry proposal for a company of the team's choice
 - (2) develop a solution to a business challenge presented by X-Culture corporate partners
- No cost to the student to participate in X-Culture.
- There is a \$200 cost per semester for the institution (waived if this cost is a financial barrier for institutional participation).
- X-Culture requires the project account for 20-30% of the course grade for all participating students, which is beneficial in helping motivate all students involved to give a strong effort toward the success of the assignment.
- X-Culture Students who successfully complete the project receive X-Culture Global Collaboration Certificates (provided by Dr. Taras through the University of North Carolina, Greensboro).
- Members are invited to attend special X-Culture activities during the annual Academy of International Business Southeast Conference (*travel not funded by X-Culture*).

- Members of the best teams are invited to present their work at an X-Culture Symposium during the annual Academy of International Business Southeast conference (*travel not funded by X-Culture*).

3.3 Instructor Application

Before the project begins, the interested instructor applies to participate in one of the upcoming semester tracks (early or late track). Notification of acceptance status is sent within 72 hours. Many participating college students are operating under different academic calendars, so offering two tracks per semester permits better alignment with coursework and the project.

Upon acceptance, the instructor is responsible for:

- Completing the X-Culture template to register students.
- Preparing students through the introduction of the X-Culture Student Guide.
- Ensuring that all students under the guidance of the instructor successfully complete the X-Culture Pre-Assessment. Each student must complete the pre-project training and pass a readiness test. This pre-assessment is designed to ensure all students come in prepared, before being placed onto teams.
- Reviewing all project related materials, particularly the Instructor Guide.
- Completing the readiness test successfully.

When the project is underway, the instructor is responsible for:

- Being the liaison between his/her students and X-Culture administration. Technical and project questions should be handled at the instructor level. X-Culture administration is readily available to work one-on-one with any instructor toward solving problems, at their request.

Upon project completion, the instructor is responsible for:

- Providing grades to each of his/her students at the conclusion of the project and sharing the feedback with the X-Culture administrator.
- Distributing X-Culture student certificates.

3.4 Student Selection

The X-Culture project requires a considerable investment of time and skills, so if there are students who cannot fully commit to the project or do not have the necessary skills, it is highly recommended that these students are offered an alternative project. As Dr. Taras stresses in many of the materials provided on the X-Culture (Taras V. , <http://www.x-culture.org>), one “free-rider” (Taras, et al., 2013) (i.e., social loafer) can spoil the experience for the other students that are depending on a rich team collaboration experience.

Once the preparation and steps above have been successfully completed, teams are formed on a random basis and the weekly team milestones begin.

3.5 Project Evaluation

During the project, students complete several on-line surveys. The information is used to evaluate individual and team performance; monitor progress; identify and correct problems; and provide improvements for future X-Culture projects. There are 11 milestone deadlines that students must meet individually through the project timeline.

All participating RCCC students substituted a major project or 20-25% of their scheduled coursework with the X-Culture project. It is suggested by X-Culture guidelines that the project comprises 20-30 % of the course grade. The exact weight of the project and specific team and individual evaluation criteria are set by each instructor and may vary from university to university.

The performance will be evaluated based on the timely completion and quality of the following components: Milestone Completion, Team Report, and Peer Evaluations.

3.5.1 Milestone Completion

All 11 progress updates submitted completely and on-time.

3.5.2 Team Report

The quality of the team report will be evaluated by at least four different instructors. The following aspects of the report are evaluated:

- Accuracy and thoroughness of the company analysis;
- Quality of the market opportunity analysis, including the feasibility of the success criteria;
- Accuracy and thoroughness of the market analysis;
- Feasibility of the suggested market entry mode and staffing policies;
- Feasibility and creativity of the marketing strategy;
- Quality of the arguments in support of the recommendations provided in the report;
- Proper use of external sources and references;
- Clarity of presentation, formatting quality, readability, visual appeal, grammar.

3.5.3 Peer Evaluations

At the end of the project each student will evaluate their teammates with respect to effort, commitment, intellectual contribution, and help writing the report and coordinating team efforts. It is suggested that peer evaluations account for 20-30% of the project grade.

Please note that most of the performance indicators are individual. This means that even though students will be working in a team, individual student grades primarily depends upon personal performance. The only two project components where a student's grade may also be influenced by a team members' performance (or a lack of thereof) is the overall quality of the team report and the team's ability to decide on the company/product and report the choice on-time.

All instructors are required to evaluate the reports from the teams where he/she has students. That is, if an instructor has 10 students in the course, the instructor will have to evaluate 10 reports. If the instructor has 50 students participating, then 50 reports will be evaluated.

3.6 Best Practices

The X-Culture Student Guide and Instructor Guide both provide detailed best practices related to: team formation, communication tips, and suggested technology for virtual communication. This section provides selected summations of a number of strategies for strong performance.

Each week, X-Culture participants complete a progress report. One of the questions in the weekly report will ask if any of the team members are not actively participating. If the majority of the team votes to exclude a team member for a lack of participation, the case will be reviewed by X-Culture administration. If it is confirmed that the student in question is not actively participating, the student will be excluded from the project. It is likely that the excluded team members will be replaced with students from countries where the semester starts later.

It is up to each team to decide how they will communicate with each other. Many of the technology tools suggested for uses are the same or similar to tools that are used by corporate employees and managers around the world. X-Culture encourages teams to try at least some of them for more effective and efficient team communications. Learning to use virtual collaboration tools will help prepare students for future careers.

3.7 Challenges

- Time-Zone differences can hamper communication in global virtual teams. Response delays could create a situation where team members are only able to exchange 2-3 messages in a week. A good solution for this is for teams to have occasional real-time conversations via Skype, Facebook, or Google+ even if not all team members can join the teleconference. Using a scheduling tool such as Doodle.com to find a time that works for everybody can maximize teleconference attendance.
- Often, when teams rely on email-only communication, they end up with dozens of emails that are difficult to follow and are full of redundancies and conflicting information. Therefore, if the team creates a Facebook, Skype, or Google+ group or a Google Docs discussion board, all correspondence is permanently saved entire conversation are easy to review. Additionally, the use of document collaboration tools like Dropbox or Google Docs helps manage document versions.
- Members of global virtual teams come from countries that have different holidays and academic calendars. Encourage students to find out in advance when each team member will be unavailable and plan the workflow accordingly.
- Teams will likely choose English as the working language. For most team members, however, English will not be their first language. This may lead to communication difficulties. The X-Culture Student and Instructor guides provide suggestions to overcome these barriers.
- Students will likely be coming from different cultural backgrounds, thus, values, attitudes, traditions, working and communication styles will be different. Students will also be taught and evaluated by different instructors, so there will likely be different levels of skills and different understanding of the task. It is important that students take the opportunity to learn from each other. The greater number of different ideas a team has during brainstorming, the more likely the team effort will be creative and effective.

4.0 THE RCCC EXPERIENCE: A NEW APPROACH

This section discusses the X-Culture program as relates to connecting with business course learning objectives. In the spring semester 2014, six RCCC students joined the X-Culture Project. RCCC is the first community college accepted into the program.

4.1 Selecting Students

Students were selected to participate based upon enrollment in the instructors classes, and when applicable, past course performance. Student selection criteria for the pilot program are as follows:

For INT110 - International Business (online section), the opportunity was presented to all students in a one week window of time. The information about the X-Culture Opportunity was documented within the online section of "Module One" content within the course. Purposefully, this information was not placed as an announcement or sent as an e-mail through our college systems. This method was chosen to gain the attention of students early in the course that were following the course content sequence; and so if interested, these students were already on-track with academic progress early in the course.

For MKT225 - Marketing Research (online section) and BUS253 - Leadership and Management (online section), students were only given the opportunity to participate based on past positive course performance. Select students based on past course performance were encouraged to participate through on individual instructor e-mail messages.

Also, this opportunity was verbally announced to all students, in two seated courses; BUS137 - Introduction to Management and BUS253 - Leadership and Management.

The author offered this project opportunity in varying degrees to these five course sections. The first priority was offering the project to INT110 students as they had the greatest learning objectives connection to the project. Next, offering the project to students actively attending traditional classes was an opportunity to expand the project to students that would interact with the instructor face-to-face twice a week, increasing the odds that there would be more opportunities to communicate with these students if they needed assistance. Students in the MKT225 and BUS253 online sections were only offered the invitation to participate if they had a past positive course experience with the instructor. This constraint was necessary to maximize the probability of success due to these courses being 100% online, and thus adding of the complexity of another online component for students.

Ideally, 5-15 students would be interested in the project because this is a manageable number for a first-run pilot group.

Across these courses, seven students were strongly interested in the opportunity, and as we approached the orientation for the project, six students made the commitment to begin the project.

Table 2: Participation Breakdown by Course and Format

| Course | Course Format | X-Culture Participants |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| INT110, International Business | 100% online section | 3 Students |
| MKT225, Marketing Research | 100% online section | 1 Students |
| BUS137, Introduction to Management | Traditional, seated | 2 Students |

4.2 Preparing Students

To prepare the students, a workshop was arranged a workshop for the student participants at the college library. The author and librarian, Timothy Hunter, conducted a three-hour workshop encompassing the following topics:

- Project Overview;
- Technology tools;
- Literature Guide Review (<http://libguides.rccc.edu/xculture>);
- APA formatting;
- Informational Literacy and Plagiarism;
- Intercultural Communication Dynamics;
- Project Management and Personal Time Management.

Students gave feedback that this was a very helpful session and got them off to a strong start. In addition, the author partnered with Timothy Hunter to create an online library guide. This guide contained links to all aspects of X-Culture, along with research database information and links that were appropriate for the project scope (Hunter & Lynden, 2014).

4.3 Team Assignments

In being assigned to the second (e.g., late or '1b') track of the X-Culture project, the RCCC cohort joined 2,750 students through 93 universities, within 41 countries, across six continents (Taras V. , <http://www.x-culture.org>).

Each of the RCCC students was placed on separate teams. Across these six teams, 14 universities/colleges were represented. Only one of the teams had more than one member from the United States. The RCCC students collectively worked with students that were located in the following countries: Austria, Brazil, Colombia, Italy, Malaysia, Oman, Peru, Spain, and the United States.

Table 3: The RCCC Student Team Dynamics (students not personally identified in tables).

| <i>RCCC Student</i> | <i>Team Members</i> | <i>Countries Represented</i> | <i>All unique colleges (no college represented more than once on a team)?</i> |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| On Team "1" | 6 students (includes RCCC student member) | Colombia USA-NC Brazil Malaysia | Yes |
| On Team "2" | 6 students (includes RCCC student member) | Colombia Oman USA-NC Italy Malaysia Spain | Yes |
| On Team "3" | 4 students (includes RCCC student member) | Colombia Oman USA-NC Malaysia | Yes |
| On Team "4" | 6 students (includes RCCC student member) | Peru Oman USA-NC Italy Malaysia Spain | Yes |
| On Team "5" | 7 students (includes RCCC student member) | Italy Peru Spain Colombia Oman USA-NC Malaysia | Yes |
| On Team "6" | 6 students (includes RCCC student member) | Colombia Italy Oman USA-NC Spain Austria | Yes |

4.4 RCCC Performance

Table 4: Spring 2014, Late Track (2014-1b) Student Milestone Performance

| Milestone | Deadline | Student Action Item |
|-----------|----------|---|
| 1 | Feb 28 | Pre-project Readiness Test: Each team member must complete the online pre-project training. |
| 2 | March 5 | Establish Contact with Teammates and Meet Your Team: By this date, you are expected to exchange at least a few messages with your teammates and meet your teammates. |
| 3 | March 7 | Select an Organization: By this date, your team must select an organization for international business proposal. |
| 4 | March 14 | Select a Product and/or Service: By this date, your team must decide on the product or service you will be recommending to your client. |
| 5 | March 21 | Select an International Market: By this date, your team must agree on the country where the proposed product/service should be offered. |
| 6 | March 28 | Entry mode: By this date, your team must decide on the market entry mode. |
| 7 | April 4 | Staffing: By this date, your team must decide on how your client should staff operations in the new market. |
| 8 | April 11 | Marketing: By this date, your team must decide on the key elements of the marketing strategy for introducing the proposed product/service in the new market. |
| 9 | April 18 | Team Report DRAFT and Progress Survey: By this date, you must submit a draft of your team report. The report does not have to be fully completed by this date. |
| 10 | April 25 | FINAL Team Report: By this date, one of the team members must submit the final copy of the report on behalf of the team – only one submission per team. |
| 11 | April 28 | Post-project survey: To receive a grade for the project, each student is required to complete the Post-Project survey. |

All students completed each milestone. One student was late reporting information to one milestone. Student data on confidence, motivation, and teamwork dynamics followed the typical pattern Dr. Taras has noted with X-Culture overall past performance. At the time of publication of this report, the final student reports are one week from completion. There will be rich data to review after this milestone, and the students' final survey through X-Culture. Results are expected to be excellent based on the student performance to date.

5.0 THE X-CULTURE DATABASE

When the aforementioned online student surveys are completed they are immediately included in the X-Culture database.

Within each semester 'track' survey data is compiled and shared with instructors, for performance feedback. Each semester upon conclusion of the project, student participant personal information is deleted, and only de-identified data is be used for further research in the X-Culture database.

The data collection has been approved by bodies governing the ethical conduct of research (i.e., the Research Ethics Committee of the Institutional Review Board at the university hosting the project, and equivalent committees in local universities, when required). If a student objects to the use of the data he/she provides during the project for research purposes, he/she can request that the data are completely deleted once the project is over.

Currently, the X-Culture database contains over 1,200 variables, and over 2,500 cases (500 teams) are added to the database every semester (Taras V. , <http://www.x-culture.org/data.html>).

The X-Culture team is always searching for better ways to: evaluate the project, focus on exploring the nature and challenges of cross-cultural collaboration, and study the processes and performance in global virtual teams. In addition, The X-Culture team is interested the effects and effectiveness of experiential learning in general, and International Business education in particular (Taras V. , <http://www.x-culture.org/data.html>).

The X-Culture team is also open to consider incorporating new measures and experimental conditions into the project for studies that may not be directly related to global virtual teams (Taras V. , http://www.x-culture.org/research_side.html).

The research results are also shared with participating students to further inform them about the nature, challenges, and best practices of global virtual collaboration.

Please note, the X-Culture research questions are not limited to the field of International Business. As noted on the website, the data being collected are suitable for addressing research questions in the fields of Management, Psychology, Marketing, Economics, Sociology, and other disciplines.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This multi-cultural project has provided the opportunity for students to work in a deadline driven environment while collaborating across time zones with potential culture, language, and communication barriers. These international collaboration-based learning opportunities could not be reproduced in the traditional course, or an online course (largely attended by students in the two county area), without the X-Culture program dynamics.

The author found X-Culture has created an outstanding opportunity for our students to collaborate with other students taking business courses all around the world, while working on a project that connected directly to course learning outcomes. For this season, being a part of the second round aligned perfectly with the semester schedule. This project began mid-way through the semester, allowing each student to build his/her skills and knowledge and then to proceed into the project. The project is concluding within two weeks of the close of the semester, so not only is X-Culture ideal as a 'final project' in each course, this timing is critical for grade reporting at the college level.

In reviewing the weekly milestone feedback and considering the student/role pairings, our teams were well prepared academically to participate with university students on this project. By allowing students to opt-in, and selecting students based on motivation or past coursework performance, this first pilot group had a very high propensity to complete and succeed.

The project was notably more rigorous for these participating students than the alternate project or coursework assigned to the non-participating students in each course. Being clear about this from the beginning is important, as to set expectations. Students also recognized they were gaining important skills and engaging in a unique academic activity. Additional motivation to persist and complete were provided through continuous instructor communications and personal consultation through the project

timeline. The certificates at the close of the project provide an additional reward, and RCCC will hold an 'award ceremony' at the conclusion of the project. This event, which will be attended by several college officials including the college president, offers additional recognition of the significance of this project. Local press releases have also been planned to help promote the students' success, the X-Culture Program, and RCCC.

While this is a small pilot group and the final results are not available at this time, the weekly milestone survey feedback showed that the students were active on their teams and contributed valuable inputs to their teams. At the conclusion of the project, all participating students will be asked to complete a short instructor provided survey to collect feedback on the support services offered and perceived value of this academic experience as it relates to the course in which the project applied, and beyond. Students will be asked for their recommendations for future implementation at RCCC.

In conclusion, we are finding great value in participating in the X-Culture project; particularly through the students' involvement in the international collaboration exercises. The experience in totality provides an excellent preview of real workplace dynamics, especially at a distance in an international business setting.

To learn more about project participation, please visit the X-Culture website page: <http://www.x-culture.org>

To learn more about research opportunities, please visit the X-Culture website page: http://www.x-culture.org/research_side.html

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