

A Virtual International Classroom for Organizational Behavior: Collaborative Online  
International Learning for Business Students in Hawaii and Japan

ABSTRACT

This breakout room session will discuss teaching organizational behavior through collaborative online international learning (COIL). It is intended for instructors interested in teaching COIL or other types of international virtual exchange classes, particularly those involving Japan. The presenters will discuss their six semesters of fully-integrated COIL which combines classes from Japan and Hawaii into one virtual classroom. Teaching activities and course syllabi will be provided to show the collaborative and interactive nature of the course. Teaching evaluations will also be presented to show some of the successes and challenges and in engaging students in intercultural experiences through online instruction.

Keywords:

Collaborative Online International Learning, COIL, Japan, Virtual Exchange

For the past six semesters Kansai Gaidai University (KGU) and the University of Hawaii - West Oahu (UHWO) has taught fully-integrated collaborative online international learning (COIL) to students in Hawaii and Japan. Combining both asynchronous (on-demand video lectures) and synchronous (required Zoom sessions) instruction, students at the two campuses are merged into a single international virtual classroom for learning. Forged before the pandemic, the partnership has taught three different business management courses, including two semesters of organizational behavior. Unlike the majority of COIL instruction which is project-based, the KGU-UHWO fully-integrated COIL is a full semester course team-taught by faculty from each campus.

This breakout room session will discuss the multi-year effort to build a virtual international experience through full-semester COIL. It is intended for instructors interested in teaching COIL or other types of international virtual exchange classes, particularly those involving Japan or business management courses. Special attention and focus will be paid to the two organizational behavior classes (undergraduate) taught during Fall 2021 and Fall 2022. Administrator and faculty perspectives will be offered on the challenges in connecting the two geographically distanced classrooms. A discussion of classroom activities, computer simulations, and group projects will be used to showcase the collaborative and interactive nature of the COIL course. Teaching evaluations from both COIL and non-COIL semesters will also be presented to show evidence of the partnership's success in teaching management topics and in engaging students in intercultural experiences, but the evaluations will also be shown to highlight some of the challenges of teaching virtual exchange.

## Background Literature

Study abroad experiences are considered one of the best ways for students to develop intercultural skills and competences. Each year an estimated 16% of all U.S. baccalaureate students participate in international study abroad (Redden, 2019), but minority students and first-generation college students (Butler, 2015; NAFSA, 2021) are greatly underrepresented, reflecting a lack of accessibility for students with exceptional needs. Virtual mobility (VM), taking online classes at a foreign university, and collaborative online international learning (COIL), merging classes from different countries for interactive learning, use advances in distance learning technologies to expand study abroad experiences to those either unable or unwilling to travel. As a complete transformation of study abroad, VM/COIL overcomes previous obstacles such as students' geographical location, attendance status (part-time), employment status (working professional), financial resources (financial aid), first generation college student status, and family obligation (single parent or family caretaker). Universities can capitalize on the highly flexible, cost-effective, and scalable solutions offered by distance technologies to promote greater access to international and intercultural learning experiences. VM/COIL was also a solution for universities that were forced to shut down in-person study abroad programs due to the COVID outbreak. The American Council on Education (ACE) even identified VM/COIL as essential responses to the COVID pandemic and as the future of international exchanges (American Council on Education, 2020).

COIL has been promoted as an innovative and scalable approach to international learning which can offer an academic study abroad experience without the need for travel (Vahed & Rodriguez, 2022; Nava-Aguirre et al., 2019). Combining online instruction's ability to develop

critical thinking (Lo, Johnson, and Tenorio, 2011) with international faculty and students to promote intercultural contact (Bai, Larimer, and Riner, 2016), COIL seeks to provide a cost-effective alternative to in-person study abroad (Fowler et al., 2014).

Focusing on the three components of pedagogy, intercultural learning, and technology (Asojo et al., 2019), COIL works best when faculty can leverage technology familiar to students to minimize costs and while maximizing students' ability to easily communicate with their international counterparts (Zhang and Pearlman, 2017). Similar to in-person study abroad experiences, COIL pedagogy should seek to maximize engagement between students for greater intercultural development for both formal and informal instruction (Leask, 2009; McBride, 2020). Poor curriculum, malfunctioning technology, or an insufficient focus on intercultural learning can make COIL an unenjoyable experience regardless of the effort given by students.

COIL also introduces several challenges beyond curriculum and instructional design. Logistical obstacles such as language, semester scheduling, time zones and daylight savings, and registration difficulties can complicate attempts to develop COIL programs (Sakuda and Zurcher, 2021). Academic obstacles, particularly differences in academic culture, can lead to vastly different experiences between partner institutions (Ramirez, 2020).

### Session Description

The session will begin with an introduction of the two partner universities to provide context of the different goals, objectives, and academic cultures of the two universities. KGU, located in Osaka, Japan, is recognized as one of Japan's most international campuses. Its institutional strength is internationalization, but prior to COVID its institutional policy banned

online instruction. UHWO, located in Kapolei, Hawaii, is one of the most culturally diverse public universities in America. Its strength is distance education, but its mission as an indigenous-serving institution prioritized the local community at the expense of internationalization. The partnership sought to build upon each institution's strengths to create the first online course for KGU and the first international exchange program for UHWO.

After introducing the partner universities, the session will provide a quick overview of COIL before offering an examination of the KGU-UHWO version of a COIL organizational behavior class. Syllabi and course materials will be offered to audience, and a quick review of the course site via the learning management software will be presented.

Two interactive activities from the class are planned for the session. The first will be an abbreviated version of a class lecture on cultural variation in perception between U.S. and Japanese students in terms of holistic and analytic perception (Masuda and Nisbett, 2021). While the abbreviated lecture does not include much audience interaction, it demonstrates a key cultural difference between students from the two campuses. The second activity will ask the audience to participate in a group activity to solve math problems. Initially announced as an exercise in social loafing, it unknowingly evolves into an exercise in groupthink and conformity. Although not designed as a cross-cultural exercise, students typically recognize different responses to the activity based on U.S. and Japanese culture.

The session will then begin a frank and honest discussion of the difficulties experienced by both faculty and students in the COIL course. Efforts to expand COIL at both campuses have not been successful, and the future of the KGU-UHWO COIL partnership is uncertain. Although

COIL is thriving elsewhere in both the U.S. and Japan, obstacles related to institutions' missions, academic cultures, and staffing are making it difficult to sustain the partnership.

During the discussion on COIL difficulties, the session will present the partnership's preliminary effort to evaluate intercultural competence by using the intercultural sensitivity inventory (ICSI) (Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992). Although not designed for COIL or educational settings, the ICSI was selected because it compares contextual behaviors between the U.S. and Japan in order to assess sensitivity and awareness across the cultural concept of individualism and collectivism. Although still a work in progress, the hope is that demonstrating an increase in intercultural sensitivity through COIL will encourage more institutions to adopt the practice.

The session will conclude with an open forum for participants to ask questions about COIL or prospective collaborations in Japan or Hawaii. It is hoped that Australia's geographic proximity to Japan, as well as the large number of students from Japan studying in Australia, will encourage others faculty to consider COIL for future courses.

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