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Introducing Service-Learning in an Afghan First-Year Seminar

Founded in 2004, The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) located in Kabul is the country's only private, not-for-profit institution of higher education. Nonsectarian and nonpolitical, AUAF is built on an American education model and offers internationally supported professional degree programs. Though Afghanistan has a respectable state-run educational system, its students are placed in tracks based on test outcomes administered at the end of high school. Higher education is essentially professional or technical in nature. AUAF, in contrast, provides a liberal arts education as well as quality career specialization to approximately 500 students.

With the hiring of a new director of student affairs recruited from the United States in 2009, AUAF revamped its fledgling first-year seminar by unifying the syllabus with a more liberal arts education focus, selecting a new text, and incorporating a service-learning project. The director also serves as the seminar's instructor.

While service-learning is used in a variety of courses and programs in colleges and universities throughout the United States with generally positive student feedback (Zlotkowski, 2002), it was not known how Afghan Muslim students would receive this concept. Certainly opportunities for service in Afghanistan are endless, but consideration had to be given to the presentation of service-learning to avoid any cultural missteps. Afghans typically tithed a percentage of their earnings through their local mosques, and staff needed to be sensitive to the role of commu-

nity service in Islam, how service is viewed beyond religion-bound duty, and to the students' willingness to seriously participate in a secular, class-mandated project rather than superficially complete a requirement.

Service-learning was first incorporated into the required three-credit seminar, UNV-101, offered in two sections during the spring 2009 term. The 48 first-year students enrolled in the both sections collaborated on a single project. Students were divided into four groups, and each group researched a potential idea (e.g., street cleanup, road building, clothing drives). To maintain a student-centered focus and a sense of ownership among the participants as well as teach decision-making and leadership skills, students used an instructor-designed rubric to rate the presentations and voted on which one to implement. The proposal selected

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Kabul children's circus entertains Fun Fair attendees. (Photo used with permission of author)

benefitted the several thousand Afghan Internally Displaced People (IDP), who were camped on the outskirts of Kabul by addressing refugee hygiene needs. Many IDP live in dangerously unsanitary conditions (e.g., overcrowding, unsafe water, lack of sewage disposal), a stark departure from the relative comfort and cleanliness of their villages. Students assembled hygiene kits, including soap, shampoo, wash cloths, combs, and water purification tablets; distributed the kits to IDP camps; and provided basic hygiene training, a critical part of the project. To raise money for the kits, the students proposed a campus Fun Fair complete with games, vendors, and entertainment.



Students load hygiene kits for distribution. (Photo used with permission of author)

Tasks were divided and assigned to each group, and the entire project, from the concept of the fair to its implementation, along with the purchase of materials and the assembly and distribution the hygiene kits, was managed by the students. In an effort to research the most essential items for the kits, the class visited the Afghan Ministry of Public Health. Ironically, the Ministry staff already had a supply of donated hygiene kits, but lacked distribution manpower. The Ministry not only had sufficient kits for the selected area of the IDP camp, but there were enough for the entire camp. The Ministry entrusted kits valued at more than \$60,000 to the students, who now faced an unanticipated challenge: coordinating the distribution of the kits and hygiene training to an even larger group—the entire camp.

With the kits donated, there no longer appeared to be a need for the campus Fun Fair; however, the fair's momentum was unstoppable. Money had already appeared in the library donation box, and advertising was up and running. Over 400 guests attended and more than \$3,000 was raised in addition to in-kind donations. Closer inspection of the kits later revealed that a critical item was missing—water purification tablets—and fair donations supplied the money necessary to complete the kits.



Students distributing hygiene kits at refugee camp. (Photo used with permission of author)

To assist in the final purchase of hygiene items and to organize distribution of supplies, the project's public relations team arranged for media coverage. This was a fresh story about Afghan youth, a vivid counterpoint to the usual bleak war coverage. The event, a success for students and refugees alike, was covered by national and international news agencies.

The passion and commitment AUAF students displayed for their project was strikingly different compared to the students the instructor had encountered in teaching service-learning in first-year seminars for six years in the United States. Afghan students actively embraced the project and were deeply appreciative that service to the community was valued enough to be placed in the curriculum as evidenced by comments from their service-learning reflection exercises.

This service-learning project has given us an opportunity for a better understanding of our own community. It took me outside myself, outside of my family life. And it trained me to care about something outside of my immediate world. I experienced that I can bring change and that makes such a profound difference. You never know about your community until you visit

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them in person and what you can actually change in the life of your community. (UNV-101 Student)

The first time when I heard about service-learning, I thought it might not be something very useful for students, but after completion of the project I realized that I was wrong. The service-learning project was the most rewarding and worthwhile project I have ever participated in. We learned a great deal from this project. The project brought students from different backgrounds, thoughts, and genders very close to each other. We shared ideas and thoughts through which we developed deeper understanding of each other. We recognized our civic responsibilities through this project. We saw things in person that we only watched and heard through the media. There was great difference between what we heard and what we saw there. We learned about our weak points and where our strong points [are]. All which would not have been possible without taking part in this project. (UNV-101 Student)

While the direct impact of the service-learning component in the UNV-101 class on AUAF's enrollment and retention efforts has not been formally assessed, 2010 recruitment efforts surpassed all expectations. Spring 2010 overall enrollment was 508 students, representing nearly a 100% increase from 2009 figures, and included 114 new first-year students. In addition, 15 UNV-101 students continued their leadership training and service-learning involvement by enrolling in the University's new Leadership 101 course, and more sections have been added to the seminar. Coordinating service-learning for 129 students (i.e., first-year seminar and leadership classes) will be challenging, but based on the success of the 48 students involved in the inaugural service-learning project, the positive impacts on both AUAF students and the Afghan community are expected to be far-reaching and exponential.

HOME

From the Editor

We recognize that in an era of increasingly scarce financial resources that everyone has to make difficult choices about the publications and services they purchase. We are grateful for your support of *E-Source for College Transitions* and are committed to providing continuing access to practical strategies for supporting student learning and success for college educators throughout the United States and around the world. As a result, we are making some changes to better serve our readers. This issue marks the last publication of *E-Source* as a bimonthly, subscription newsletter. Beginning October 2010, *E-Source* will be published biannually (October and March) on a complimentary basis. Archival content will be available via MetaPress through December 31, 2010. After that time, new and archival content will be posted on the NRC web site at www.sc.edu/fye/esource

E-Source remains a submission-driven publication focusing on student transition, learning, and success, and we invite you to submit articles about your assessed initiatives. Submission guidelines can be found at <http://u101tech.sa.sc.edu/NRC/esource/submission.php>

Thank you for your past support of *E-Source*; we hope you will continue to find *E-Source* a useful and inspiring publication. To register for e-mail alerts to future issues, please go to <http://u101tech.sa.sc.edu/NRC/esource/index.php>

Toni Vakos
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The Big Picture

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Peer Leadership: Situation-Specific Support Roles

Experienced and successful students have been used in a wide variety of support roles to provide assistance to their less-experienced peers and to ultimately improve student persistence rates (Black & Voelker, 2008; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998). What follows is a more complete listing of specific leadership positions that have been cited in the higher education literature and at professional conferences. The list is intended to be comprehensive, but it is not exhaustive. However, the wide range of positions identified below can serve as a starting point for campuses interested in expanding the number and variety of leadership opportunities they provide for their students.

- **Student Ambassadors** work with college admissions to recruit new students and assist with campus visits by prospective students and their families.
- **Student Orientation Leaders** welcome new students and facilitate their transition to the college experience and campus life.
- **Resident Advisors or Community Assistants** are experienced students living in a college residence providing advice and support for other students living in the same hall.
- **Peer Mentors** are sophomores, juniors, or seniors who serve as role models and coaches for other students.
- **Peer Counselors** train in counseling techniques (e.g., listening, questioning, referring) and provide paraprofessional support for students seeking assistance on personal matters.
- **Peer Academic Advisors** are upper-division students majoring in a particular field who pre-advise lower-division students majoring in that field, thereby freeing time for faculty and professional advisors to engage in meaningful mentoring.
- **Peer Wellness Counselors** have been specifically trained to assist fellow students on issues relating to physical and mental health.
- **Peer Community-Service Leaders** facilitate volunteerism or service to the community by organizing and publicizing volunteer opportunities and promoting the involvement of other students.

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- **Peer Teachers** with advanced understanding of specific subjects are recruited and trained to provide learning assistance to less advanced students. Peer teaching arrangements include:
 - Tutors who provide one-on-one or group support, often in a learning assistance or academic success center
 - Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders who have performed exceptionally well in an academically challenging class and are selected to re-attend the course and facilitate regularly scheduled review sessions with novice learners outside of class
 - Writing fellows, upper-division students with strong writing skills, who help students in lower-division classes (e.g., large introductory courses in their major, first-year composition) by reading and responding to their papers
 - Student instructors or facilitators for first-year seminars who work with the primary course instructor to provide a student's perspective on course topics and promote student involvement inside and outside the classroom
- **Peer Learning Community Assistants** meet regularly to support students enrolled in a learning community by facilitating out-of-class visits from course instructors and student-support professionals.
- **Alumni Mentors** are college graduates paired with current students who intend to pursue the same educational and career path.
- **Peer Transfer-Support Agents** have successfully transferred from a two-year to a four-year campus and serve as mentors for two-year college students intending to make the same transition

All of the above peer roles provide direct student support, but they may also indirectly contribute to student retention. By providing individualized attention and support, peers help students feel they matter at the institution, facilitate academic and social integration, and increase feelings of satisfaction with the institution—all of which contribute to persistence. Peers may also be more aware of underlying causes of student dissatisfaction with the college and of plans to withdraw—often well before these intentions become apparent to faculty, staff, and administrators. Such awareness may provide the institution with the opportunity to intervene before a student decides to withdraw.

While any peer position might offer these retention benefits, I would argue that institutions should consider developing peer-leadership positions that specifically focus on retaining already-enrolled students. **Peer Retention Agents** are intentionally selected and carefully trained student leaders who would promote persistence by serving as student representatives on college retention committees or as retention ambassadors prepared to articulate to other students the institution's distinctive features and campus opportunities as well as the advantages of degree completion. Additionally, since students are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their feelings with a peer rather than an authority figure, peer retention agents could gather qualitative data (e.g., via mail, phone, e-mail, online, in-person interviews, or focus groups) on students' campus experiences and perceptions, for both enrolled students and those who have already withdrawn. Lastly, peers can be

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Peer Educator Programs

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition maintains a collection of research-based descriptions of peer educator programs on our web site. Five cases are presented from a range of different educational institutions using peer educators in a variety of different settings—first-year seminars, diversity education, orientation, support programs for at-risk students, and Supplemental Instruction.

We invite you to help us expand the available resources on peer educators by including a description of your initiative in this online collection. If your institution has an assessed peer educator program that has a history of two years or more, we encourage you to submit a description of your program for consideration. We are interested in the objectives and structure of the program, how it has been assessed, what was learned, and how the assessment results have been used to improve the service provided to new students. The peer educator program collection and guidelines for those who would like to submit an initiative for publication can be found at www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/peers.html

Promoting Student Engagement in a Large First-Year Inquiry Program: Keys to Success

The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities is a large, public, four-year research university located in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, enrolling approximately 30,000 undergraduate students. The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) is home to more than 5,200 students with 475 to 500 first-year students entering each fall. As a strategy to promote student engagement and persistence, the college embarked on a required comprehensive first-year inquiry (FYI) program, beginning in the fall of 2008.

All entering CEHD students enroll in a four-credit course, Multidisciplinary Ways of Knowing. The course is team taught by 18 faculty members from diverse disciplines (i.e., three faculty assigned to each of the six sections). Each section consists of approximately 80 students and has a theme determined by the course instructors (e.g., food, energy, critical moments in history, MySpace). The format includes two components: (a) a weekly lecture with the entire class and all three faculty and (b) a weekly smaller group meeting (e.g., 25 students, one instructor).

The core curriculum for the course is based on high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008), including a common intellectual experience (e.g., common book), writing-intensive requirement, and collaborative learning activities such as a group final project. The intent of these activities is to produce a high-quality FYI program emphasizing critical inquiry, information literacy, frequent writing opportunities, and group work. Course evaluations revealed, however, that students felt least engaged during the large lectures.



Students show off their tea purchases at the Minneapolis farmers' market. (Photo used with permission of author)

Three Successful Engagement Strategies

To address the challenge of finding innovative ways to integrate high-impact and educationally purposeful activities into the small and large group settings for more consistent engagement, the faculty from the food-themed section used the following strategies:

- **Off-campus experiential activity.** Intentional integration of experiential activities contributes to the overall learning experience, especially for first-year students, (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008) and fosters social engagement with peers. Students spent a Saturday morning visiting a local farmers' market applying their participant observation skills in a community setting. For many students, this was their first encounter with a farmers' market as well as public transportation.
- **Traditional collaborative learning activities applied to a larger lecture class.** An example of this strategy is to divide students into small groups for an activity and have a representative from each group report back to the entire class. Using this model and a simulation activity

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adapted from Barbara Gross Davis' *Tools for Teaching* (2009), during the unit on food zoning politics and the power of food advertising, students held a mock town hall meeting deciding on the merits of a proposal by an imaginary fast food company offering to pay for a new high school gymnasium in exchange for advertising and naming privileges. The class divided into 10 special interest groups (e.g., school administrators, local merchants, students, coaches) with a representative of each group presenting testimony. The entire class then voted on the motion.

- **Group capstone.** As a capstone project to promote teamwork and hone interpersonal communication skills, the class produced a food-related public service announcement, which was shown at a college-wide showcase event. Initially, students worked in small groups to brainstorm ideas, write a script, and shoot and edit the video with the entire group collaborating on the final product.



A student visits the St. Paul Downtown Farmers' Market as part of an experiential activity for the food course. (Photo used with permission of author)

In addition to these engagement strategies, the course's team-taught, multi-disciplinary instruction format enhanced the quality of the class by providing students and faculty with the opportunity to critically explore and analyze key concepts around a theme from multiple lenses.

Assessment and Outcomes

Engaging in ongoing assessment and evaluation was critical to produce the culture of evidence necessary for an effective FYI program. Students in all sections provided feedback about the progress of the course in the form of a qualitative critical incident questionnaire (Brookfield, 1995). These open-ended online journal prompts (often only two to four questions) were administered three to five times over the semester at key transition points (e.g., mid-term). Feedback allowed changes in pedagogy to be made during the first few weeks of the semester (e.g., less lecturing and more interactive exercises in the large-group section). Students were also assigned numerous reflective writing assignments that developed strong writing skills while providing insight regarding their experience of the course.

Overall, the journal entries for students in the food-themed section showed a high degree of engagement and satisfaction with the three high-impact strategies. One student wrote that the farmers' market assignment "gave me a perspective [on] local food. It was awesome to see the farmers all gathering and trying to make a living by selling what they have produced with their own sweat and time." Another student found the town hall meeting important "because I was arguing my opinions in front of the whole class, and took part in a discussion in front of the whole class," something not always easy for students to feel comfortable doing.

Engagement was also enhanced through the capstone project. For one student, the activity made the University "a smaller, more community-like place,"

Two students explore their Wisconsin roots by visiting a cheese vendor at a local farmers' market. (Photo used with permission of author)



while others saw gains that could extend to their lives beyond the academic world. The teamwork skills were especially relevant as two students noted:

Working in a group of people that may not be your best friends can be tough, but it does happen often in the real world, especially in the field I plan on going into. This project gave me insight on what working in a group like that would feel like.

In our world today, there are little to no professions that require you to work entirely on your own. Skills [in] working with other people are vital to career success.

Conclusion

The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities CEHD first-year inquiry program is a work in progress, and there are several revisions that are being considered for all sections based on feedback from faculty and students. First, service-learning has been identified as a high-impact educational practice and an important one for first-year students. The feasibility of adding a service-learning component to each of the six large classes is being explored; however, the logistics of finding local venues that could absorb 80 students is a challenge. Second, college leaders are evaluating the most efficient and effective ways to sustain the current program, especially in austere economic times. The three-instructor model is an expensive one; but downsizing to two instructors may not sustain the course's multidisciplinary focus. Lastly, faculty and staff are seeking innovative ways to link course content with valuable information regarding student services (e.g., academic advising, career planning, financial management skills). This integration will require careful planning and constant interdepartmental communication.

Despite these challenges, faculty look forward to generating new and innovative answers to best serve the needs and issues of the college's first-year students. Intentional integration of high-impact educational practices in both small- and large-group settings proves to be an effective strategy for this FYI program.

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used to follow up with students who have been referred through early-alert systems to campus support services or to identify and intercede with students showing signs of intended withdrawal (e.g., failure to preregister for next term's classes, reapply for financial aid, or renew a residential life agreement).

Effective leadership is often situation-specific and displayed in different leadership contexts (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2007). As the foregoing list suggests, peers can effectively assume a wide variety of situation-specific leadership roles and positions in higher education.

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Academic Support for Provisionally Admitted Students

Baylor University's initiative for provisionally admitted students, created in 1989 as The Freshman Challenge Program (FCP), was designed to help these students succeed academically and to ensure greater diversity in the institution's enrollment. Facilitated by the Academic Support Programs department, FCP began as a summer workshop with academic mentoring provided by graduate students. The program has undergone several changes since its inception, including creating a full summer bridge program with a graded study skills class in the fall and dropping the FCP designation, which was felt to have a pejorative connotation. Graduate student mentors remain an integral part of the program. Today Baylor annually admits between 175 and 250 students (i.e., approximately 6% of the first-year cohort) with provisional status based on low mean SAT or ACT scores (i.e., less than 991 or 21, respectively) and/or a low high school graduating class percentile (i.e., not in the top 25% of the class).

The provisional admit program is structured around concepts that actively promote student engagement in educationally purposeful activities as defined by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2010) by requiring frequent and continual interaction with academic support staff, graduate student academic mentors, and faculty members. As Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, and Gonyea (2008) note, an emphasis on multiple and systematic encounters concerning academic issues with faculty and staff has the potential to provide the greatest compensatory effect on grades for students who enter with relatively poorer prior academic achievement.

The formal admission agreement requires students to matriculate into a summer bridge program and take at least two credit-bearing courses during one of the two offered sessions. To complete the contract, students also agree to meet regularly with a graduate student academic mentor, complete a fall study skills class, register for 12-15 hours each term, and achieve a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0 by the end of the spring semester. An early release from the contract is granted to students who earn a cumulative GPA of 2.5 by the end of fall term.

The summer classes are not developmental but are chosen to meet the requirements of a variety of major and degree programs. At least one course must be selected from a mandatory list of general education courses (i.e., religion, sociology, speech, mass communications, and information technology offerings) while the second class can be from the same grouping or from a second list of appropriate entry-level courses that lead to a major program and that introduce students to new ideas and perspectives (e.g., chemistry, earth science, world history, anthropology). Advisors encourage students to pair a heavy reading course with a more project-oriented class (e.g., the required religion class with either a public speaking or management information class). Provisional students also attend two special meetings: a Meet Your Mentor session held on the first day of summer classes and a one-hour presentation, How to Create the Perfect Class Schedule, offered to all students during summer orientation.

The mandatory list of courses are attended by graduate student mentors who also meet with provisional students in weekly 15-20 minute private sessions to assist with class questions and the development of successful study strategies (e.g., note-taking skills). In addition to the mentoring, students meet with an Academic Support advisor or with a major and/or preprofessional program advisor if they are prepared to declare a major. Students are sent surveys in advance of their initial advising session

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to prepare them for course selection decisions and to provide the advisors with individualized information to better guide each student on his or her path to academic success. Students who attend the June summer session are advised by telephone and registered for their summer courses, meeting in person with their advisors during the first week of summer classes to determine their fall schedules. Students in the July summer session attend one of the regularly scheduled June orientation sessions, during which registration is completed for both summer and fall classes.

In the fall, provisional students are required to take a two-hour graded study skills class, EDC 1200, typically taught by their Academic Support advisor. Course activities include getting together with faculty to evaluate test performance, preparing for an academic advising session, constructing a set of lecture or textbook notes, and designing a visual study aid as well as becoming familiar with campus resources, such as tutoring services and library research.

Additional programs that support all students are a tutoring center staffed by approximately 60 peer tutors; a Supplemental-Instruction program for traditionally rigorous courses, such as biology, chemistry, and economics; and a variety of seminars, workshops, and one-on-one study skills counseling opportunities. Because these programs are administered by Academic Support Programs, and are housed in that department, they are highly visible to the provisionally admitted students.

Provisional students typically earn relatively high grades in the summer. The intrusive approach to advising and mentoring, along with a daily class schedule much like high school and the reduced course load, produce mean and median summer GPAs averaging 3.25. The more complicated class schedules and greater distractions in the fall semester often lower GPAs to the 2.38-2.6 range. However, even with lower fall GPAs, more than 60% of provisional students typically earn an early release from the program by the end of the fall term. Further indication of the program's success is the six-year graduation rate for provisional students compared to regular admits (i.e., 71% compared to 73%, respectively, for the 2002 cohorts graduating in 2008).

For institutions seeking to increase the diversity of their student population by accepting students who do not possess standard admission requirements, Baylor University's three-tiered approach—summer bridge program, graduate student academic mentors, and graded study skills class taught by advisors—can provide students with a solid foundation for academic success throughout their college careers.

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Style: Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style. *E-Source* does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

Length: Original feature-length articles should be 750-1200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

Please address all questions and submissions to:

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Resource Spotlight: Using Skype to Enhance the Educational Experiences of Faculty and Students

Skype, a free Internet phone service with video capabilities, was responsible for approximately 8% of all international calling minutes in 2009 and reported up to 20 million users online at peak times (What is Skype, 2010). Besides being free, fast, and easy to use, Skype is a technology that has the potential to build community and social capital (i.e., the study of human connections, norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness), contrary to a commonly held fear that technology may undermine human connectedness. Robert Putnam, the leading researcher on the concept of social capital noted, "If the Internet is used more like a telephone than a television, it will increase social capital and social connectedness in new and interesting ways" (Personal communication, March 23, 2001).

Skype can also be used to engage students in and out of the classroom, facilitate professional development among colleagues, and can virtually eliminate communication barriers caused by distance. The following creative uses of Skype are offered to staff and faculty as tools to enhance the educational experience:

- **Making live video presentation at conferences.** With many institutions facing budgetary challenges resulting in staff travel freezes, Skype offers a way to continue professional development and knowledge exchange literally without leaving home. It also provides a solution for both conference coordinators and presenters for those inevitable last-minute emergencies. When illness prevented me from presenting at a symposium in Oregon, rather than cancelling the session or simply e-mailing the PowerPoint and having someone unfamiliar with the material narrate, I used Skype to make the presentation. The conveners at the conference used two LCDs to project the PowerPoint on one screen and a second screen to display a video conferencing Skype call. I was able to not only make the presentation but also to interact with the audience from my faculty office in New Hampshire, with cough drops and tissues handy.
- **Addressing teaching and conference presentation conflicts.** Skype can provide a solution for those times when a faculty member may need to be in two places at the same time (e.g., presenting at a conference and teaching a key class in his or her course). While attending a conference 400 miles away, I arranged to have researchers at the conference visit my class through Skype and discuss their research interests. The Skype conversations were a way of connecting the human element to the research the students had been reading and working on in course—and I didn't miss the class.
- **Bringing national and international experts into the college classroom.** Having experts in the field give a presentation to a class is an oft-used teaching strategy to enhance students' knowledge on a topic. Skyping can expand the pool of available experts beyond the campus or local boundaries to include the global community. To deepen student engagement with material in a University of New Hampshire (UNH) first-year seminar entitled Risk and the Human Experience, Preston Cline, a leading risk management expert at the Wharton School of Business in

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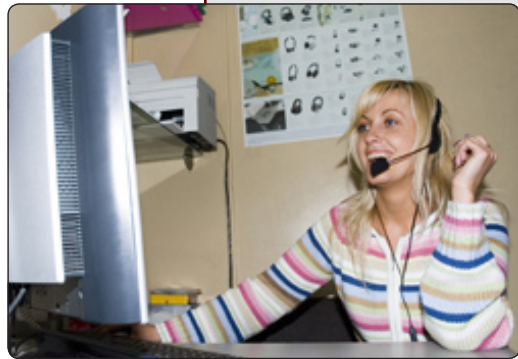
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Pennsylvania, was invited to Skype into the class from his office. This was a much less onerous commitment on Cline's part, and the students received the benefits of learning from his experiences.

- **Collaborating with colleagues on research and writing projects.** Skype not only expands the community of experts available to students, it can also enhance the professional network among colleagues and contribute to a greater breadth, depth, and cross-cultural exchange of knowledge. When I was asked by a colleague at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland to collaborate on a chapter for a new book, Skype was used to make introductions and for chapter discussions. Having never met in person, Skype provided important visual cues to help us understand when a key point, or a joke, was being made—avoiding any cultural missteps. Being able to view each other's reactions to comments furthered the dialogue and facilitated the process of working together. Through video chatting, we grew to know each other as well as other colleagues in our respective departments.
- **Conducting long-distance interviews with student or faculty applicants.** As a dramatic improvement over the traditional telephone interview, a Skype interview offers both audio and visual details that can provide crucial information in hiring or acceptance procedures. Skype has been used successfully in UNH's graduate admissions process. Often graduate students are unable to fly to every campus for interviews, but Skype provides a way to conduct interviews face-to-face, which can build greater trust and develop a stronger connection to the University. After a Skype interview experience, a new graduate student reported how having the video conversations helped him make the transition to UNH.

Putnam (2000) reports that social capital increased dramatically with the invention and widespread use of the telephone. Skype and other video conferencing technologies also have the potential to connect faculty, staff, and students to resources that were previously distant and existed only as abstractions. Skype provides the opportunity to not only increase social capital but to also provide a more engaging educational experience in higher education.



(Photo credit: stock.xchng)

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What is Skype? (2010). Retrieved March 17, 2010, from <http://about.skype.com/>

Related Articles in E-Source

Henderson, F. (2010). Resource spotlight: International student support and information exchange with Skype. *7*(5), 10.

HOME

What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Conferences

Institute on Peer Educators

October 17-19, 2010
Indianapolis, IN

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

invites professionals involved in campus programs and initiatives who use undergraduate students as peer educators to participate in the Institute on Peer Educators. The Institute will provide participants with information and effective strategies and concepts that positively impact peer leadership experiences and enhance program outcomes. A diverse array of faculty will share expertise regarding the use of peer educators in a variety of areas, such as new student orientation, residence life, first-year seminars, and Supplemental Instruction. Additional information on the Institute can be found at <http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/index.html>



17th National Conference on Students in Transition

November 13-15, 2010
Houston, TX

Proposal deadline:
July 15, 2010

Share with and learn from each other the latest trends, initiatives, best practices, ideas, research, and assessment strategies focused on supporting student success through the full spectrum of college transitions. Concurrent session, roundtable discussion, poster session, and exhibitor presentation proposals are invited on topics addressing student transitions. For more information on the conference and proposal guidelines, please visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/sit/index.html>



Save The Date!

30th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 4-8, 2011
Atlanta, GA

Proposal deadline: September 20, 2010

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eSOURCE FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS

E-Source for College Transitions (ISSN 1545-5742) is published bi-monthly by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. The National Resource Center has as its mission to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. The Center, a nonprofit organization, will use proceeds from the newsletter to defray publication costs, support research, and disseminate information.

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Publications

Monograph No. 52

International Perspectives on the First-Year Experience in Higher Education

Diane Nutt and Denis Calderon, Editors

Produced in collaboration with Teesside University, United Kingdom

Based on the National Resource Center's successful *Exploring the Evidence* series, we are pleased to offer this inaugural collection of international first-year initiatives, demonstrating the portability and adaptability of these strategies in a variety of institutional contexts. Cases from a dozen different countries touch on a wide range of topics, including: academic advising and support, comprehensive program design, early-warning systems for at-risk students, electronic portfolios, first-year seminars, learning communities, orientation or induction, peer mentoring, retention initiatives, self-regulated learning, and Supplemental Instruction or peer-assisted study sessions. Students of higher education will value this volume for the rare glimpse it offers of international first-year transition programs and for the opportunity to compare programs from a wide range of educational contexts. Educators involved in the first-year experience will find both familiar strategies and insightful innovations to inform program design and assessment. To learn more or to order a copy, visit <http://sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms052.html>

A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes

Jimmie Gahagan, John Dingfelder, and Katharine Pei

Produced in association with the Office of Student Engagement, University of South Carolina

For more than a decade, educators have focused on illustrating the effectiveness of educational interventions by measuring changes in grade point averages, retention, satisfaction, and participation. What such measures don't tell us is what students know or are able to do as a result of their educational experiences. Yet, these are the kind of data colleges and universities are increasingly asked to report by state legislatures, regional accrediting agencies, and a number of other stakeholders. Responding to this call requires new assessment vehicles that report success through the eyes of students using measurable learning outcomes for courses, programs of study, and cocurricular experiences. *A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes* presents a framework for developing and assessing student learning outcomes in a brief, accessible format. To learn more or to order a copy, visit <http://sc.edu/fye/publications/bb/ar/index.html>

University 101 Programs Faculty Resource Manual

Designed by the University 101 staff and campus partners at the University of South Carolina, this resource manual provides instructional faculty with a how-to guide for designing, managing, teaching, and evaluating student work in the first-year seminar. The manual includes a detailed discussion of course management that offers suggestions for working with first-year students, designing a syllabus, establishing grading policies, building community in the classroom, and working with a peer leader. Chapters on topics common to first-year seminars offer resources for students and suggested assignments and classroom activities. Presented on a CD-ROM, the materials can be adapted for particular campus contexts. To learn more or to order a copy, visit <http://sc.edu/fye/publications/transitions/u101002.html>

