

December 2006

A Collaborative IS/IT Course Between Universities In México and the United States Using WebCT

Peyton Roden
University of North Texas

Jack Becker
University of North Texas

Juan Laurent
Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

Patrick Pluscht
University of North Texas

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2006>

Recommended Citation

Roden, Peyton; Becker, Jack; Laurent, Juan; and Pluscht, Patrick, "A Collaborative IS/IT Course Between Universities In México and the United States Using WebCT" (2006). *AMCIS 2006 Proceedings*. 21.
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2006/21>

This material is brought to you by the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in AMCIS 2006 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

A Collaborative IS/IT Course Between Universities In México and the United States Using WebCT

Peyton Foster Rodén
University of North Texas
roden@unt.edu

Jack Becker
University of North Texas
becker@unt.edu

Juan Francisco Rosales Laurent
Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México
laurentfrancisco74@yahoo.com.mx

Patrick Pluscht
University of North Texas
pluscht@unt.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the implementation of a generic internet technology course between faculty (and students) at a university campus in the United States and in México. The authors discuss issues surrounding course organization of the course, selection of course content, delivery of the course, logistical issues, and funding. Although the discussion builds on WebCT Vista, the course development is consistent with any web-based course between universities in the two countries.

Keywords:

Connecting the Americas, Mexico, WebCT, Distance Learning, Collaborative Technology

INTRODUCTION

Hira notes that education is "... fast becoming a global business, following the trends of other industries..." (Hira, 2003, p. 911). This expanding global business has engendered several different models for delivering course content internationally. Irrespective of the model, the global nature of the new business and availability of course content on the web make almost any model a competitor to traditional universities. (Hanna, 1998) Although evidence suggests (Wilson, 2001) that cultural discontinuities affect learning effectiveness, this paper takes as its starting point the model that a cross-cultural course in IS/IT is successfully developed and offered within the framework of the traditional university setting. The course and faculty enrichment associated with collaborative international teaching and learning surpasses the difficult issues surrounding this model of course delivery.

Bates and Escamilla de los Santos (1997) note that a schism exists between the potential of web-based learning and the practical results. They note that for the reality to meet expectations, the course needs to have well-developed information technology infrastructures, to develop curricula that transcend local cultural and language barriers, and to provide high quality instructor-learner support services. They lament that "... there are few, if any, guidelines or precedents to follow." (Bates, et. al., 1997, p. 1) This paper is a direct response to their lament with specific application to IS/IT courses. It summarizes procedures for faculty to undertake when implementing a collaborative course between universities in México and in the United States in order to maximize the successful implementation of such a course. The course is web-based supplemented with video-conferencing lectures and a visit by one of the groups to the campus of the other group.

To keep the discussion straight-forward, we presume that the U.S. students (estudiantes estadounidenses) and instructor as part of the course will visit the Mexican university campus for the final week to share a cultural-professional experience. While in México, the U.S. students will attend classes with their Mexican counterparts, visit IT companies in and around the locale of the Mexican university, stay with Mexican families, and study Spanish taught by the faculty at the Mexican university at whatever level is appropriate to the visiting students. The protocol that we present here is appropriate for an all web-based, teleconference course by omitting the campus visit during the final week.

A project to develop an IT course between two international universities requires facilities, financial support, and faculty, staff, and administrative commitment. The structure of the course that we outline here involves a course jointly taught by Mexican and U.S. instructors to Mexican and U.S. students, the use of web-based assignments, video-conference delivery of content, mentoring between the two groups of students, and finally an international experience on the Mexican campus.

BENEFITS OF TEACHING A MULTICULTURAL, TRANS-NATIONAL COURSE

A collaborative course taught internationally offers benefits to students and faculty. Feinberg and Vinaja (2002) found that two motivators drive faculty to participate in multicultural international courses: satisfaction/enjoyment and a desire to keep up with technology. Anecdotal evidence supports their empirical results. We have noted that faculty participating in such a course learn the policies and procedures associated with foreign IS/IT programs and will enhance the ability to work with foreign professional and staff. Learning to work with foreign partners is necessary in a world in which political borders have been compressed in both time and distance, challenging the global firm. Although often painful, learning to work in different cultures expands the faculty member's personal, social, and professional horizons.

Students in such a course benefit for many or the same reasons as does the instructor. However, the student is receiving these benefits at the start of her IS/IT career, and so should be able to take greater advantage over her working life.

ORGANIZATION

Each university needs an infrastructure in web-based teaching, teleconferencing, and international education. It may well be that overcoming problems with the IT architecture may be more difficult than overcoming language problems. That is because the language issue will be unique to each group of students and so can be solved by each instructor dealing with her target students. Each instructor will prepare material for her student.

COURSE CONTENT

The course we describe is a three-week, blended, Maymester course of three semester hours. Students and instructors will do the heavy lifting during the first two weeks of class via video conferencing and the web. By that, we mean that most of the material and assessment will be completed during this period. The discussion explains the process.

1. Textbook.

Although we are convinced that the textbook and materials should be developed by one (or jointly by both) of the instructors, that may not be feasible. In that case, the instructors must should a textbook available in each language.

There are Spanish translations of Running Excel 2002 and of Running Access 2002 published by Microsoft Press: Guía Completa de Excel 2002 and Guía Completa de Access 2002. The translations are done in Spain by McGraw-Hill. Translations are available of Excel 2003 Step by Step and of Access 2003 Step by Step. In Spanish they are Excel 2003 Paso a Paso and Access 2003 Paso a Paso. As a general rule, McGraw-Hill is the strongest for Spanish translations of IT books.

2. Course Delivery

Video Conference.

Scheduled class time will be coordinated between the two campuses because the simultaneous classes will be taught jointly. Each instructor will be responsible for a part of each class. Sessions require preparation and distribution of the lecture material in advance in a format such as MicroSoft Power Point or Corel Presentations. The material will be in both Spanish and English with a vocabulary list at the end of each handout.

Web-Based Content

Unrecorded Assessments. Each class presentation will have at its foundation a self assessment so that students can measure their mastery of material in the textbook. The self assessment will use primarily calculated problems, multiple-choice, and matching questions. Short essay questions will be included.

Recorded Assessments. These will build on the unrecorded assessments so that students will know unambiguously what is expected of them. Availability of calculated problems in WebCT Vista will permit the instructors to use the same problems as in the unrecorded assessments, but change the minimum and maximum values for variables [x] and [y] in each problem. Multiple choice and matching problems from unrecorded assessments will be changed and choices ordered randomly so that students will need to master the material rather than memorizing answers.

Groups. Lind (1996) examined the use of cases in groups and found that there were few significant differences across electronic groups assigned internationally and communicating via the web and face-to-face groups. Gunawardena et. al. (2001) found statistically significant differences in the perception of groups by Mexican and U.S. students. Our anecdotal

experience is consistent with these empirical studies: We have found that group development and work require effort to establish legitimacy in a cross-cultural environment and, once successfully established, yield a feeling of place and encouragement to students to learn from their classmates cross-cultural classmates.

The group feature in WebCT Vista permits the instructors to place students into small groups. That permits each student to have an assigned mentor from the other class and a peer group not only for discussing issues about the class, but also for addressing cultural and business issues. Each group will have its own chat room so that its members can leave messages in the log and refer back later to read responses from group members. The log will be maintained throughout the semester so that I can monitor the contribution of each member to group activities. The instructors should require assignments from each group submitted as attachments via the Assignment tool. Each member of the group will receive the same grade.

We think this is one of the most exciting features of a collaborative international course. Each student will be paired with a foreign counterpart. Then, when the U.S. group arrives on the Mexican campus, the students will be able to greet each other and to establish quickly a trusting, professional friendship.

Chats and Whiteboard. Each instructor will host chats for students in respective groups. Occasional cross-cultural chats should be held.

- **Unstructured chats.** Discuss any topic within finance. It can be from a previous assignment, an expected assignment, or a contemporary issue.
- **Structured chats.** Topics from a specific module (chapter) are preassigned within 15-minute increments. After time expires, the instructor moves to the next topic.
- **Chit chats.** Students will be invited to talk about any topic they want— finance, movies, the class, graduate school, you name it. I may be there.

The instructors should make extensive use of the whiteboard during structured and unstructured chats. Using SnagIt® (a popular screen capture software product) will permit them to create JPG files and seamlessly upload them to the whiteboard.

Web assignments. Each student should complete a minimum of five web assignments submitted as attachments via WebCT Vista to her specific instructor. Assignments should be developed to introduce the student to contemporary issues confronting the IT manager in both countries.

Discussion links. A useful part of the course will be discussion links for students to pursue ideas and issues with their classmates.

BUDGETING

Most resources to develop and implement an international course are already available as part of the university commitments to teaching. However, incremental costs will be incurred:

1. The university may need to hire someone to cover the usual course taught by the instructor who participates in the international course. If the usual course is cancelled, then the semester credit hours lost should be included in the benefit-cost analysis of the course.
2. Although most communication will be via e-mail, the faculty members jointly offering the course will need to communicate via telephone and teleconference.
3. Physical delivery of items between México and the United States is either expensive or excruciatingly slow. It's excruciatingly slow if the US Postal Service is used. Allow for a two-week delivery time of a first-class letter. It's expensive if items are sent via a contract delivery service such as United Parcel Service, FedEx, or DSL. Our anecdotal evidence is that FedEx is the service of choice for delivery to México.
4. The instructors should meet face-to-face and discuss the logistics of the course. That requires trips by the U.S. instructor to México. Each trip will require a stay of at least three days. Note that this is in addition to the travel expense for the U.S. instructor when the class travels to México to conclude the course (See Figure 1).

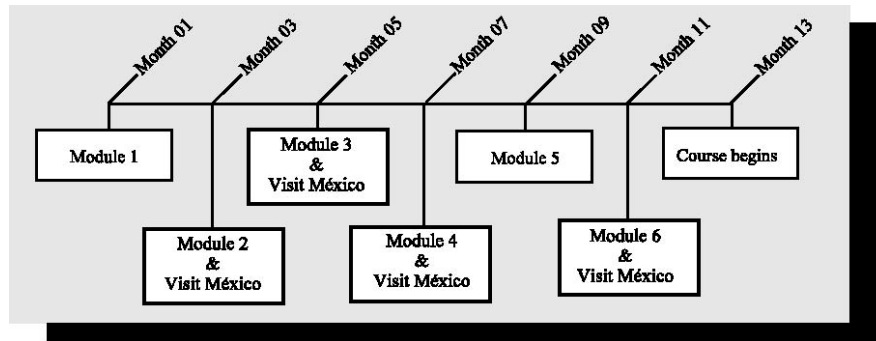
Incremental Outlays at Each University	Outlay
Faculty member	\$
Telephone	
Mail	
Travel	
Miscellaneous	
Total	

Figure 1. Budget Template

TIMETABLE FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

How long will it take to develop and offer a collaborative international course such as the one we describe? ¿Quién sabe? We can offer only a general answer to that question because of the uncertainty surrounding each of the issues above. The figure below (Figure 2) offers some guidance. It shows a one year (13-month) time line for completing each part of the process.

Figure 2. Timeline for Course Module Development



Elaboration of the steps (*Modules* in figure 2) in the one-year time line follows (Table 1):

Activity or Accomplishment	Beginning of Month
Module 1. Process begins	01. Verify presence of IT architecture and commitment from each university; prepare budget
Module 2. Visit to México to meet colleagues there	03. Select text material and discuss allocation of work load between instructors
Module 3. Visit to México to develop examples and problems for the text and course	05. International Studies arranges for week-long visit of students to México– families, classrooms, field trips; development of web-based assessments and assignments
Module 4. Visit México to develop more models and examples for textbook	07. Development of group activities; development of in-class materials (Spanish and English); meet International Studies staff at Mexican university
Module 5. Logistics	9 Registration for course; assign U.S. students to Mexican classmates
Module 6. Visit México to discuss opportunities to market the course to Mexican students	11. Assign students to groups; assign students to host families; distribute course material to students
Course offered	

Table 1. Detail Process Flow of Module Development

You may be struck by the number of visits to México. There are two reasons for this: First, it's México. Excuses to visit are always welcome. Second, there is a serious reason for the visits: The better the instructors know each other and the support staff, the more successful the collaboration will be. We've learned from experience that relying on the International Studies staff at a university to arrange the program may be an invitation to problems. That staff won't have the interest in your program that you have. The two instructors must take an active role in each activity from verifying host families and travel arrangements to determining cultural and professional activities while in México.

REFERENCES

1. Bates, A.W. (Tony), and José Gpe. Escamilla de los Santos, "Crossing Boundaries: Making Global Distance Education a Reality," *Journal of Distance Education*, 1997, pp. 1–12.
2. Feinberg, Martin, and Roberto Vinaja. "Faculty Perceptions of Bi-National Distance Education between the U.S. and Mexico: An Empirical Analysis," *USDLA Journal*, September, 2002, pp. 1–9.
3. Gunawardena, Charlotte N., Ana C. Nolla, Penne L. Wilson, José R. Lopez-Islas. "A Cross-Cultural Study of Group Processes and Development in Online Conferences," *Distance Education*, 2001, pp. 85–122.
4. Hanna, Donald E. "Higher Education in an Era of Digital Competition: Emerging Organizational Models," *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, March, 1998, pp. 66–95.
5. Hira, Anil. "The Brave New World of International Education," *The World Economy*, June, 2003, pp. 911-932.
6. Lind, Mary R. "Student Case Groups: Electronic Groups Versus Face-To-Face Groups," *Education and Training*, 1996, pp. 10–14.
7. Wilson, Michael S. "Cultural Considerations in Online Instruction and Learning," *Distance Education*, 2001, pp. 52–65.