**Building Cultural Competence Virtually: Virtual Exchange Projects**

Interface 2021: Better Together

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The Content

* An interactive, technology-enabled global collaboration to assist students with both building cultural competence and applying course topics
* A student-centered experiential learning opportunity that offers reinforcement in and reflection on course material through a cross cultural lens
* A pedological tool that could be applied to any subject

Advantages

* Discussions offer additional reflection on the course content and topics taught during class
* Students schedule meetings with peer group outside of class that fits their schedules. Meetings are coordinated through and conducted on a variety of technological platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Zoom, etc.) – promotes career readiness
* Moves beyond an exclusively residential collaboration platform to allow collaboration with people around the world on a common interest/topic
* Gain cultural insights and perspectives on topics that cannot be taught in the classroom

Challenges

* A - Finding an international partner(s)
* B - Various levels of engagement and assignment expectations among institutions
* C – Individual set-up (e.g., differences in time zones, semester schedules, customs and courtesies, etc.)

Fixes

* A - Use campus resources or fellow colleagues to find a partner(s)
* B - Using multiple low stakes assignments; inflate the number of group members to account for attrition
* C - Having a Virtual Exchange (VE) plan set up prior to meeting partner; Take VE training at UF

Bonuses

* Through attending the Global Learning Institute and Virtual Exchange Training, I was able to map out a clear plan for the virtual exchange project that included plan B and plan C options.
* Feedback from students revealed that they very much liked the laid-back style reflection videos (e.g., low stakes assignments).
* Students also explained that that they enjoyed learning from peers aboard (e.g., study aboard option virtually) and some continued to keep in touch with their international peers post-project.