International Travel via a Virtual Experience: Lessons learned from a virtual international exchange program

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Purpose of Starting the Project

• Provide an international experience to our students in a time where social distancing is the norm
• Examination of another country’s eating habits and influences
• Offer an experience to students who might otherwise not have in 2020
• Build a relationship between schools to lead to more in-depth international experiences for our students
Background of Project

Spring 2020 semester was an unprecedented one full of unknowns, life upheavals, and anxiety.

Rapid transition from in-person to online greatly affected study abroad opportunities.

International travel is an eye-opening, enriching, enlightening experience and can academically, professionally, and personally set our students apart.

Nutrition lends itself very easily to cross-country collaboration: We all must eat! But we do not all eat the same things and not for all the same reasons!
Lamia worked with Office of International Affairs and School Dean to find a partner.

International Exchange Officer of Newcastle University connected Lamia with Anthony.

Conducted Zoom meetings and email conversations to create the project.
Project Objectives

• KINE N220, School of Health and Human Sciences, IUPUI
• NUT1006 Introduction to Human Nutrition and Practical Skills DTC1001 Introduction to Nutrition and Dietetics, School of Biomedical, Nutritional and Sports Sciences, Newcastle University

Through this virtual exchange, the students will:
1. Acquire the ability to communicate and collaborate across national and cultural boundaries.
2. Demonstrate an acceptance and recognition of cultural differences, particularly when it comes to nutritional influences.
3. Participate in two international interactions with students from all over the United States and a variety of countries.
Discussions

• Discussion 1:
  • Why Do You Eat What You Eat?:
    • Top three reasons they choose to eat what they do each day, and then elaborate on why or how those become the top three reasons
    • Comment on other students’ posts and discuss how their reasons are similar and/or different and why
• Discussion 2:
  • The Who, What, and How of Eating:
    • Discuss who or what is in charge of what they eat, how much they eat, and how they obtain their food
    • Discuss the differences between the Dietary Guidelines in the United Kingdom and the United States
    • Comment on other students’ posts and discuss how where they live and their cultures, government, rituals, etc. influence their eating to be different
• CourseNetworking:
  • A global, academic social-networking site with unique technology solutions for learning and collaboration
  • Virtual café where they will ‘meet’ international students, gain an insight to their eating habits, their governmental food regulations, and their culture
CourseNetworking

- Social learning environment for students to exchange knowledge, resources, and ideas
- Students become members of a global academic network in which they can connect with students in the same academic discipline from other institutions and countries
- Posting and reflection tools allows for postings with a variety of media attachments
- Integrated in IUPUI’s LMS, but not Newcastle’s
  - Includes free options if integrated within the university or paid options if not
Examples of Interactions:

Discussion 1

Hi! I am [redacted] and I am originally from Lincolnshire (UK) and I study at Newcastle University. The three most important contributions to what I eat include my mood, how busy I am and naturally the cost. The reason my mood is the most important factor for deciding what I eat is that generally if I am stressed I tend to not want to eat as much as it makes me feel slightly nauseous. While if I am bored I want to make a full meal from scratch. As a dancer, rugby player, musician and student my timetable can be rather hectic and so if I am tight for time around a meal time I usually am forced to opt for a quick meal such as tinned ravioli or even a sandwich from a supermarket. Like many others the cost naturally plays an important part when I am deciding what to eat as my student budget really limits what foods I can afford. Interestingly since moving to university this year I have noticed that while previously I often opted for salmon and cream cheese on toast or a bagel at breakfast since moving to Newcastle this old habit has altered to just be cereal and a fruit salad.

Nice to meet you [redacted] I agree with how our mood plays a role in when we eat. I know when I’m feeling burned out from schoolwork, I got to have my next meal of the day to help keep me going. I would say time management is also a challenge when it comes to making food choices. I know when I’m at the campus center, my lunch is normally whatever is the least costly and most convenient. Glad to see you’re making healthy food choices though when you apply your criteria for making food choices, I hope your school and extracurriculars go well.

Oct 29, 2020 at 11:17am

Hello [redacted] I also agree with you when it comes to mood playing a role in our food decisions. Honestly it is something that slipped my mind and did not include in my reasons. Maybe it is because it is something I do naturally without realizing it. Whenever I am stressed I just go the food pantry and grab something sweet to eat.
Examples of Interaction: Discussion 2

As adults, I think we as individuals are in charge of all food choices. We do have a lot of outside influences on our food choices but ultimately we are the ones to make the final call on what we eat. I think the biggest difference between these two countries is the population and fast-food living. In the US, food AI is higher, fast food here is cheap and easily accessible, and also food in the UK is of better quality.

It's so interesting to see a similar theme through this conversation, that food choices in the US and obesity rates are being highlighted as down to fast food, portion sizes and cost. So I wonder if this is more about availability rather than an individuals choice on what they want to eat.

I completely agree with you! I think many Americans would be eating healthier if healthy foods were more accessible to them.
Feedback from Students

I was able to acquire the ability to communicate and collaborate across national and cultural boundaries.

- Strongly Agree/Agree: 92%

I was able to demonstrate an acceptance and recognition of cultural differences, particularly when it comes to nutritional influences.

- Strongly Agree/Agree: 88%

I would participate in a project like this again in a different class.

- Strongly Agree/Agree: 88%

I think this project should be implemented in this class in future semesters.

- Strongly Agree/Agree: 88%
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Overcome</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asynchronous online course (IUPUI) vs. hybrid course (Newcastle)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Time zone differences in synchronous activities</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Alignment of semesters</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Apathy of students when not credit bearing</strong></td>
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Inaugural run but plan to implement yearly → Physical study abroad experience

Fall 2021 will implement a synchronous meeting to create deeper connections from the start

Increase length of exchange

Written into Newcastle modules as formative assessment
Questions?

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