

IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE:

How to Build Virtual Global Learning Programs That Make a Difference



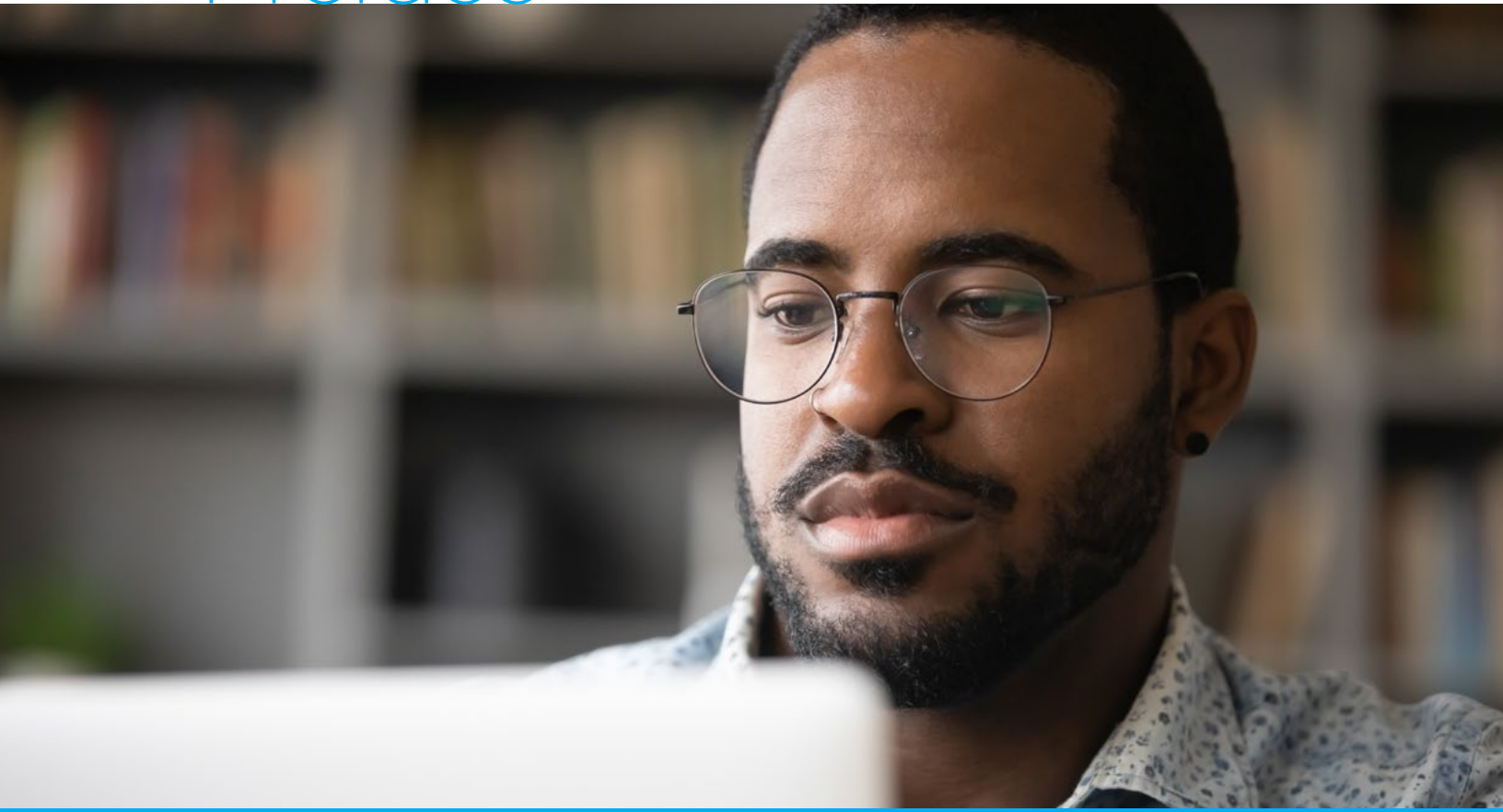
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CONTENTS

Preface	3
3 Reasons to Launch Virtual Programs	4
At DePaul University: 3 Virtual Programs That Work	8
Tips For Creating Virtual Programs	11

Preface



As the pandemic sent far-flung students around the world back to their home institutions or their hometowns in March 2020, study abroad offices grappled with an uncertain future.

Scores of student trips were canceled. And more than a year into the pandemic, it's still uncertain when international travel will be ready to ramp up to its pre-COVID levels—and when students will feel safe traveling abroad again.

As the pandemic bore down, some higher education institutions looked digitally for alternatives, offering virtual study abroad and global exchange programs that aimed to help students build connections with other cultures.



3 REASONS TO LAUNCH VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

AS WE MOVE INTO A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, some may be ready to log off Zoom forever. But digital exchanges aren't simply a replacement when international travel isn't possible, said virtual exchange experts during a **recent Terra Dotta webinar**. They are an opportunity to provide international experiences to a broader range of students and help them develop necessary skills for the 21st century.

...expand opportunities for students at a time when they need new skills and perspectives for the global workforce.

"If your institution is thinking of entering the virtual global learning space just simply because we're still in the midst of the pandemic and as a substitute for traditional mobility, you're not going very far," said GianMario Besana, Associate Provost for Global Engagement and Online Learning at DePaul University in Chicago.

Virtual exchange programs only expand opportunities for students at a time when they need new skills and perspectives for the global workforce.

EQUITY

While study abroad teams have been successful in persuading more diverse students to study abroad, white female students still make up the vast majority of study abroad students. Cost, family responsibilities or expectations and cultural concerns are among the hurdles holding many students back from studying abroad. Virtual programs help pave over some of those objections because they don't include the cost of a plane ticket or require students to be away from family or work responsibilities for an extended period.

With virtual programs, institutions can engage students who never would have pictured themselves participating in a study abroad experience, said John Sunnygard, Associate Provost for Global Learning and International Affairs at Western Kentucky University. It's "creating new opportunities for students to be thinking about international activity."

White and Female: Study Abroad Students in 2018-19

69% **White**

67% **Women**





REASON #

2

EMPLOYMENT

Global and intercultural fluencies are among the top competencies associated with career readiness, according to the **National Association of Colleges and Employers**. And, after a year of video conferencing, global virtual collaboration skills, specifically, may be more important than ever, Besana said. Even before the pandemic, he said, it wasn't unusual for newly hired DePaul graduates to be plunged into a virtual business meeting with participants from around the world.

As students participate in these digital exchanges, they not only gain experience collaborating with people from other cultures, but they also learn how to do it virtually. It's a skill they likely wouldn't gain during a traditional study abroad trip.

"When you're thinking about traditional mobility on one hand and virtual global learning experiences on the other hand, the narrative isn't either or, which one is better, can I do this instead of," Besana said. "It's simply an 'and.' Think about both. Think about the difference in learning outcomes and then engage strategically in both because they serve different purposes."



REASON #

3

NEW PERSPECTIVES

When properly structured, students can become “truly immersed” with peers in other countries as they partner on virtual projects, Besana said. These peer connections often don’t happen in traditional programs, particularly during short-term, faculty-led trips. “Students really work for weeks and weeks and weeks with students of the peer institution,” he said of the digital exchanges. “They get to really experience a difference of perspective.”



AT DEPAUL UNIVERSITY:

3 VIRTUAL PROGRAMS THAT WORK



LONG BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, DePaul began growing its virtual exchange opportunities, and it added more during COVID. *Here are three programs that students can choose from.*

1

Global Learning Experience Projects

Developed through Collaborative Online International Learning, students work together with peers at other institutions on projects that run at least five weeks and end with a deliverable. **Current topics** include race, gender, class and nation with a university in England, sustainability and climate resilience with institutions in France and Brazil and exploring the concept of national parks with a college in Italy.

What is COIL?

COIL stands for Collaborative Online International Learning and was developed at the State University of New York. Its mission is to “cultivate an engaged educational environment by providing the resources, support, and professional network to enable educators and institutions to incorporate virtual engagement opportunities for all students and faculty.” The program provides support to institutions ready to create virtual exchange experiences for their own students.

SOURCE: [SUNY COIL CENTER](#)

BY THE NUMBERS:
**GLOBAL LEARNING
EXPERIENCES AT
DEPAUL**

TOTAL COURSES

200

COURSES A YEAR

50

**STUDENT
PARTICIPANTS**

200



2 Virtual Programs in Study Abroad

When study abroad programs shut down in 2020, DePaul pivoted and turned some into virtual experiences. In one, students focused on work-life balance in the corporate world, comparing American and Spanish points of view. Students met for about a week, had conversations and meetings with different companies around Barcelona and completed a project on the topic.

“It was different, but the faculty was game, the students were game and it ended up being a positive experience to the point where the faculty now are coming back to us saying, ‘Hey, vaccine or no vaccine, travel or no travel, I would like to do it again.’ Several more are planned.

—**GIANMARIO BESANA**
ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR GLOBAL
ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE LEARNING



3 Virtual Global Study

With their sights set on infusing DePaul's existing curriculum with an international perspective, the program helps faculty members connect with experts, academics and others from around the world to provide enrichment as part of existing classes. DePaul's education abroad team helps with logistics and covers speakers' fees. DePaul is piloting these virtual global studies with two courses in spring 2021. A Brazilian music course has brought in dance instructors and included several live performances. The second class on international public relations has tapped PR experts from Latin America. In addition to enriching existing classes, these Virtual Global Study programs also can provide other experiential learning opportunities.

TIPS FOR CREATING VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

WHILE VIRTUAL PROGRAMS may look great in theory, they may also seem difficult to pull off in practice. Here's how DePaul gets faculty and students on board, and how to make sure they don't turn into DIY projects.

Provide motivation

For the Global Exchange Programs, DePaul offers faculty members a mini grant, which usually covers the cost for them to travel to the partner institution or to bring somebody from abroad to DePaul for planning purposes. For faculty, "that financial incentive is a motivator," Besana said. And when faculty members are on board, they typically can attract students to them.

...when faculty members are on board, they typically can attract students to them.

DePaul also has created a **global fluency certificate** for students. Among the certificate's requirements is participating in a traditional study abroad program or a global learning experience course. "This has elevated the visibility of the courses with students who are engaged with the certificate," Besana said.



TIPS FOR CREATING VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Don't try to do it yourself

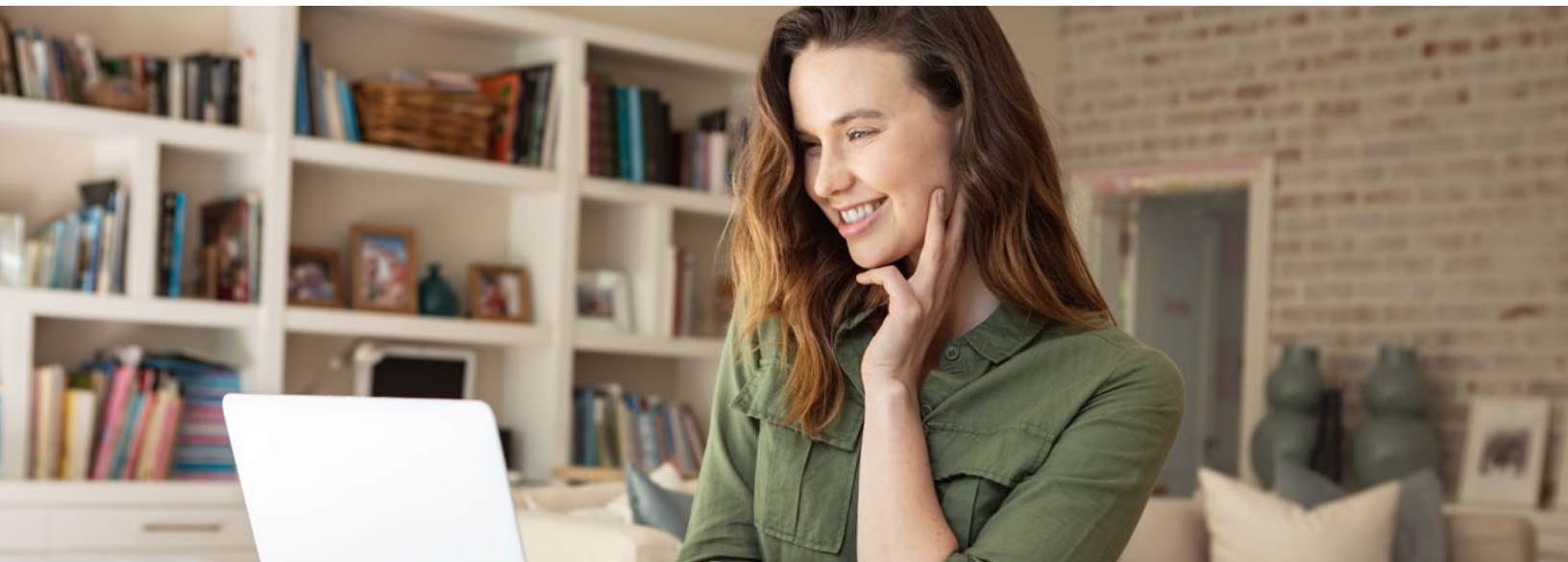
Program managers from DePaul's study abroad team and instructional designers are available to faculty members as they structure new virtual experiences.

“My recommendation is don't try to reinvent the wheel. Look to instructional designers, tech support and other departments across campus who may be able to collaborate on virtual offerings.

—GIANMARIO BESANA

ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR GLOBAL
ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE LEARNING

“Make sure you have a very clear narrative around why you want to do this,” he said. “If you can ‘hook’ the why to the fundamental ethos of the institution, to the current strategic plan, that will open doors...in establishing productive relationships with other stakeholders in the university that aren't necessarily traditional allies of international education and global engagement, but, in this new world, they need to be.”



Learn how Terra Dotta can help you manage your virtual opportunities.

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