The Global Classroom in American Politics

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Course: PI3074 American Politics
Level 3: Honours Option in Politics and International Relations
Two 1-hour lectures and one 2-hour tutorial per week

Professor Richardson Dilworth
Department Head, Department of Politics
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Course: PSCI110 American Government
Level 1: Introductory course in Political Science
Two 2-hour lectures/tutorial hybrid per week

The problem:
Only a small proportion of students get to undertake an ‘international experience’ (a semester or year on exchange) for a variety of reasons – prohibitive costs, environmental concerns, physically unable to travel.

The solution?
Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) attempts to bring the international exchange to the student, using a virtual learning environment to share content, classes and assessments, and to build learning networks across institutions.

Rationale
• Learned from experience as an International Exchange tutor the value of exchange experiences.
• Wanted to find ways to extend this opportunity to those who cannot participate in physical exchanges.
• Considered COIL a good fit for my American Politics course.

Plan
• Secured a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship in Philadelphia.
• Identified an enthusiastic COIL partner at Drexel University – Professor Richardson Dilworth.
• Discussed how to merge our individual courses (both were due to be revised).

Development
• ‘Zoomed’ several times to consider options on course content, textbooks and assignments.
• Re-organised our content and decided upon delivery sessions.
• Synchronised lecture times to allow for dual-delivery.

Execution
• Alternated lecture delivery between Aberdeen and Drexel, with opposite cohort joining via Zoom.
• Professor Dilworth provided more depth and detail on specific elements of American Politics.
• Included more comparative elements and an international perspective to my classes.

Evaluation
• Students called for more interaction between cohorts, both in class and in assessments.
• PIR has bid for 2040 funding to equip a lecture theatre to allow for more interactive classes.
• Planned a more significant shared assessment and a shared VLE for 2022 course.

Aberdeen cohort feedback:
“A unique experience – I’ve never had a class like it!”
“It was great to hear an American professor talk about these issues.”

Drexel cohort feedback:
“Nice change to the dynamic in the classroom.”
“Beneficial... gave me perspective on American politics from abroad.”

Shared Formative Assessment:
Email exchange between students paired across cohorts debating the merits of the US Electoral College.
Mirrors The Federalist Papers and letters of Founding Fathers promoting the constitution.

Proposed Summative Assessment:
Cross-institution group work on a briefing document focusing on strengths and weaknesses of one of the US branches of government.