

MAPPING COMMUNITY COLLEGES AROUND THE WORLD

Comparative Perspectives and Collaborative Pathways



Global Partnerships: Successes and Strategies
ISSUE 3





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The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who serve on over 500 governing boards of community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES



Mapping Community Colleges Around the World: Comparative Perspectives and Collaborative Pathways reflects a strategic collaboration between the Association of Community College Trustees and the STAR Scholars Network. This series of briefs:

- Highlights effective regional, national, local, and institutional policies and programs that support, fund, evaluate, and strengthen community colleges and similar institutions, and enable them to fulfill their missions and goals.
- Identifies structural, operational, programmatic, and curricular frameworks and good practices around the world that can serve as models for the development of institutions and educational systems in other geographic contexts.
- Investigates the challenges facing community colleges and their global counterparts, as a means toward developing shared solutions as well as contextually specific approaches.
- Explores synergies that can serve as the basis for mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations that engage institutions, industry, and government to promote student success and socioeconomic development.
- Celebrates the successes and contributions of this unique educational sector, amplifies its visibility, adds to the body of scholarly literature and knowledge, and identifies areas for additional research.

In designing this publication, we have adopted a true community college ethos. Like our institutions, we've emphasized access, proactively tapping our collective networks to invite a wide array of contributions and voices and enabling wide distribution. Throughout the series, you'll find articles written by trustees, institution presidents and leaders, scholars, practitioners, and industry partners, which collectively provide a rich and nuanced array of insights and represent a unique contribution to scholarship and our collective understanding of community colleges and their impact worldwide.

We encourage you to share the publication widely, and hope it inspires continued dialogue and innovation that benefit our students, institutions, local economies, and ultimately, our shared global community.

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Editors' Introduction

Welcome to the third installment of *Mapping Community Colleges Around the World: Global Partnerships – Successes and Strategies*. After an exploration of the global college sector worldwide in our first issue, followed by a focus on student learning and outcomes in the second, in this installment we turn to partnerships and collaborations within the sector: How to get started, what it takes to sustain and grow joint activities, and the (often profound) impact such relationships have on students, faculty, staff, and entire communities.

Similar to our previous installments, the articles presented here are written from a wide range of perspectives and include detailed case examples as well as lessons learned to inform practice. Scaffolding the case studies, this installment also features articles that explore the philosophical underpinnings of global partnerships and provide a step-by-step guide to creating the campus conditions needed for sustained global engagement. A few additional notes to set the stage as you dive in:

- The **articles in this installment are a bit longer** than those in the first two – in order to present nuances that help bring the case studies to life, but also because there have been “plot twists” in some partnership programs related to recent federal policy changes in the US. A key theme from all of the case studies is the importance of flexibility and resilience to adapt relationships as conditions (institutional, national, and geopolitical) ebb and flow over time.
- **We name names.** You'll see specific individuals named in the articles as instrumental in partnerships and read about their stories and impact. As editors, our first impulse was to simplify, condense, and take out names – but a key lesson that emerges across the articles is that partnerships are truly relationship-based. People's stories matter, and their passion is the primary fuel for successful collaborations.
- That said, **enduring partnerships go well beyond the individuals involved.** As you'll see throughout the articles, institutional leaders play a pivotal role in building and sustaining global collaboration and marshalling campus-wide resources and support. Linking global collaborations to the overall strategy of the institution creates the conditions for long-term sustainability. And the real magic happens when partnerships grow over time to encompass a wide variety of (sometimes unpredicted) collaborative activities – from joint lectures, to virtual exchange, to in-person visits and connections.
- While the specific focus of this installment is institution-to-institution partnerships, the case examples demonstrate the **power of engaging broader communities** – at home and at the partnering institution. As highlighted in our first installment, broad engagement is a hallmark of community colleges and similar institutions worldwide, so it is perhaps unsurprising that this engagement is a “superpower” of the sector when it comes to forging meaningful international partnerships.

This last point is a perfect preview of our next installment in the *Mapping* series, which will explore the broader “ecosystem” of global collaboration among higher education, industry, and other stakeholders to advance workforce development and student success worldwide.

Thank you for reading and we hope you enjoy this installment!



Cultivating Wonder: Curriculum, Context, and Connection

Wojciech (Voytek) Wloch

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Philosophical underpinnings

In the opening sentence of his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire (1974) states, “to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world” (p. 3). To truly engage in human activity, Freire goes on to say, we must integrate with our context rather than simply adapt to the present. We must emerge from “today” to “impregnate our relations with consequence” (p. 4). Thus, Freire is urging us to engage in an “analytical contact with existence” (p. 33).

It is when we go beyond time and integrate with contextual aspects of our relationships that we become subjects of our being. This is best done by means of a dialogue, which to Freire is a “horizontal relationship between persons” (p. 40); a relationship that creates a “critical attitude.” “Whoever enters into dialogue does so with someone about something; and that something ought to constitute the new content of our proposed education” (p. 41). He then posits that by engaging in a dialogic relationship, we emerge as “less perplexed by the new experience of participation” (p. 32). This is because when we engage with otherness, we shift our context from that known to us through our individual or semi-collective experience into the one that is newly renegotiated and hence renewed – and, thus, learned.

This is how education happens; this is how we develop an ability to recontextualize our perception of reality and introduce dimensionality into our thinking. Such education (back to Freire) provides an opportunity to “take a new stance towards [our] problems – that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principles” (p. 32) of cultural contextualities we have been conditioned to through our upbringing. Education via dialogue is the “education of ‘I wonder,’ instead of merely ‘I do’” (p. 32).

Freire (1974) goes on to describe education for critical consciousness as comprehension of “causal links” (p. 39) of a phenomenon or a problem, because the more people “grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be” (p. 39). It is through constant analysis of “causal and circumstantial correlations” (p. 39) between phenomena and problems that they become empirical and hence fully and critically comprehensible. For this, we need a true dialogue, one that is strongly horizontalized, or grounded, in the four principles of love, humility, faith, and hope (Freire, 2010). It must also be about engagement in critical thinking by the dialoguers; “thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them – thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation” (p. 92).

That solidarity to me is another foundational aspect of a true dialogic education. People are the world and the world is people. Freire’s work, and this philosophical purpose, have driven my work in international education throughout my career, and provide the framework and *raison d’être* for the global partnerships that I have launched. The following examples illustrate how these philosophical underpinnings can be operationalized in partner relationships to drive student (and faculty and institutional) learning and growth.



Warsaw, circa 1999

Kaz, Wika, and I are sitting in Kaz's office, elated that our college (Giedroyc College of Communication and Media – CCM) had just received its Erasmus Charter – a document that allowed CCM to join the higher education student exchange community across Europe and provided access to funding for partnerships. We are bouncing around ideas about how to engage our students with those of our potential new academic partners around Europe.

A bit more context: CCM no longer exists, but back then it was a vibrant institution with Kaz serving as VP for Academics, and Wika as a Librarian and huge intellectualizing force for students. I served as Foreign Languages and Foreign Relations Director. With the Charter, we were able to engage our students not just in physical mobility, but also in the mobility of thought; we could apply for European Union funding for all sorts of projects that aimed at bringing aspiring EU member countries (Poland did not join the EU as an official Member State until May 1, 2004) into closer connection with current members.

Back to our brainstorm: We come up with the obvious. As a college that trained journalists and political scientists, we would create a magazine for the students and with the students from CCM and its partners across Europe, where they can engage in dialogue across boundaries – a place where they can exchange ideas about peace, joy, what pushes them forward, who they are and how they think about reality, and how they express themselves through art. Kaz gave the idea, Wika gave the layout and contextual breadth, and I took care of organizing the project.

To get started, we reached out to all colleges across the continent that had an Erasmus Charter and offered degrees in communication, media, and political science, we heard back from a good number in Germany, Romania, as well as other Polish institutions. Students began to exchange ideas about what Europe meant to them, or how they defined happiness, via email (still a very new technology back then), and sent their photos and art by (physical) mail. Initial responses to our call for text and art submissions came to my office, then I worked with faculty from individual departments to identify CCM students to become “e-mail pals” with submitting students – once these “matches” were made, we let them take it from there.

After receiving submissions, we created a Student Editorial Board, which then elected a Chief Editor, and began working with the students to pull everything together in a magazine we called “Faces.” The college already had its own magazine, also run by students under Kaz's intellectual supervision, but this one was different – it was written in English, and truly international in scope. We published it using CMC's own funds and distributed it to European higher education institutions during the European Association for International Education's 16th annual conference in Turin, Italy in 2002. The publication got excellent reviews, and we began receiving lots of email with cooperation requests from an array of potential partner institutions.

Through “Faces,” we expanded our European partner network (in France, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Sweden) as well as the US, gained visibility, and catalyzed additional international activities. These included student exchange programs, which we built until I left for the US in 2006. I am especially proud of one of these programs, which was partially funded by the European Commission and focused on vocational training. In 2004, we sent out a call (through newspaper ads) for Polish volunteers to participate in three-week training sessions to be held in four European countries, specifically targeting mothers on prolonged maternity leave. Through this program, we refreshed participants' computer skills in Malmö, provided self-presentation and PR training in Lyon, and delivered theater training in Berlin. Upon participants' return to Warsaw, we helped them apply for jobs, with a 95% success rate.



While most of these connections were lost due to my departure and CCM's closure, these were my foundational projects. I still maintain contact with some colleagues, and we continue to draw on lessons learned during the creative years of our initial entry to European higher education. Further, the last of my projects at CCM gave me an opportunity to interact with and observe academic and personal growth of the vocational student population. This experience came full circle when I joined the College of Lake County as its "senior international officer" in June 2023.

Grayslake, Illinois, early spring 2024

Laura and I are sitting in her office, putting together our proposal for Stanford University's EPIC (Exchange Partnership for Internationalizing Curriculum grant (Stanford University, n.d.). Laura teaches English at the College of Lake County [CLC] and is Chair of its Technical Communication program. Prior to joining CLC, she was a campus media adviser for an award-winning student magazine, and developed courses in new media writing, digital storytelling, and professional and creative writing. At the time of our meeting, she had recently returned from leading a study abroad program in Scandinavia, where she taught participants how to blog about food.

I am CLC's new "senior international officer" and Director of Global Engagement. The EPIC Fellowship – the topic of our discussion – is designed for community college faculty and staff to add international components to their core curricula as well as develop their students' global competencies. The year-long experience is designed to help us not just plug global learning into individual classes, but also to promote sustainability and replicability of those curricular advances.

What really clicked between Laura and me as we worked on the proposal was that our respective experiences in leading global education were anchored firmly in our devotion to growing critically conscious students – people who receive from their faculty the tools they need to comprehend the reality around them, not just see it; to hear people out, not just listen to them; and write about it. To me, it was about the need to expand our students' global exposure beyond study abroad.

As a now-seasoned "senior international officer" at a US college, I am fully aware that no matter where we work (2-year, 4-year, doctoral, public, or private institutions), we will rarely see more than a small percentage of our student body engage in study abroad. In fact, shortly prior to my meeting with Laura, I had read in The PIE News (2023) that only 6% of all American students actually engage in physical mobility and immediately thought about the need to cater our services to the remaining 94%. Laura and I were on the same page throughout the meeting and came up with a project for the EPIC Fellowship titled "Our Lives, Our World: Creating Connections Across Cultures," which won us the Fellowship. Here is an excerpt from its description:

As we emerge from global social isolation caused by the pandemic, the need to create opportunities to meaningfully communicate across cultures and capture the stories of everyday people is increasingly important. We are living in an unprecedented time when miscommunication and misinformation fuels social and political polarization. Despite rapid advancements in technology that make communicating across cultures easier than ever, opportunities for meaningful connections – authentic conversations with individuals from cultures outside of our own – are limited, especially for community college students, who often commute to campus and are not afforded opportunities to engage with international students.

"Our Lives, Our World: Creating Connections Across Cultures" will pair individual students or entire classrooms from College of Lake County (CLC) with international students from partner colleges across the globe to interview one another about topics related to their areas of study or personal lives. The goal is for students to learn more about one another – their daily lives, their goals, their hardships and how they overcame them, their aspirations – while fostering an appreciation of cultures outside of their own.



We decided to anchor this project on four big topics and let the students negotiate their meanings as they saw them in their respective colleges, countries, and cultures: Community, Education, Identity, and Place. The conversations occurred on Zoom or a similar platform, and when needed, an interpreter was present for translation purposes. We documented the conversations and shared the stories on the “Our Lives, Our World” (n.d.) blog. The idea is that students continue to foster relationships with their international peers by posting photos, videos, and commenting on the blog posts.

With this project we wanted to get our students to the point where they actually say “I wonder,” where they engage with other people around common themes in order to see their realities as multidimensional, where they participate in true solidarity with other students while getting intimate with what surrounds them (community), how they learn (education), who they really are (identity), and how they place themselves in a greater context (place). It will take time and effort from many of us (faculty, staff, and a lot of students) to continue developing the project, but we intend to show our students the world as it can be otherwise, not as it they are told it is (Greene, 1998).

Now that the EPIC Fellowship is over, my office is actively seeking additional faculty members and students to engage in this conversation. This fall, we have planned two information sessions for faculty, met with the Student Government Association, and intend to engage our international students in this ongoing conversation. After all, the goal is to remind all of us that we are all human and as such, after Freire, we do engage in relationships and we do impregnate our relationships with consequence.

About the author

A recent EPIC Fellow at Stanford University, Dr. Voytek Wloch holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership, with an international leadership certificate (USA); a master’s degree in journalism and political science (Poland); and a bachelor’s degree in English (Canada). A newly elected Board Member of AIEA, he also serves on committees of various other international education associations. His past service includes Honorary Board Membership at the European Journalism Training Association and Vice-Presidency of the European Association for Erasmus Coordinators. Email: wwloch@clcollinois.edu

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Cloud Forest Collaboration: Linn-Benton Community College's Costa Rica Exchange Partnership

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Transcending the barriers of study abroad

Studying abroad is one of the most transformational experiences that a student can have, and is strongly connected to college retention, graduation, and even future employment. It has been identified by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as one of 11 High-Impact Practices that positively impact student success and completion, “including and especially [for] those from demographic groups historically underserved by higher education” (AAC&U, 2013).

Community college students are the most diverse college students in the nation, and they face the highest number of barriers to graduation, including fewer financial resources, parenthood, first-generation status, immigrant family of origin, non-traditional age, and other socio-economic barriers.

Thus, many community college students do not even consider study abroad, as most such programs do not take these barriers into account. At Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC), however, we recognize the barriers and are working hard to help our students overcome them so that they, too, can reap the educational and career benefits of global academic experiences.

Guiding principles to overcome barriers

LBCC's Study Abroad Task Force has developed a vision, guidelines, administrative support, and safety procedures for inclusive, equitable study abroad programming. The guiding principles established in 2022 include:

- Affordability made possible with scholarships and external support
- Credit courses that contribute to graduation requirements of students' degree plans
- Short-term programs to accommodate students with jobs or family obligations
- Combined academic and experiential learning
- Single-location learning (instead of tour format) enabling meaningful connections with the local community while maintaining consistent class time
- Partnership with a local academic or community institute that provides classroom space, housing support, and community connections
- Mutually beneficial for the host town or institution



In accordance with these guiding principles, we sought a local partner in Costa Rica that would help us learn with a culturally responsive and sustainable ethos. We were thrilled to find the Monteverde Institute (MVI), located in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve (Monteverde Institute, n.d.). MVI integrates academic programs, ecological research, and community initiatives into programs that benefit both visitors and the local community. A cloud forest is a type of tropical forest with persistent, low-level cloud cover, high humidity, yet cooler temperatures due to its high altitude. This institute is located in a cloud forest community where LBCC students and faculty reside for 2 weeks with host families while pursuing coursework, taking part in experiential learning, and embracing a plethora of intercultural experiences.

Stability and flexibility

One important aspect of the program we have developed is that it combines stability with flexibility. The program takes place only in the summer term, is 2 weeks in length, and always in collaboration with MVI. The flexibility comes into play with different LBCC course(s) being led by different LBCC instructors each summer.

In addition, the basic format remains the same each year with students taking classes on the course subject material and then participating in experiential learning by visiting local community organizations, such as a health clinic, the local high school, or a reforestation project at a nearby farm. They also hike in the cloud forest and take part in many other cultural experiences.

Ten students participated in the first year of LBCC's Costa Rica study abroad program at MVI (2023). We offered courses in Spanish and Non-Western Literature (4 quarter credits each). A student summarized her experience as such: "this was the most gratifying experience I have ever had. I was welcomed into a [host family's] home, shared meals, spoke a new language, learned about a peaceful community, and made lifelong friends along the way. I've never stepped further out of my comfort zone or been more rewarded for taking that step. I came home with a new understanding of culture, differences, the rhythm of the world, and my place in it." This statement perfectly summarizes the transformative impact of study abroad, especially for community college students.

In 2024, 11 students were able to take part in the program, earning four credits in public health. This program had a particularly fitting focus given that Costa Rica is renowned for its excellent public health system.

The public health faculty reported that they observed students supporting each other in overcoming language challenges (as many had little to no experience communicating in Spanish) and engaging with a new culture (sometimes for the first time). Students documented their experiences in written reflections, and their increased global awareness and cultural fluency was apparent in these journals.

The student feedback at the end of the experience was overwhelmingly positive with comments like the following:

- *Almost every day there is a moment that I will cherish.*
- *[The LBCC study abroad group] became a family and it was so hard to leave them. It feels like we lived in Costa Rica for a year together because we shared so many new experiences together.*
- *[I appreciated] getting career advice from the professors. Hanging out with the other students. Just being in a pleasant environment with smart, trustworthy, virtuous people. That's not always easy to find outside of a college environment.*



Based on the success of the first two cohorts, including 100% student year-to-year retention in year two, we are committed to offering the program annually, with a program planned for summer 2025 that will focus on biology and geology. At this time, students do not have to be enrolled in a degree program to participate.

Affordability = accessibility

The LBCC-MVI study abroad experience costs approximately \$5,000 USD per student, an amount that is out of reach for many community college students despite the known positive impact of participating in such a program. By leveraging a variety of funding sources for scholarship support, LBCC has been able to offer this program for a fee of only \$1,500 USD per student participant.

Participating students who are Pell grant-eligible as part of their financial aid package receive support from LBCC staff to apply for the U.S. Department of State (n.d.)'s Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, which funds low-income students' participation in study abroad. The college now has two staff trained and authorized to submit applications to this national, competitive funding source.

The LBCC Foundation, through presidential and faculty advocacy, has also committed funds to support study abroad scholarships for this program. This funding is made possible by the generosity of a variety of private donors within our community.

We are researching additional grants and funding sources that could help make these trips even more affordable for students. In fact, our goal is to make it possible for students to take part in this study abroad opportunity with out-of-pocket expenses not exceeding \$500.

Leveraging international experiences helps expand the reach of student options: for example, two alumni of LBCC's Costa Rica study abroad were selected for participation in Amideast's Community and Social Entrepreneurship program in Tunisia, a fully-funded global opportunity. When students are able to participate in short-term study abroad programs, the hope is that they can use this as a springboard for longer experiences. Another potential benefit of short-term study abroad success is the possibility to leverage the experience into a more competitive application for subsequent study abroad programs, supported by grants such as the Gilman Scholarship.

Mutually beneficial study abroad

Ensuring that the program is mutually beneficial for our partner institution abroad is of the utmost importance to the integrity of the LBCC program. Thus, we asked Alexandra Paniagua, Academic Director at Monteverde Institute, to give her view on the benefit to the local community in Costa Rica:

LBCC programs promote meaningful interactions between students and the local community of Monteverde and help sustain the Monteverde Institute's mission to promote ecological, economic, and social sustainability.

This program provides direct economic support to local families through homestays and creates opportunities for cultural exchange. Homestays are modestly compensated for hosting students, which provides incentive and offsets costs. Students in the program learn from and contribute to community programs of the Monteverde Institute and our partner organizations, like women's associations, local schools, and the Association to Help People with Special Needs in Monteverde (APAPNEM), whose majority of members are senior citizens, as well as public clinics and hospitals. Recent groups have directly supported MVI's community health program and broader community-based organizations.

The collaborative nature of this program ensures alignment with local priorities, addressing real community needs while enriching students' learning experiences.



Future plans

In summary, this Study Abroad program in Costa Rica represents an important part of LBCC's goal to internationalize its curriculum as a way to support students' future career success and civic engagement, while simultaneously benefiting local Costa Rican communities.

LBCC will continue to track the year-to-year retention and graduation rate impact on all students who participate in the LBCC-MVI program. Currently, LBCC's graduation rate is 13% and 45% of LBCC's students transfer to a 4-year institution. Gwillim (2023) showed a statistical significance to participation in a short-term study abroad program and improved retention and completion rates.

The program also has the full support of LBCC's President, Dr. Lisa Avery, who traveled to meet with students, faculty, and Monteverde Institute staff in 2024. While there, she was able to lay plans in collaboration with the Monteverde Institute Executive Director Fern Perkins (a former U.S. community college student) for LBCC and MVI to jointly seek US and Costa Rica funding to expand their partnership. Plans for the proposal include a possible exchange involving underserved Costa Rican youth, in which they would travel to the Monteverde Institute at the same time as LBCC students for academic and experiential collaboration.

About the authors

Currently the President of Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC), Dr. Lisa Avery has been a longstanding leader in global education. She has guided LBCC and Portland Community College in their internationalization efforts, expanding study abroad and funded workforce exchanges. Previously, Dr. Avery served as the Senior International Officer at Community Colleges of Spokane, led study abroad programs at a four-year university, and received numerous federal grant awards in support of student and faculty exchanges.

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An Enduring Relational Partnership: A 30-Year Global Collaboration between McLennan Community College and Masaryk University

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The end of the Cold War in 1989 brought about a new era for the global exchange of ideas and commerce, and increased opportunities for international travel and relationship-building. Against this backdrop, a partnership developed between McLennan Community College (MCC), in Waco, Texas, and Masaryk University in Brno, Czechoslovakia (MUNI). As geopolitics have ebbed and flowed in the 30-plus years that MCC and MUNI have partnered together, our collaboration has evolved and continued to flourish, benefiting students and scholars alike. Human connections are at the heart of this success; what follows is an account of some of the ways such relationships have encouraged personal growth and strengthened a global partnership.

Beginning of a partnership

Celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Masaryk University and curiosity prompted Dr. Dennis Michaelis, then-president of MCC, to travel to Brno with Dr. Bill Ovenshire, president of Hill College in 1994. Texas has the largest population of Czech descendants of any US state, and connections to Czech-Americans from central Texas, particularly the city of West, spurred his interest in visiting Czechoslovakia.

While in Brno, Michaelis attended ceremonies and met with MUNI administrators and faculty members. He connected with Dr. Jiri Hala, a nuclear physicist and textbook author who, in 1994, was serving as Rector of the Faculty of Education at MUNI. Michaelis invited Hala and another MUNI professor, Draha Blaha, along with their teenage daughters, Marketa and Carolina, to Texas in 1995. Hala and Blaha taught courses in Science and English. Marketa spent her freshman and sophomore years at MCC studying and perfecting her English. Carolina also studied at MCC. These initial visits provided opportunities to establish personal connections between the two institutions and created a pathway for faculty and student exchange to follow.

Faculty exchanges

MUNI was interested in developing business programs and needed professors with expertise in human resources, economics, and related fields. Jerry Jordan, Nancy Ray Mitchell, and Brooks Wilson from MCC's Business Department were some of the first MCC professors to teach at MUNI for a semester. While faculty at both institutions were committed to working together, there were various cultural and practical differences to navigate, such as differing expectations around gender roles and organizational efficiency, and different economic and business models underpinning faculty members' subject matter expertise.



Over the following 30 years, faculty exchanges expanded to include liberal arts. Business-focused exchanges continued, and professors from English, and Spanish also traveled to Brno, including Jennifer Black, Charlotte Laughlin, and Dan Paniagua. Art, English, and Education Professors from MUNI traveled to Waco to teach, including Martin Svoboda and Ivan Maly (economics), Vladislav Muzik and Zdenek Janik (education) and Lucie Podrouzkova (English) among many others. Enduring friendships have grown from these exchanges along with insights into each other's culture, history, institutions, values, and daily experiences.

Students, part 1: Czechs in Texas

Marketa Halova and Carolina Blahova, the daughters of the MUNI leaders who initially visited MCC in 1995, enrolled at MCC as full-time international students in 1995-1996. Their time abroad significantly impacted the trajectory of their lives. Marketa, Jiri Hala's daughter, after a year at MCC, returned to MUNI to finish her degree. She then returned to Waco and completed an MBA at Baylor University. From there she moved to Boston where she met her husband. Marketa currently is a full professor at Skidmore College.

Not all the students from MUNI who have attended MCC over the years have settled in the States, but all have made lasting friendships and connections. In 2000, Gabriela Kolocovova came to study at MCC. She was interested in photography and rock-n-roll music. She played in a band and studied photography. After a year at MCC, she went on to complete her bachelor's degree at the University of North Texas and her MFA at the University of Houston. She returned to MCC to teach photography for several years before returning to Czechia.

Funding

Since 1995, MCC has hosted 69 Czech students, most for a semester at a time, though others have stayed for a full year. Students receive airfare and a stipend to cover some living expenses from MUNI. MCC provides scholarships and social support through the Presidential Scholars program, a competitive scholarship program for students with a 3.0 GPA or higher, awarded by the college president. The scholarship, funded through the MCC Foundation, provides tuition, fees, and funding to purchase instructional materials. The college also provides housing, technology, a bike for each student, and in the last few years, an Uber account. The students work on campus and take classes, making friends and forming long-lasting relationships with students, faculty and staff.

An immersive experience

The Czech students who study at MCC get an immersive experience of Texas culture. Each incoming MUNI student is assigned an MCC student liaison, or "ambassador." The ambassadors contact the incoming MUNI students, offer individual help, invite them to local events or their homes, provide transportation, and forge relationships that foster cross-cultural engagement, heightened learning, and deep engagement. One particularly active ambassador, Perla Reynoso, has facilitated travel for visiting MUNI students and helped them experience culture in new ways. Perla has given them glimpses of Mexican-American cultural events, local sports and arts, and a look into her own family as she has shared her life experiences with them.

Additionally, MUNI students travel to Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York with MCC's Presidential Scholars and Honors College students as part of government and leadership courses. They also have opportunities to meet important figures in Central Texas, such as ambassadors, state senators and representatives, and leaders in education, business, and philanthropy.



The MUNI students who study and faculty who teach at MCC widen their understanding of politics, institutions, culture, and people. They have expanded their knowledge of child development, taking part in MCC's early childhood education program; participated in our expansive music and theater programs, performing and receiving private lessons; and have learned about ranching and US and Texas government through our agriculture and political science offerings. They also make a lasting impact on MCC students, faculty, and staff.

Students, part 2: Texans in Czechia

MCC students have traveled to Czechia in a variety of capacities, and for varying lengths of time – from several weeks to a full semester. Several business students spent a semester studying at MUNI, and three groups of students have gone to Czechia as part of a travel course through the Presidential Scholars program and the Honors College.

President Michaelis took the first group of MCC students in the late '90s. Another group of MCC Presidential Scholars traveled to MUNI in 2009. The students were able to interact with faculty and students at MUNI, forging bonds, expanding their understanding of the world, and learning the benefits of travel. A group traveled in 2023 (a trip had been planned for 2020 but was cancelled due to the pandemic), and the next trip took place in spring of 2025.

Currently, students from MCC (Presidential Scholars and Honors College students) who travel to Czechia are part of an interdisciplinary humanities course co-led by Drs. Zdenek Janik and Amy Antoninka. The course encourages self-reflection, intercultural competency development, critical thinking, and relationship building. Participating MCC students are paired with MUNI students early in the spring semester and work collaboratively on virtual projects that help them understand each other's culture. From peer-to-peer interaction they gain cultural sensitivity and understand cultural diversity. They grow in respect for one another while combining theoretical knowledge with real-world understanding of human situations. The increased empathy, open-mindedness, and appreciation of the rich tapestry of human experiences increases their capacity to navigate a global world.

Funding

The two biggest barriers to meaningful global engagement for MCC students are economic and experiential. Most of our students have had little travel experience; many have never left McLennan County or flown on a plane. Additionally, our students generally do not have the financial resources to travel. Thus, we have sought to keep the cost affordable to students; our president has raised funds from private donors to pay a significant portion of the students' costs. In order to make the trip meaningful, all students are required to pay a minimum of \$300, and for others who are able to pay more, costs range from an additional \$32 to \$1250. TPEG (Texas Public Educational Grants) awards have been used to cover about half of the students' costs while the Foundation funds make up the additional costs.

Student-centered collaboration

An additional barrier to travel for some MCC students is fear. Having travelled little, they often have anxiety about leaving home and being in another country. Creating relationships with MUNI students studying at MCC provides a way to start overcoming such feelings prior to travel and provides a level of familiarity with the culture and context MCC students are entering. Additionally, the on-campus coursework that precedes the travel portion of the program promotes understanding of their peers in Brno. MCC and MUNI students work in virtual teams ("buddies") on assignments that encourage them to understand each other's culture in terms of



“relationships, rituals, and restrictions.” As these assignments progress the relationships that grow between the buddies help the students with that final barrier.

The MCC students’ excitement grows over the course, and during the trip they gain firsthand knowledge of Czech history, art, music, politics, and society through a series of immersive and interactive workshops led by MUNI professors. They also experience Czechia’s rich history, architecture, art, and culture through tours and field trips, and through the relationships with peers that were started during the semester.

Students’ reflections after the trip are telling. In general, they report that they gained new appreciation for another culture; grew in self-confidence and self-reliance; developed problem-solving skills, adaptability, communication skills, and creativity; and moved beyond the place they were comfortable to develop themselves in new ways. They overcame fear and communication barriers, and became more confident, empathic, and adaptable. As Perla Reynoso, MCC ambassador for MUNI students who was then able to participate in the program at MUNI herself, reflected, “this was the first step to improving myself.”

Relationships at the heart

From the beginning, learning, growing, and developing through relationships has been the root of the success of this global partnership. Everyone who has been part of the collaboration has been afforded the chance to gain intercultural competencies, develop tolerance and appreciation of different cultures, and build communication and critical thinking skills. Students, faculty, and all involved have had opportunities to broaden their perspectives and gain insights into global issues through teamwork and collaboration. The students involved are better prepared for a global job market; have gained skills and motivation, and experienced personal growth. The relational model used in this collaboration between MCC and MUNI makes these breakthroughs possible and strengthens our global partnership.

About the authors

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Impactful Collaborations: Using Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) to facilitate meaningful connections across borders at the Alamo Colleges District

Lindsey Kline

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Composed of five independently accredited community colleges in San Antonio, Texas and serving over 100,000 students, the Alamo Colleges District (ACD) is the largest provider of higher education in South Texas (Alamo Colleges District, 2024). ACD is guided by a strong moonshot goal of ending poverty in our community through education and training. In pursuit of this moonshot, the ACD Office of International Programs has sought to implement high-impact practices that foster connections between our students, faculty, and colleges with diverse communities around the world, while simultaneously giving students a chance to develop critical global competencies. The development of a robust Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program has been an effective tool for accomplishing this goal.

COIL is a virtual exchange methodology pioneered at the State University of New York in the early 2000s (Rubin & Guth, 2022). While there are different technical definitions of COIL (Hackett et al., 2024), at its core COIL is a technology-sustained pedagogical model wherein faculty at institutions in different countries and cultural contexts co-develop and co-facilitate a five-to-eight-week collaborative module for their students to work on together. Because COIL modules are integrated into existing academic courses and don't require travel, they are an accessible, affordable, and environmentally friendly alternative to traditional international education programs (de Wit, 2016).

Participation in COIL benefits students by facilitating the development of both intercultural skills (de Wit, 2016; Fukkink et al., Rubin et al., 2022) and global competencies (Duffy et al., 2022). In addition to supporting the students' personal growth, participation in COIL also fosters the development of career readiness skills that global employers are seeking in job candidates (AAC&U, 2025; Withanachchi et. al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025).

Leveraging COIL as a connector

COIL has been an invaluable tool for the Alamo Colleges District to build connections at every level of our community. ACD implemented its first COIL courses in the fall 2021 semester. Since that time, over 500 students have participated in COIL, 32 faculty have been trained in the COIL methodology, and the Alamo Colleges District has partnered with 27 higher education institutions in Argentina, Mexico, Honduras, Latvia, Brazil, Uganda, South Africa, Colombia, India, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Ukraine (Alamo Colleges District, 2024).



Student connections

Providing students with the opportunity to interact with peers from a different country and cultural context is one of the crucial elements of a COIL experience. For ACD students, many of whom have never left Texas, a COIL project may be the first time that a student has a meaningful interaction with fellow students from outside the United States. A student who participated in a COIL project with students from Mexico reflects:

“COIL has offered me new knowledge and different perspectives on the topics we researched together, such as ecotourism in other countries. Through the COIL program we had the ability to get to know each other and connect over mutual enjoyment of the natural wonders of our states and countries, such as our national parks. ... This enabled us to have a better understanding of their culture, and I hope throughout the exchange we were able to give them new knowledge about our culture and country as well.”

Navigating these collaborative tasks and building connections to their student peers also has a positive impact on educational attainment, particularly for students who have been historically underrepresented in participation in international education programs (Lee et al., 2022).

Faculty connections

COIL has been an invaluable way for ACD faculty to build their professional networks. Faculty COIL partnerships can be established in multiple ways. Faculty may have personal connections with faculty from outside institutions, and COIL is a way to formalize these partnerships. There are also several global networks (e.g. SUNY COIL, COIL Connect, PIC- Americas) that can help facilitate potential COIL faculty partnerships.

Regardless of how the COIL partnership is made, faculty partners work closely together to develop a collaborative activity or project for their students to work on together. At ACD, faculty teaching partners go through COIL training together to both design the module for students and become familiar with the COIL methodology. Through this collaborative process, faculty can develop meaningful personal and professional relationships with each other. COIL partnerships are frequently interdisciplinary, which allows faculty to connect across fields and offers their students the opportunity to explore their subject through a new lens.

The connections that ACD faculty have built through COIL have lasting impact beyond the COIL module itself. Within the ACD system, faculty from both St. Philip's College and Palo Alto College have traveled to international conferences to co-present with their COIL teaching partner. Another faculty member from Northwest Vista College connected their COIL course to a traditional study abroad program, scaffolding the COIL experience for their students to travel to Costa Rica. Other faculty build meaningful personal relationships with their COIL teaching partners that lead to continual reengagement in the COIL process every semester. By “re-COILing” these faculty continually hone their COIL techniques.

Participation in COIL also offers opportunities for ACD faculty to connect with a broader community of practice and professional organizations actively engaged in COIL. Dr. Yael Edrey was named an inaugural SUNY COIL Ambassador for her contributions to COIL. Two ACD faculty have been recipients of Texas International Education Foundation virtual exchange grants for their work – Melinda Zepeda for her COIL with the University of Mumbai in India and Patricia Nevarez for a COIL with Riga University in Latvia ().



Institutional connections

COIL helps build connections for students and faculty, but it is also a valuable way to build connections at the institutional level. At ACD, implementing COIL has been an important strategy for both strengthening existing institutional relationships and forging new partnerships.

Because of its relatively low financial cost and comparative ease of implementation, COIL is an attractive method to begin a formal institutional partnership. While logistics-heavy programs like study abroad or legally intricate opportunities like articulation agreements are integral parts of community college internationalization programs, they can often take many months, if not years, to establish and prepare for.

ACD has also leveraged its established COIL program and trainings to enhance existing international partnerships with institutions in both Cameroon and Mexico by developing COIL partnerships in addition to existing student mobility programs.

Just as they can be interdisciplinary for faculty, COILs can also work across institution type and level of training. Working with students from different types of institutions across the world allows ACD students to learn about different educational systems and strengthens the variety of institutional engagement ACD has.

Keys to COIL success at community colleges

While relevant at any institution type, COIL is particularly impactful at community colleges (Whatley, 2024). There are three key areas that have led to successful COIL implementation at ACD: Alignment, Institutional Support, and Meaningful Partnerships.

- **Alignment** – It is critical that both institutions participating in the COIL are aligned in their expectations for the collaboration. Faculty and administrators should share an understanding of how many COILs can feasibly be conducted between the two institutions and have a collective vision for the overall outcome of the COIL partnership. It is also important for a COIL program to be internally aligned with the institution's strategic mission and internationalization plan. At ACD, COIL is a key element of the nationally recognized comprehensive internationalization strategy.
- **Institutional Support** – Having a team member within the Office of International Programs dedicated to coordinating COIL efforts at the district level, supporting faculty development, and promoting COIL opportunities has been instrumental in the continued growth of the COIL program at ACD.
- **Meaningful Partnerships** – As with any institutional partnership, the most successful COIL partnerships between institutions are ones that are developed with care and intention. At ACD, a close working relationship between the COIL coordinator and the international relations & partnerships coordinator has contributed to the success of both the COIL program and broader institutional engagement.

For community colleges like ACD, COIL can be a valuable tool to offer affordable and environmentally sustainable international education programs and high-impact practices that support students' academic and professional outcomes. COIL can also be integral to developing new international relationships or strengthening existing partnerships.

Anchored by core institutional values of collaboration and community engagement, the ACD COIL program is essential to ensuring that students pursuing degrees and certificates at any of the five colleges have access to international education experiences that will support their success while enrolled and will prepare them to be competitive in the global job market.

About the author

Dr. Lindsey Kline has over a decade of experience working with students and faculty in international higher education, and her current professional efforts are dedicated incorporating COIL as an internationalization strategy in community colleges. Dr. Kline has a dual title Ph.D. in Higher Education and Comparative and International Education from Penn State University. Her research currently focuses on critical internationalization and virtual exchanges at U.S. community colleges. Email: lkline2@alamo.edu

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Mapping Global Partnerships: The Case of Symbiosis Skills Universities and Aalen University

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International collaborations in higher education are increasingly shifting from symbolic agreements toward substantive partnerships that deliver measurable outcomes for students and faculty alike. The partnership between Symbiosis Skills & Professional University, Pune (SSPU) & Symbiosis University of Applied Sciences, Indore, India with Aalen University of Applied Sciences, Germany, exemplifies this evolution toward applied, skill-based internationalization. This article explores the origins, scope, challenges, and outcomes of the collaboration, highlighting Symbiosis Skills Universities' distinctive approach to academic rigor, student support, and workforce-oriented global engagement.

Introduction

In the era of globalized education, cross-border partnerships have become essential in equipping students with international exposure, cultural intelligence, and workplace readiness (Knight, 2013; Brandenburg & de Wit, 2020). Moving beyond conventional exchange frameworks Symbiosis's collaboration with Aalen University represents a pragmatic model that aligns academic mobility with applied learning and industry integration. This collaboration goes beyond the classroom and is deeply rooted in the belief that internationalisation efforts should focus on creating synergies that enhance employability and strengthen community engagement.

How the relationship started

The collaboration originated when a Delegation led by Dr. Swati Mujumdar, Pro Chancellor, Symbiosis Skills & Professional University visited Germany and met with Professor Anja Dieckmann, Vice-Rector for International Affairs and Communication. The delegation's visit was aimed at introducing Symbiosis's academic ecosystem while identifying areas of shared interest, including student mobility, research partnerships, and industry engagement. Surprisingly, there was an instant synergy and alignment of missions between the two institutions. Both Universities have a strong and deep commitment to graduate employability, fostering community engagement, and developing global competencies

This dialogue soon translated into action, with the first cohort of SSPU students participating in a semester-abroad program at Aalen University. Discussions subsequently expanded to encompass faculty research and student internship opportunities. The awarding of Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM grants (described below) to Symbiosis Skills University students reinforced the credibility and depth of this partnership, signalling SSPU's growing integration into Germany's higher education network (Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, 2024).



Scope of activities

The Symbiosis–Aalen partnership encompasses multiple dimensions of engagement:

- Student mobility through semester-abroad programs.
- Collaborative research initiatives between faculty in areas such as advanced manufacturing, digital transformation, and mechatronics.
- Industry internships that connect theoretical learning to workplace application.
- Cultural immersion, giving Indian students direct exposure to European academic and professional settings.

Addressing the challenge of academic mapping

A central challenge in sustaining this collaboration is academic calendar alignment. The semester structures of SSPU and Aalen differ, often resulting in SSPU students returning mid-semester. This mismatch requires sophisticated academic mapping and pedagogical flexibility.

To address this, Symbiosis Skills Universities have instituted a system that includes:

- Mapping of overlapping and missed course units.
- Customized bridging modules and tutorials.
- Faculty-led assessments to ensure parity in learning outcomes.

This rigorous approach ensures that students returning from abroad not only meet Symbiosis’s curricular standards but also graduate with the same competencies as their peers. This model demonstrates how mobility and academic integrity can coexist through institutional commitment and structured faculty involvement (Khanka, 2025).

Recognition through the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM

A hallmark of this collaboration is the recognition of Symbiosis Skills Universities’ students through the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM, a prestigious scholarship awarded exclusively through partnerships between Baden-Württemberg universities and their international counterparts. The program, administered by the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, supports outstanding international students, encouraging intercultural exchange and academic collaboration.

Partner universities such as Aalen pre-select eligible candidates, with final approval by the Foundation. Several SSPU students have received this scholarship, reflecting not only their academic excellence but also SSPU’s standing as a globally credible skills university. The scholarship reduces financial barriers while symbolizing SSPU’s active role in fostering Indo-German academic cooperation (Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, 2024).



Student support and academic reintegration

At Symbiosis Skills Universities, international mobility is conceptualized as a holistic learning journey encompassing pre-departure preparation, ongoing mentorship, and post-return academic reintegration.

- Pre-departure phase: Students participate in orientation sessions organized by the Office of Global Engagement, addressing academic, cultural, and logistical preparedness. Personalized guidance is provided for scholarship applications such as the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM.
- During mobility: Symbiosis maintains digital engagement with students to monitor academic progress and well-being. Faculty mentors from both universities collaborate on evaluating projects and coursework.
- Post-return reintegration: Returning students undergo structured academic mapping, bridging modules, and tutorials to ensure continuity. Individualized study plans are created to facilitate seamless re-entry into ongoing curricula.

This proactive framework ensures that study-abroad experiences enhance academic and professional growth without disrupting degree progression.

Student participation and experiences

The diversity of participants underscores the inclusivity of Symbiosis's approach:

- In 2024, six students from the Pune and Indore campuses participated: three from *Mechatronics*, two from *Computer Science*, and one from *BBA Logistics*.
- In 2025, another six students joined: four from *Retail*, two from *Computer Science*, and one from *Media*.

Student reflections highlight the transformative nature of the experience:

"It was the best experience for me, and I would strongly recommend my juniors to go through this."
— *Avigney, CSIT*

"The work in vehicle design, 3D printing, and the Industry 4.0 lab was fantastic in giving me practical learning opportunities." — *Dhruv, Mechatronics*

"I liked the fact that the work was project-based, and we got to work with diverse groups. That really enhanced the experience." — *Tanaya, CSIT*

These testimonials reinforce SSPU's commitment to producing globally aware, industry-ready graduates through experiential international learning.



Outcomes and accomplishments

Despite structural challenges, the SSPU–Aalen partnership has achieved measurable outcomes:

- Two cohorts (2024, 2025) have successfully completed exchanges across multiple disciplines.
- Joint faculty research discussions have commenced.
- SSPU has established itself as a leader in skills-based, globally integrated education, emphasizing substance over symbolism in international partnerships.

Future directions

The partnership is expected to evolve through:

- Enhanced academic mapping systems to streamline student transitions.
- Development of dual-degree and joint research initiatives.
- Short-term study tours and intensive skills bootcamps to supplement semester-long exchanges.

These initiatives align with Symbiosis’s broader strategy of linking global learning with local workforce development, reflected in its collaborations with institutions such as Wor-Wic Community College, USA.

Implications for global partnerships

The Symbiosis–Aalen case highlights key lessons for institutions seeking to internationalize through skills-based education:

- Anticipate and plan for structural misalignments such as differing academic calendars and credit systems.
- Emphasize skills and applied learning, not merely credit transfer.
- Engage faculty as co-creators of the partnership model.
- Ensure inclusivity by providing academic and financial support for diverse learners.
- Foster reciprocity and mutual benefit through research, innovation, and employability outcomes.



Conclusion

The Symbiosis–Aalen University collaboration exemplifies the next generation of higher education partnerships — those that combine academic excellence, industry relevance, and intercultural understanding. Through its robust academic mapping system, scholarship facilitation, and dedicated student support, SSPU has established itself as a pioneer of skill-oriented, globally connected education in India. The voices of SSPU students stand as testimony to how such partnerships can redefine international mobility — not as a privilege, but as a transformative, academically rigorous, and inclusive experience.

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Building Strategic Partnerships for Global Education at Monroe Community College: A Case Study with Cornell University's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies

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As part of our mission, Monroe Community College's latest strategic plan states that we will "build global engagement and understanding" (Vision 2027, p. 5) while strengthening the "college's commitment to community, service, and justice" (Vision 2027, p. 7). We serve this mission through co-curricular programming, professional development opportunities, and strategic partnerships to enhance teaching and learning for our students in the classroom and to create a greater sense of community and belonging at the college.

Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY (New York) is one of 30 community colleges in the State University of New York system. We enroll a global student body; our students include over 800 immigrant and refugee students and average 100 full-time, degree-seeking international students per year from six continents and over 30 countries. Our office, Global Education and International Services (GEIS), performs three main functions at the college in a unique model that serves students and supports teaching and learning. We advise and support international students, provide academic advising for new immigrant and refugee students, and build strategic relationships with partners at the college and in the community to create educational opportunities for students, faculty, and staff.

While the buzz of our office is often the foot traffic of students who need advising and seek a sense of belonging in our Global Commons, the co-curricular planning of global education, as a high impact practice, is imperative to the work we do in GEIS and at MCC. At MCC, our priority in global education is to provide multi-modal ways for our students and faculty to expand their knowledge about global systems and understand their impact on our local communities. Through partnerships with local and international colleges and universities and community-based organizations, we have enhanced global learning at MCC.

A foundational partnership

In 2018, MCC and the Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University entered a formal partnership to collaborate on professional development opportunities for global learning. Cornell had been awarded four U.S. Department of Education Title VI grants to engage with area community colleges, like MCC, to explore curricular internationalization projects with faculty through guest lecture and fellowship opportunities, workshops, and access to its area studies resources and expertise (e.g., its libraries). Geographically, areas of focus first included South and Southeast Asia but soon expanded to include Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. The expansive global context allowed our faculty to explore working with scholars with expertise in these areas and helped offer greater representation of global perspectives in our college programming and in the classroom.

Key objectives for global learning at MCC include a commitment to diversity, equity, and belonging in both global and local contexts, increasing opportunities and support for professional learning and development, and highlighting scholarship and research through visiting lectures and performances to make connections to local and global communities.



For the past seven years, we have worked closely with Einaudi outreach manager and fellowship coordinator, Kathi Colen Peck to invite visiting scholars, activists, and artists at Cornell to lecture or perform at MCC. Early on in our partnership, we decided to seek scholars who work and conduct research in their countries or geographic regions of origin. It was an important objective to frame global education with a decolonial lens when possible and invite scholars with a non-Western perspective.

Community engagement and impact

When hosting a scholar for a classroom discussion, we open the class to the MCC community and the Rochester community at large. Rochester is home to many immigrant and refugee families, and to highlight how the global context often impacts our local communities, we invite community members from these countries of origin, local non-profit organizations working with global populations, as well as area colleges, universities, and organizations to attend these lectures. Those attending have a chance to dialogue with scholars and activists working and researching topics in their home countries. Examples include:

- In partnership with MCC's Institute for the Humanities, MCC Libraries, and photography professor Jasna Bogdanovska, we collaborated and curated a photography exhibit and lecture with photo documentarian & activist from Myanmar, Min Ma Naing (pseudonym), who fled for safety after the country's 2021 coup d'état. The photography exhibit, *Faces of Change*, on display in MCC's LeRoy V. Good Library in the Fall of 2021, drew in local activists and people from the local refugee community originally from Myanmar. Min Ma Naing fostered a friendship and collaboration with community members who attended, who also curated a show for the refugee community, and the relationship continues today.
- A year and a half later, in spring 2023, visiting scholar and feminist human rights activist from Myanmar, May Sabe Phyu, lectured in Dr. Joseph Scanlon's Comparative Political Systems class on the resistance to her home country's military authoritarianism. We invited several of our international students from Myanmar to attend the event. One of our new students recognized the activist as a friend of her mother and aunt who helped shelter Phyu in Myanmar just before leaving the country to keep her family safe. This connection took us all by surprise and was a moving reunion.
- In partnership with student-led sustainability and biology clubs, we hosted a panel of five Cornell-based Hubert H. Humphrey Fellows from Kyrgyzstan, Tanzania, Uganda, Laos, and Brazil, who are scholars and advocates of environmental policy and sustainability. We invited political cartoonist Pedro X. Molina exiled from Nicaragua to lecture and then teach in Professor Franzie Weldgen's comic book class. Dancer and choreographer, Marcel Gbeffa, from Benin, West Africa, led an interactive dance class and lecture on our downtown campus. The director of our local and world-renowned Garth Fagan Dance company attended and participated with our college attendees, including children of our staff and students.
- Recently, we hosted Yaku Pérez Guartambel, a Kichwa Kañari leader, lawyer, teacher, author, and presidential candidate in Ecuador in 2021 and 2023 with an agenda focusing on what Guartambel calls "defense of water." He presented in Spanish with translators to a packed room of students from our sustainability class and club. Even though the audience was primarily English speakers, the topic and philosophical presence of our speaker resonated in the room and many lingered afterwards to pause and reflect on his message. This kind of learning would not have been possible without this partnership and collaboration with Cornell.



From faculty to student learning

Since 2019, MCC's collaboration with Cornell also included a year-long, grant-supported Community College Internationalization Fellowship. To date, over a span of six years, 15 MCC faculty have worked with faculty and staff at Cornell to focus on one of the four global regions. Utilizing resources at Cornell and the expertise of Cornell's faculty members, MCC faculty developed new global learning modules for their courses. Reflections by participating faculty illustrate the impact of the program and how it enhances student learning:

- MCC political science professor Dr. Joseph Scanlon, notes, "Cornell's Community College Internationalization Fellows program is an outstanding opportunity for students and faculty alike. Faculty can flexibly pursue unique projects that enhance course learning outcomes and student success within a global context. With access to Cornell resources, the program also provides faculty with an occasion for meaningful and essential professional development. Overall, this was a great experience, and I am grateful to have been a part of the 2022-2023 cohort."
- Biology professor Laura Penman said, "My experience as a fellow granted me access to resources that enriched my own content-area knowledge and enhanced my courses. As a fellow during the 'tail end' of pandemic shutdowns, I was able to access many seminars via Zoom related to the disciplines of agriculture, health, and sustainability. I also enjoyed the opportunity to learn from programming that was less directly related to my content-area (including seminars and workshops with historical, artistic, and political themes)."
- Music professor, Dr. Rollo Fisher, stated, "the Cornell Fellowship increased my ability to partner with primary resources from music cultures in areas of the world I did not have connections with. This gave more authenticity to my music in world cultures course content."

MCC's partnership with Cornell allows us to invite scholars, activists, musicians, and artists who share perspectives that are often personal, social justice focused, and decolonial. It supports the scholarship and interests of our dedicated faculty and helps make connections to global systems for our students. Most importantly, highlighting scholars and artists from global cultures that reflect the heritage of our students and community fosters a sense of belonging and connection to the world and our college.

An epilogue of sorts, but not an end

In August of 2025, after this article was submitted, we learned that the Title VI grants that funded this partnership were essentially withdrawn. Kathi wrote me this email:

Since there's been no communication from the US Department of Education regarding the continuation of Title VI NRC & UISFL funding, and with our current year grant funding ending next week on August 14 (2025), the Einaudi Center's outreach program will end with it. I am therefore poised to be laid off on the same date. As you might guess, I'm heartbroken but slowly making peace with it.

A month later, the Acting Assistant Secretary of the US Department of Education released a "Notice of Non-Continuation of Grant Award" stating that several programs under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965, two of which supported community college outreach, were no longer consistent with the continuation requirements for multiyear grants and would therefore not be making continuation awards to its grantees.



During Kathi's tenure as outreach manager, she worked with six community colleges in Western and Central NY, including MCC, facilitated close to 200 visits to these campuses with scholars and artists based at or visiting Cornell, and supported and mentored 37 community college faculty fellows in 17 disciplines. The model she developed allowed our faculty to pursue research interests, utilize Cornell's vast scholar resources, and make site visits to countries of interest. Hundreds of MCC students had an opportunity to hear from scholars, grapple with new information, and celebrate with music and performances from scholars and artists around the world.

Learning that funding had not been renewed, our Provost and Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Michael Jacobs, said, "Title VI funding and our partnership with Cornell have been vital in supporting Monroe Community College faculty as we deepen our global expertise and integrate international perspectives into our teaching and research. Programs like these are critical for expanding the reach and impact of community colleges in an increasingly interconnected world."

Since this grant ended, we have been exploring ways to continue these meaningful partnerships. We are considering a cross institutional lecture series with in-house scholars, as well as offering small stipends to artists, musicians, and business owners to share global music, artistry, or expertise in specific global content areas. Always focusing on the ways our local and global communities are connected, we are increasing our community engagement with immigrant and refugee organizations to bring their expertise to campus.

Many of our faculty have maintained relationships with some of the scholars we worked with at Cornell. Art professor Franzie Weldgen, cited above, noted that his collaboration with Pedro X. Molina continues today with coffee meetings in Ithaca and discussions to inform his comic book curriculum at MCC. Several other fellows remain engaged with partners or scholars they met through the program virtually and through email. We continue to explore grants and funding opportunities for student and faculty exchange.

In a recent New York Times article (Austen, 2025), it was noted that federal cuts to higher education programs impact community colleges who educate a vital group of local students. Bringing scholars to our campus opened a perspective and offered high impact experiential learning for students who may not have the resources to travel or plan an academic program abroad. It gave our faculty, who are committed to the teaching and learning of our students, time for research and innovation. Community colleges are robust places of global learning because of partnerships like the one we have with Cornell's Einaudi Center for International Studies. This is a loss for us all – but, just a pause, and not an end.



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About the author

Dr. Christina Lee leads efforts to build strategic partnerships and design curricular programming with a global lens. Her work integrates perspectives on diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and social justice, ensuring that students engage with global learning in ways that are culturally responsive and inclusive. She is a 2025 inaugural fellow of SUNY's AANHPI (Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander) Leadership Institute. Email: clee40@monroecc.edu



Establishing Dynamics for Successful Growth of Global Engagement Partnerships: A Step-by-Step Approach

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The case examples presented in this installment of *Mapping Community Colleges Around the World* demonstrate the positive impacts of global partnerships on faculty, staff, institutions, and most importantly, on student learning. Truly generative partnerships such as these – that evolve over time and encompass a range of activities – require sustained commitment, resources, intentionality, and at times, tenacity and problem-solving. They are not easy and should not be undertaken lightly. For community colleges that aspire to build effective and rewarding global partnerships, it is important to understand all that is entailed and to lay the foundations for successful relationships. The rewards are great – but for colleges that are new to global engagement, where should they start?

First: Introduce “internationalization”

Internationalization has been defined as the integration of “international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003). Raby (2022) among other scholars, credits a 1947 Truman administration report articulating the need for international understanding to be delivered to students through curriculum and instruction as igniting internationalization in community colleges and other US higher education institutions.

Since then, Raby (2022) notes, the development of community college internationalization has been directly influenced by national association statements and advocacy, and at the institutional level, changes in mission statements and dedicated administrative support. Her research demonstrates that schools that have developed international education practices, such as mission statements, curriculum development, internationalized curriculum, and study abroad, have proven records of student persistence and retention.

While the need for global and cross-cultural competencies has been established decade after decade, the percentage of community colleges that pursue internationalization remains low; more than 40% of US students are enrolled in community colleges, yet less than three percent of community colleges participate in global engagement. McRaven and Somers (2017) suggested that factors inhibiting community college internationalization include lack of leadership support, scarcity of resources, fear of the unknown, and even skepticism of – or outright resistance to – the need for internationalization.

A first step toward overcoming these barriers is to introduce the concept of internationalization and articulate the need for it in the context of community colleges and the specific circumstances of the institution. Student success is at the heart of the community college mission – what, then, are the ways that internationalization contributes to student success? How does bringing global perspectives and experiences into the curriculum align with and serve local economic needs? What resources and connections on campus and in the community might be available to support internationalization efforts? Engaging academic faculty, staff, students, and administrators in the discussion of these questions and how internationalization aligns with college strategy and operations will generate ideas for what aspects of internationalization to focus on and what activities to undertake.



In terms of activities, it is advisable to start small and capitalize on the enthusiasm of “champions” – for example, individual faculty members who are eager to bring international dimensions into their courses via virtual guest lectures from colleagues in other countries, or lead a short-term education abroad experience for students embedded within a course. Concrete examples of activities that are launched successfully, combined with intentional discussions and planning among multiple stakeholders, will build enthusiasm for internationalization, and lay the groundwork for individual forays to come together into more complex endeavors such as institutional partnerships.

Next: Cultivate a culture

While discussions and discrete activities are an entry point, in order for internationalization to truly take root and grow, it is critical to establish a campus culture that is supportive of development on all levels of the organization – one that fosters a campus-wide desire to support and sustain global engagement.

A qualitative study concluded in 2023 of eleven community colleges examined the ways community colleges can establish such a culture. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators, staff, and faculty at community colleges with established internationalization plans and programs, located in various regions of the US. Participants described their institutions’ internationalization efforts, including what it took to develop a successful campus-wide philosophy.

Themes that emerged as key components of establishing a culture supportive of internationalization included leadership engagement, academic support, communication, infrastructure, strategic planning, and intentionality. One participant, for example, noted how important it was to have clear messaging throughout the campus – like a choir “singing from the same song sheet.” Several others agreed, noting that internationalization “can’t be a lone wolf” or “disjointed” endeavor. Incorporating internationalization into institutional mission statements and strategic plans, as well as establishing internationalization committees, were cited as infrastructural supports that enabled culture change.

While all of these components are important, research indicates that the support and engagement of top institution leaders is perhaps the most critical factor. For example, Harder (2010) conducted a study of internationalization in urban, suburban, and rural community colleges, in which the highest level of significance was attributed to having an administration focused on “cultivating a campus-wide commitment to internationalization.” This finding has endured over time; more than a decade later, the importance of leadership was underscored in ACE’s 2022 *Mapping Internationalization on US Campuses* study, which demonstrated that upper-level leadership, senior international officers, and faculty were the most important catalysts of internationalization (ACE, 2022).

Then: Progress to partnerships

With a supportive campus culture established and initial global activities underway, multifaceted institution-level partnerships can be an excellent way to focus efforts and grow global engagement strategically and sustainably. Such relationships require the coordinated engagement of multiple stakeholders in an array of operational and strategic roles, who first need to come together to determine initial goals and desired activities, and importantly, assess available resources and feasible scope. ACE’s *Internationalization in Action* series defines various “levels” of global partnerships and types of partnership agreements and provides a useful framework for decisions about scale and scope (Gatewood & Buck Sutton, n.d.).



Next, it is time to identify an initial partner. This may arise organically from existing smaller-scale collaborations at the faculty-to-faculty level, or community connections such as sister city organizations. Other programs and relationships that can be leveraged for partnership development include: the Fulbright International Education Administrator, Specialist, or Scholar-in-Residence programs; the Council of American Overseas Research Centers' community college faculty programs; state-based economic development, trade, or commerce committees; "study state" consortia; collaborations with universities that have established overseas partners; and professional organizations such as ACCT, Community College for International Development (CCID) or NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA).

In addition, governments outside the US are increasingly seeking to engage with community colleges and are offering programs and support. For example, Campus France, a partnership between the French government and French higher education institutions established to foster connections and increase transatlantic mobility, offers "French Bootcamps" – two-week, multidisciplinary programs for community college students and faculty that focus on sustainability (Villa Albertine, 2024). These programs are kept affordable by design and subsidized by the French government.

Putting it all together: An example

One community college's participation in the French Bootcamp program provides an illustration of how internationalization, campus culture, and partnerships come together in a virtuous cycle. Initially, the college was paired with a French counterpart institution to create classroom-to-classroom virtual projects and interactions. As part of the program, the faculty involved in these initial classroom-level collaborations then had the opportunity to participate in a face-to-face exchange, which solidified their working relationships and generated ideas for additional and on-going activities, including faculty-led study abroad programs for students going in both directions.

At the start, institutional support for participating faculty was low, but as activities progressed and the positive impact on students became apparent, the collaboration has gained support from upper administration and interest from other faculty. A track record of success has led to direct involvement by the college's foundation, the development of community programs and engagement, and several faculty volunteering to help coordinate logistics for visits from the French partner institution's staff and students. Importantly, the experience and lessons learned have helped the college's global committee have more definitive conversations with administrative leaders about the future of international education activities at the college.

Conclusion

Global partnerships require infrastructural, administrative, and fiscal support to be fully successful and sustainable. Such relationships may not be a starting place for internationalization and global engagement, but rather a culmination – or drawing together – of an array of collaborative activities and efforts. Key strategies to bear in mind when starting down the global partnerships path include:

- Assess institutional resources, relationships, administrative support, and campus culture to ensure there is a strong foundation for developing and sustaining relationships with prospective partners.
- Seek global partner institutions that offer parity in academics, programs with an applied-learning focus, opportunities for students to gain workforce skills, access to businesses in the region, and faculty and staff development initiatives.
- Remain flexible and open to new approaches and opportunities so that partnerships and other internationalization efforts augment and amplify learning across and beyond the campus community.

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