

History of Global Partners in Education

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In the US, less than 2% of college students participate in Study Abroad programs (Institute of International Education, American Council on Education, and the US Department of Education). In most other parts of the world, the percentage may be even smaller. There are many reasons for this with financial difficulty being the major factor. There are other contributing factors, such as fear of foreign settings, lack of knowledge in the foreign language, not accustomed to the local foods, fear of the risk of terrorism and infectious diseases, etc. However, while less than 2 % of students go abroad, 100% live in a world that requires them to be global citizens. The knowledge of diverse cultures will help us realize that all people do not think alike, do not have the same perspective, do not share the same values, and do not hold the same priorities.

In 2002, a cross cultural psychologist (Rosina Chia), a computer mediated learning expert (Elmer Poe), and a data network and information security expert (Biwu Yang) at East Carolina University got together to talk about the importance of global knowledge and the lack of opportunities for students to get that knowledge. In general, American students do not spend much time reading newspapers anymore, nor do they watch the evening news or spend much time surfing the web for news, and they know little about what happens outside of the US. Thus we talked about designing a course that would use Internet based technologies available to most countries to bring real time global experience into each partner's own classrooms. If that could be accomplished, the course would be accessible to all students. Our hope is that students can become more globally competent after taking such a course.

With this goal in mind, we designed the Global Understanding course to provide experiences which would prepare students from all cultures, both developed and developing, to be global citizens. After many lively discussions, we agreed on a simple threefold definition of global competence, and our goal for the course was to provide experiences for all three aspects of global competence. The three aspects are: *cognitively* acquire basic knowledge about other cultures; *affectively* become more open-minded towards other cultures; *behaviorally* acquire real time interactive and collaborative experiences with students from other cultures.

We realized that it was important to read body language in any social interaction, especially for cross-cultural social interactions. Thus from the first pilot of the course in 2003 we decided to use real time video conferencing technology (DVC). It was also decided that tools based on regular internet connectivity would be used in order to accommodate the infrastructure in all of our potential partner countries. At East

Carolina University we have a 14 week semester. In the Global Understanding course we divide the semester roughly into three 4-week sessions. For each 4-week session we bring students and faculty from one other country to join our students via DVC to learn about each other's culture. The faculty from each country offers a short lecture on their own culture and after that the emphasis is on students interacting and learning from each other. Considering that it is difficult for some partners to acquire textbooks, or have access to journal articles, we placed all basic information on partner countries on a website managed by ECU. This website also includes English language news sources for our partner countries, and we require our students to read the front page and to know the current situation of their partners. In addition to DVC, we use Internet Relay Chat (IRC) for individual discussion. IRC is also used by the technical assistant assigned to each class on both sides to maintain constant communication to assure that the class will go smoothly.

One important aspect of the partnership is the administrative independence of all partner institutions. From the outset we had wanted to provide opportunities for students all over the world to interact and learn from each other and to collaborate on joint projects. We would not let money get in the way. Thus no money exchanges hands between partners. Students pay local tuition and receive academic credits from their local institutions. Teachers in partner institutions grade their own students' tests and papers and assign their final grades. This enables all partners to maintain their own academic standards and meet their own accreditation criteria.

Also from the beginning we decided to choose a technology that would be feasible for partners in different parts of the world, including the countries that are in the developing world. Dr. Poe and Dr. Yang did much research and finally decided on using H.323 based videoconferencing technology, since H.323 is an international standard. ECU and some partner universities have high quality DVC equipment. For those partners who do not have video equipment, ECU provides consultation on acquiring an inexpensive camera and the videoconferencing software. A plan in case of technical failure was created to ensure continuity of instruction during times of network congestion and low bandwidth. Faculty members are always prepared with additional teaching plans and materials in the case of a complete network failure.

To make the Global Understanding course affordable to partner institutions in developing countries, we selected minimum hardware requirements that should be available to most institutions around the world. Each site needs 10 PCs, one for the video conference software, 8 for IRC chat, and one for the tech helper. Gaining the approval and support of the senior administration is crucial to the success of this course.

The pilot of the Global Understanding Course was conducted in 2003 and based on its success the number and diversity of partners has grown so that as of the spring semester of 2011, ECU offered 9 sections of the course with more than thirty partners in more than 20 countries. In February, 2007, partners from China, Morocco, Peru, Russia and ECU jointly presented a paper at the Association of International Education Administrators Annual Conference in Washington DC. During the conference these partners discussed possible actions to increase the

effectiveness of this project, to get more partners, etc. During these discussions it was decided that we would form an organization. ECU was charged to accomplish this goal.

During May 15-17, 2008 the association of Global Partners in Education (GPE) was established at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. Representatives from China Agricultural University and Shaanxi Normal University, both from China; the University of Malaysia at Terengganu; San Ignacio de Loyola University and ESAN University, both from Peru; Lomonosov Moscow State University from Russia; the Universite Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen from Algeria; the Metropolitana University from Venezuela; the State Medical and Pharmaceutical University from Moldova, and East Carolina University, USA, were attendees in the inauguration. Representatives from the Institute of Leadership and Communications Studies, Morocco; Azad Jammu of Kashmir University, Pakistan; and Universidad Regiomontana, Mexico, joined the conference virtually via videoconference. ECU's Provost Marilyn Sheerer and Senior Associate Provost Austin Bunch served as hosts for the conference. After two days of productive discussions, the participants at ECU signed the GPE charter as Founding Members, and GPE was born. ECU was elected as the first President and also elected to serve as GPE Secretariat for the first five years.

In May 2009, the GPE II Conference was hosted by China Agricultural University in Beijing, China. Twelve partner institutions sent representatives to Beijing, China Cultural University and Shandong University, both from China; ESAN and Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola, both from Peru; University of Jammu, India; Lomonosov Moscow State University, Maritime State University, Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service, all from Russia; University of Malaysia at Terengganu, from Malaysia; Moldova Medical and Pharmaceutical University, from Moldova; Universite Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, from Algeria; and East Carolina University, from USA. At the conference there was a paper presentation section and a section that discussed tasks related to GPE. Many ideas were presented to make GPE more functional and beneficial for partners. All the papers were published in a Proceedings volume produced by CAU. ECU also conducted a virtual workshop to the participants at CAU on technology.

In May, 2010, the GPE III Conference was hosted by San Ignacio de Loyola University in Lima, Peru. Fifteen partner universities from 9 countries sent representatives to Lima. Papers were presented and much of the time was used to discuss GPE related matters. During the conference it was unanimously decided that GPE should have its own journal. An Editorial Board was elected and Dr. Parikshat Singh-Manhas from the University of Jammu, India, was elected the first Editor in Chief for the GPE Journal. Dr. Biwu Yang from ECU would take care of the electronic publishing of GPE Journal. It was also decided at GPE III that each year the Secretariat will be responsible for gathering information, producing, and distributing a GPE Annual Report so we can have a record on file of the major events for all GPE partners.

With the establishment of the GPE, partners began to use it as a vehicle to establish other global activities in addition to the Global Understanding project. Using the same video conference technologies that all partners already have, different kinds of

projects have been developed. For example, there is the ILEP (International Lecture Exchange Project) where partners either jointly lecture to similar discipline classes in both countries or one partner offers lectures to another partner. There is the ICEP (International Course Exchange Project) where two partners jointly teach a class for an entire semester. There is the IREP (International Research Exchange Project) where faculties use video conference technology to discuss ideas and theories and jointly work on papers and grants. The continuous success of these initiatives has impressed the US Department of State so they approached us to partner with them on a Global Climate Change course. In Spring 2010, the US Department of State, Faculdade de Jaguariuna from Brazil, Shandong University from China, University of Jammu from India, and East Carolina University from the US, started a pilot collaborative course on Global Climate Change. It was a success and Universidad Regiomontana from Mexico was added to this course in fall, 2010.

Over a period of 6 years we have witnessed the growth and success of global academic initiatives using technology. We have learned much from our experience and firmly believe using technology is the most cost effective way to rapidly set up a global network of educational partners and to facilitate the internationalizing curriculum. Through GPE, faculty and students within the GPE network have benefitted from opportunities to interact with their peers around the world, including the Global Understanding course, the Global Climate Change course, the ILEP, ICEP and IREP projects. The GPE Journal will provide another venue for the exchange of ideas and inviting more partners to join us.

We believe GPE has helped to accomplish our vision of creating a network where students from a wide range of countries have an opportunity to become global citizens and to function successfully in a global community. We believe that the global academic projects carried out among the GPE partners have indeed made progress on achieving our threefold goal of providing global awareness; enhancing positive global attitude; and acquiring real global interactional experience through collaborative projects. We look forward to developing more partners, exploring different kinds of technologies to make the links and activities better, and exploring innovative ways to strengthen the GPE network, so we can be even better in accomplishing our vision.

About the Authors

Dr. Rosina Chia is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Global Academic Initiatives at East Carolina University. With her Chinese background, she has always been interested in research in the cross-cultural psychology area. She co-developed the ECU Global Climate Change and Global Understanding Projects, the latter includes more than 30 partners in more than 20 countries. This virtual partnership has expanded to other formats of collaboration on the university campus, high schools, and elementary schools. She can be reached at chiaro@ecu.edu.

Dr. Elmer Poe is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Emerging Academic Initiatives at East Carolina University. He has directed a team in the applications of innovative tools and approaches in collaborative intensive, Internet based education in a variety of learning settings. Elmer co-developed virtual world culture courses, such as Global Understanding and the Global Climate Change, that use real time video and collaboration tools to bring students from around the world together on a daily basis. He can be reached at poee@ecu.edu.

Dr. Biwu Yang is a Professor in the Department of Technology Systems, East Carolina University. He teaches in the field of data networking, information technology, and information security. He has served as the key technology person in all aspects of Global Academic Initiatives since its inception, including the Global Understanding project that includes more than 30 partner universities from more than 20 countries, and the Global Climate Change course including Brazil, China, India, Mexico and USA. He can be reached at yangb@ecu.edu.