

Virtual Exchange: **Click** Early Results for Faculty and Students Gazelle International Higher Education Brief

We are proud to share the results of our initial year working with the Connecticut community college system (CCC) to launch its first ever comprehensive International Education Initiative. With a small data set (70 students, six teachers), we do not claim statistical significance. Yet, we are eager to share our preliminary insights and seek feedback on our methods and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative.

The Connecticut Initiative's aim is to advance the CCC system's mission "to prepare Connecticut students to be successful global citizens" and support its goals to contribute to faculty development; expand faculty/student exchanges; develop skill-building in critical thinking, communication, languages, cultural competencies and social responsibility; and expand technological competencies. All are important to academic and personal success, and to employer needs. This initiative intends to widen paths to international education for the over 50,000 credit-enrolled students of all 12 CCCs. Using Gazelle's virtual exchange system, **Click** (Collaborative Learning for International Capabilities and Knowledge), we harnessed a troika of tools — faculty talent, technology and travel — to enable students to develop their international capabilities through cross-country teamwork in classroom settings. **Click**'s two-country faculty teaching partnerships served as the CCC's entry ramp to a sustainable internationalization strategy anchored in the curriculum with existing technologies. Beyond the classroom connections, travel opportunities supplied key motivators for funders, students and faculty.

Three programs were implemented in the first year (2017-18). The **Click** virtual module in Fall 2017, "Expression Through Digital Media," included two professors and 21 students total from Middlesex CC in CT and LaSalle University in Mexico. In Spring 2018, the **Click** virtual module "Health & Technology: Complex Topics, Clear Writing" consisted of four professors and 49 students from Asnuntuck CC in CT and IUT-Lannion in France. The Explorers group, composed of eight students and three faculty members from CT, traveled over 10 days in May-June of 2018 to Paris and Lannion, Brittany, France.

Our three operational goals focused on program-building, engaging faculty and promoting student learning. We assessed outcomes for three key groups: teachers, **Click** students, and students who also traveled. We asked teachers such questions as: did they feel the value of **Click** justified their extra effort and time? Would they repeat it themselves? Encourage colleagues? We assessed whether responses from students in the **Click** class teams indicated greater cross-cultural maturity and awareness of the wider world, greater confidence in 21st century skills (technology, x-country team work), and positive expectations for their futures and possibilities of success in the global workforce. We also sought to determine how responses from students who traveled in addition to **Click** classes (the Explorers group) compared with the **Click**-only experience.

The next two sections present highlights of our results, first for faculty, then for students. The students' results include both the Explorers who traveled and the **Click** classes virtual-only students.

Faculty Assessment Results

Three take-away points seemed most salient. The six faculty completed a post-**Click** survey with closed (scale of 1-5) and open-ended questions. Pre-**Click**, they completed a set of guide questions about their "**Click**-able" classes, teaching and learning goals, hopes and concerns.

Faculty engagement and satisfaction: The majority of faculty found the time they invested in the program worthwhile, would recommend the program to colleagues and would like to teach **Click** again. They found that the experience enriched their teaching as a whole and provided skills and knowledge that they will use in teaching future courses. Faculty were pleasantly surprised by the technology demands and felt emboldened in their ability to integrate technology in their teaching.

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Student learning value: Overall, faculty praised the **Click** program and found it very worthwhile in terms of student results.¹ Crucially, they believed that students learned as much of the subject matter in the **Click** course as in a regular course. They also found that their students gained extra skills and knowledge beyond the course material which would benefit them in other courses and extracurriculars.

Support for future international work: Faculty indicated that they believed the experience introduced them to new knowledge and skills related to globalization and teaching in a global classroom. In particular, faculty honed networking skills and formed meaningful connections with international colleagues that they were eager to maintain. They supported future international work and increased cross-cultural opportunities for both faculty and students via traveling and hosting.

Student Assessment Results: Click-only, Explorers Click-plus-travel

We drew our data from pre- and post-surveys of two student groups: **Click**-only surveys had 70 pre-survey and 54 post-survey responses, US and overseas combined; and Explorers, **Click**-plus-travel, had eight US students for both the pre- and post-travel survey. Constellating these responses together, we identified four key takeaways around student learning: cosmopolitan skew, cultural awareness and engagement, workforce value, and technology and teamwork as 21st century skills.

Cosmopolitan skew: The “cosmopolitan skew” is the term we have coined to describe a phenomenon we observed, i.e. the cultural self-perception that college students consider themselves to be more sophisticated, savvy, and aware of the world than their surrounding community and peers—an assumption which appears in the student responses. Simply put, the cross-country encounter tested their initially high cosmopolitan self-perception and they subsequently found themselves wanting. This seemed to crystallize in higher pre- and lower post- results for the **Click**-only group. They became more truly globally aware and cosmopolitan. They realized what it really meant to read about world events and to be able to collaborate across cultures. Here, it is important to note that the eight Explorer students started high and ended high in their self-perception of cosmopolitanism. This suggests the four week **Click** module may have had more than a superficial effect in shaping students’ inter- and intra-cultural perceptions on its own -- even without travel.

Cultural awareness and engagement: Data from the pre- and post-**Click** surveys showed over 50% of students felt the experience changed how they related to the world. However, there was a roughly 20% shift downward from both US and overseas students in the post-course survey responses. This disappointment suggests that we could have set more realistic expectations for **Click** projects. On a more positive note, we saw evidence of growing realism regarding staying informed about world news and events, and in valuing different cultural views.

Workforce value: Students started with high expectations that learning to collaborate cross culturally with faculty and students would help prepare them for the workforce. However, post-**Click** results revealed disappointment. Perhaps this was due to overselling the possibilities of a four-week global module, or not clarifying the effects related to immediate job prospects versus long term careers and success in the workforce. In addition to adjusting expectations, we need to help students understand how the skills honed in a **Click** experience, such as cross-cultural teamwork and using technology in an international work-like setting, can be translated into resumés and job interview settings. It is important to note that we witnessed more positive results on this front in the Explorer’s responses, perhaps because in

¹ One outlier respondent that confirmed the trend of faculty satisfaction noted that, while the experience was worthwhile, there were several ways in which it might be improved, such as the choice of technology and the need to invest more time in developing the student team interactions.

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addition to navigating daily life overseas, they also had hands-on opportunities in international workforce settings ranging from demonstrations in a robotics lab to work in television broadcasting studio.

Technology and teamwork as 21st century skills: Pre-**Click**, students felt comfortable with their technological skills. Their post-**Click** responses showed even stronger confidence, with comments demonstrating specific accomplishments in this area. In relation to a different skill-set, developing teamwork, pre- and post-survey results were disappointing. The Explorers group from CT had only short interactions with French students during their travels and met only a few of their **Click**-class teammates, due to French internship schedules. In the largest **Click**-only group, the faculty felt that the students did not form bonds or team spirit in the way the teachers did. This underscores the need to focus on the early bonding and team formation among students. The choice of apps and technology needs to support and promote true interaction rather than independent coordinated work. In the communication skill set, there was a positive shift, especially notable for the Explorers. From a strong positive sense before the trip, all students ended the experience with a firm sense of the importance of communicating in more than one language. Additionally, after the trip, students felt communicating in a different language was harder than expected but still quite manageable.

Looking forward: With an additional 15 teachers and four **Click** modules in Spring 2019 and another cohort expected in Fall 2019, we look forward to more robust information and lessons. We welcome comments and suggestions from our colleagues in the field.

We are honored to help the CT Community Colleges, along with our French and Mexican partners, pursue their international and global goals. We would be pleased to explore ways these and other tools and strategies can work for your campus.

Nancy L. Ruther, EdD
Principal, Gazelle International
www.gazelle-international.org
nancyruther@gazelle-international.org
nancy.ruther@yale.edu

