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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
SSG Sozialwissenschaften, USB Köln

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Fuchs, D., Zeiser, P., & Engelkamp, S. (2009). *Internationalizing course discussions: a German-American partnership.* Münster: Universität Münster, FB Erziehungswissenschaft und Sozialwissenschaften, Institut für Politikwissenschaft.
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-257424

Internationalizing Course Discussions: A German-American Partnership[1]

Pamela Zeiser, Doris Fuchs, Stephan Engelkamp

Because of globalization and global commerce, "internationalizing the curriculum" has become a common catch-phrase throughout American higher education. The catch-phrase has many definitions and varied means of implementation throughout the country. Broadly, internationalizing the curriculum includes "projects to bring international perspectives into the undergraduate curriculum, promote study abroad, build academic partnerships with foreign universities, and even create American-style campuses around the world" (Lovett, 2008, p. A40). [Although the catch-phrase itself may not be as common, the similar goals of academic partnerships, joint degree programs with foreign universities, and recruiting foreign students is equally common in German universities.][2]

In "We Need a New Model of Global Education," Clara M. Lovett argues that "the challenge today is not simply to teach students to 'know the other.' It is to help students see the world and its wonders and problems through the eyes and minds of others, to explore alternative interpretations of events and trends" (Lovett, 2007, p. A40). The goals of internationalizing the curriculum in political science, as defined by a joint APSA-American Council on Education Symposium on the topic, are also quite varied when applied to substantive subjects such as public policy, political theory, and international relations – but can be condensed to comparing and contrasting: Western and

[1] Paper presented at the APSA Teaching and Learning Conference, Boston, February 2009.

[2] We would like to thank Dr. Darren Wheeler at the University of North Florida for sharing his instructions and rubric for on-line discussions, which we adapted for our own use. We would also like to thank Erin Soles and Deb Miller, also at UNF, for their technical assistance with Blackboard.

non-Western political ideas, systems, and behaviors; political culture and its impact on political systems; actors' roles in policy-making at home and abroad, politics of difference (ethnicity, class, gender, culture, etc.); and international relations theories as tools to study the world as well as their relation to practice. Commonly suggested strategies for internationalizing the curriculum of American (and European/German) university and college courses include: bringing international perspectives into the reading list, requiring students to read foreign media, assigning students research papers or other assignments which focus on international or other nations' perspectives, international case studies, and in-class activities or debates which emphasize international perspectives. (Barber et al., 2007). Some of these strategies rely on traditional teaching methods, while others implement active learning.

Outside of the campus classroom, of course, study abroad is a main form of internationalizing the curriculum. It offers students opportunities to achieve such goals as: experiencing other cultures and customs, understanding global issues and events from other perspectives, gaining a new perspective on and appreciation for their own country, and gaining self-confidence and independence. However, not all students have the interest, ability, or funds to study abroad and thus achieve these goals.

Today's technology, however, offers us effective methods and techniques for requiring students to think beyond their own national borders, which can provide us with a useful "middle ground" between simply adding international content to existing courses and study abroad. Following from other political scientists' efforts at on-line simulations and/or video-conferences with other countries (Martin, 2007; Jones, 2008), we utilized communication technology to create opportunities for our students to engage in

discussions with students at a university in another country. In Fall 2008, students in the University of North Florida's International Studies Capstone Seminar and the University of Münster's Hauptseminar on Power and Corporations in Global Politics engaged in joint on-line discussions on concepts of power, the American election, the role of history in Germany's politics today, the role of corporations in national and global politics and the current global economic crisis. Faculty in the US and Germany cooperated on their syllabi, coordinated readings on power, and required common assignments from their students. Students in both countries participated in on-line discussions in response to the same questions, with the expectation that they would learn substantively about not only the course concept of power, but also the culture and attitudes of other country's citizens with regard to power (and politics more generally).

Based upon achievement of educational objectives, these on-line "discussions across borders" provide an effective way to increase student (and faculty!) awareness of other cultures and perspectives as well as substantive course content. Through this initial effort, moreover, we learned important lessons about the design and process of the discussions and developed initial conclusions about how cultural differences impact student performance and learning in the discussions. As such discussions are easily replicable at other institutions, this paper presents the educational objectives for, design and process of, assessment of,[3] and challenges in carrying out discussions across borders.

Educational Objectives

[3] Our categories here are an adaptation of the "design components" utilized in Lantis, Kuzma, and Beohrer's *The New International Studies Classroom: Active Teaching, Active Learning*.

Pedagogically, we had two overriding goals for our discussions: active learning and internationalization. Bonwell and Eison (1991) define active learning as "instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (p. 2). Though there is little agreement on a common definition, Bonwell and Eison (1991) insist active learning focuses on engaging students in more than just passive listening: "They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (p. 2). A variety of techniques and strategies fall within active learning: guided lectures, in-class writing, case study methods, discussion and debate, role playing, games, and simulations (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

We utilized discussion and debate as our active learning techniques, and sought to internationalize them by engaging in "discussions across borders." As noted above, we are seeking an effective substitute to allow students remaining within their home country to achieve the goals of study abroad – the most transformative form of internationalizing the curriculum, but one not necessarily available to millions of American (and German) students. Thus, we sought not simply to introduce international content to our courses, but to, in Lovett's words quoted above, make it possible for students "to explore alternative interpretations of events and trends" (Lovett, 2007, p. A40) by conversing on-line with students from another country. Specifically, we intended for our internationalized discussion to enable students to: 1) engage with and experience other cultures; 2) understand and identify differing cultural perspectives on history, international interactions, and global events; 3) gain a new perspective on their own cultural and personal viewpoints; 4) practice communicating on-line, on potentially

sensitive topics, with strangers, including producing engaging, clear written comments; and 5) gain and demonstrate substantive knowledge about power and other course concepts. We considered these objectives important both educationally and for our students' preparation for eventual careers. These objectives were conveyed to the students at both universities in writing and during in-class explanations of the activity.

The discussions between students at the University of North Florida (UNF) and University of Münster (Münster) were designed and carried out with these educational objectives in mind. We believe the first four goals are general enough that they could apply to many courses, even outside political science – really, any course in which students engage in discussion and another perspective could be valued. Certainly within the field, such discussions across borders would be useful in a variety of comparative politics and international relations courses. Course- and content-specific goals can then be added, as we did with our fifth objective.

Design and Process

Internationalizing course discussions requires a fair amount of planning and active management during the discussions. The following steps are necessary for effective cross-border discussions:

Making connections with foreign universities: in our case, the American professor and German professor attended graduate school together and stayed in contact – making for easy connections. However, there are numerous ways faculty can make contacts with foreign universities if they believe internationalizing course discussions would be useful

in their courses: conference contacts, schools with which their universities have exchange or other partnerships, etc.

Considering the language barrier: University of Münster offers upper-division international relations courses in English, also making this an easy connection for us. Many other foreign universities do as well – and, of course, Americans in advanced language courses could seek out discussion partners whose courses are offered in that particular language.

Matching compatible courses: We had talked about engaging in these discussions for several semesters before actually doing so; difficulties presented themselves, for example, when the Münster professor taught primarily graduate courses in a semester in which the UNF professor taught introductory, lower-division courses. Compatible course topics, level and size are necessary for effective discussions.

Our course topics were not as closely compatible as we would have wished, but sufficient for a first attempt. Because she feared how little her students would know about Germany, specifically, the UNF professor made it the main subject of her course – with the concept of power applied both to the US (through the textbook readings) and Germany (through in-class discussions, written assignments, and group presentations). The Münster course, on the other hand, was primarily about corporate power in global politics.

Fixing a Schedule: The fact that many foreign universities operate on very different academic year calendars is a challenge that must be taken into consideration and will vary by country. In our case, the UNF semester ran from mid-August until early December, while the Münster semester ran from mid-October until early February. The Münster

professor needed time to get her students started on their materials, yet the UNF professor needed to wrap up the discussions before the end of her term. In the end, we planned four weeks of mutually convenient discussions.

Technology: There are a number of communication technology tools that make cross-border discussions possible. In our case, we utilized the Blackboard distance-learning platform. The Münster faculty and students were enrolled in the UNF Blackboard course, and all discussions were held through Blackboard Discussion Forums. The process of enrolling outside students onto UNF's Blackboard system was technically simple, but did raise questions of whether it was a misuse of our licensing agreement. After checking on this and because both universities subscribe to Blackboard, we got around that problem – in the short term. There remains a question as to whether Blackboard licensing will prevent continued discussions across borders and/or a future team-taught on-line course. Private blogs and newsgroups are other means through which such cross-border discussions could be held.

Coordinating Readings: We worked, in advance of completing our syllabi, to coordinate reading assignments for our students and, through that literature, to create a "common conceptual language" for the students in both courses. Due to differing course priorities, however, the overlap in the end was only one text on power (Joseph Nye's *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*). Such a narrow overlap is less than ideal, of course, but sufficient for a start (see below).

Coordinating Assignments: The discussions themselves were graded assignments for both sets of students (see Appendix 1 for grading rubric). The first week of discussion was devoted to ungraded discussions around a set of "icebreaker" questions, both to give

the faculty a chance to make sure the technology was in order and to give the students a chance to get to know one another before engaging in graded, academic discussions. The second week of discussion (first graded, substantive discussion) was geared toward the UNF course, and we posted for discussion: "Applying Nye's concepts of hard and soft power, assess Germany's power in the world today. Please consider: sources of power, uses of power, and potential future changes in power (if any)." Students could, and did, create news threads: "Can Germany overcome its past?" and "Will Germany's power become 'Europeanized'?" The third week of discussion was, in turn, geared toward the Münster course, and we posted for discussion: "What role does corporate power play in today's politics at the national or international level? What are the implications? Put more provocatively, are corporations dictating governmental policies or are governments dictating corporate conduct? And what are the implications for citizens and democracy as such?" Again, students created additional threads, primarily narrowing the discussion to particular topics or readings but also discussing corporate power as it related to the current economic crisis and proposed bailouts. Finally, for the fourth week we tied together the students' emerging interests up to that point, current events, and the common readings: "During the Week 3 discussions, you all made salient posts about the current economic crisis, President-elect Obama, and the power of TNCs. For Week 4, let us tie those topics to Nye's argument about information, US values, and foreign policy: 'This dramatic change in the linked technologies of computing and communications, sometimes called the third industrial revolution, is changing the nature of governments and sovereignty, increasing the role of non-state actors, and enhancing the importance of soft power in foreign policy' (p. 43)." Full instructions provided to the students for these

discussions are in Appendix 2. Briefly, we sought to encourage true intellectual discussion by requiring each student to post more than once, setting a time limit, and requiring students to tie their comments to course readings (common or not).

We also coordinated on a written assignment: students at both universities would write reflective essays, following the discussions, in which they would compare and contrast the contributions of their own and the other university's students to discussions (see Appendix 3). These reflective essays were designed to test the educational objectives, particularly the goals of understanding other's perspectives and gaining a new perspective on one's own country as a result. We discuss below the results of these essays.

Managing Discussions: Over the course of four weeks' discussion, the two sets of students together made over 430 posts on Blackboard discussion forums. As faculty, we posted initial questions and, as noted above, allowed students to create new threads of discussion. Although we, as faculty, decided to stay out of the discussions themselves, we faced a considerable time commitment in staying aware of how the discussions were progressing. Given that one of the educational objectives was to enable students to engage with and experience other cultures, we sought to ensure that no major 'culture clashes' occurred and to monitor for culturally insensitive posts – neither was a problem. The UNF professor, who met more frequently with her students, commented in class upon the progress of discussions and provided examples of effective posts and provided via e-mail comments to individual students when posts were especially ineffective or bordered upon culturally insensitive.

Assessment

While assessment also relates to design and process, of course, we feel that this is such a major point that we are discussing it in a separate section. Specifically, we cover three separate topics with regard to assessment: assessment of student achievement of educational objectives, student evaluations of the process and design, and faculty evaluation of process, design, and achieved objectives.

Student Achievement of Educational Objectives:

We assessed student achievement of educational objectives through the discussions themselves and through the writing assignment, measuring both against criterion-based rubrics. The discussions themselves primarily focused on educational objectives #1 engage and experience other cultures, #4 communicate sensitively and clearly on-line, and #5 acquire and demonstrate substantive knowledge about power and other course concepts. On the UNF side, the most commonly earned student grade – based upon rubric criteria (see Appendix 1) – was B+ or B-. Student posts generally: demonstrated knowledge of the assigned readings and other students' posts, engaged the perspectives of the Germans (through questions and the search for common ground), and demonstrated understanding of power and other course concepts. As faculty, we were also especially pleased with students' efforts to incorporate outside research and knowledge in the discussions.

The UNF course had far more students active in the discussion than the Münster course, so it was harder for UNF students to meaningfully engage on-line with German

students than other American students, so student achievement of educational objective #1 was perhaps spotty: some American students worked harder to engage the few German contributors than others. Other weaknesses included a tendency for students to post statements that amounted to little more than "I agree with so-and-so" to drift off topic.

On the German side, grades varied widely with some students participating frequently in the on-line discussions with substantively excellent posts while others showed an average performance, and others again barely participated. Student posts generally: demonstrated knowledge of the assigned readings and other students' posts, engaged the perspectives of the other side, and demonstrated understanding of power and other course concepts. As the German students also had plenty of opportunities to engage on-line with UNF students, all educational objectives of the on-line discussions were achieved.

We assigned students a reflective essay because, in active learning, "experiential learning frequently occurs after, rather than during, an exercise" (Lantis, Kuzma, & Boehrer, 2000, p. 4). Both sets of students had some in-class opportunity to talk about the progress of discussions (the UNF students more than the German students), but both sets of students tended to "lose the forest for the trees" as they engaged in discussion. The writing assignment, therefore, was an opportunity for students to focus on the entire activity and draw conclusions about the all three weeks of substantive discussion. As can be seen in Appendix 3, the assignment required students to compare and contrast the contributions made by the UNF and Münster students and was intended to assess primarily educational objectives #2, #3, and #5 (understanding differing cultural

perspectives, understanding anew one's own cultural and personal perspectives, and understanding power/other course concepts).

The UNF students' essays show that most students achieved the objective of understanding differing cultural perspectives (#2). Student comparisons in the UNF essays focused on differing national opinions of power, how different histories led to individual opinions, and the value of hearing from the German students, rather than just reading about German perspectives in textbooks. Given that the American course included content on Germany, the UNF students found value in having discussions were "one is studying the topic, while the other is living it."[4] American students were somewhat surprised but also educated by the apparent discomfort of the Germans in discussing Germany's power: "I feel like I understand better how Germans internalize power, by the way they discussed it with inhibition and in a round about way, and how that concept of power ties in with their identity. That was something that was not easy to grasp just from reading the texts."

Many UNF students were surprised by the similarities in opinions between the Germans and Americans – just as they were surprised by dissension among the Germans themselves. They recognized that opinions were individual and could not be stereotyped by culture/nationality alone. UNF students concluded that the Münster students' opinions were not "drastically different opinions than those of the American students, but rather opinions that were affected by a number of different life experiences, cultural influence, and information" and that "I have decided that the German students and American

[4] All quotes are taken directly from student essays and evaluations, without corrections for grammar or syntax. Quotes from essays are anonymous to respect student wishes and the student evaluations were, of course, anonymous.

students have similar views on Germany's power, but the two perspectives were arrived at from very different places."

The UNF student essays demonstrate they achieved objective #3, gaining a new perspective on one's own viewpoints, though perhaps to a lesser extent. This was in part due to the lack of activity by the Germans in the discussions, but also to resistance or close-mindedness on the part of some American students. In the final week's discussions of information technology – including that used by Barack Obama in the 2008 election – typically conservative Jacksonville, Florida students did not all appreciate the perceived "left of center" opinions of the Germans on the American presidential election. One UNF student, disappointed by the discussions as a whole, was as hard on his classmates as he was on the German students, arguing that the discussions were not truly debates because the UNF students did not want "to hurt the feelings of their German counterparts or . . . to appear like ignorant Americans." Another dissenting UNF student's reaction was that the "Germans replied in a tone befitting teachers. They seemed more inclined to gently correct us than argue with us." Perhaps their reaction was comparable to the cultural shock, but not acceptance, that one experiences in a spring-break-length study abroad program? On the positive side, however, most UNF students recognized that (in one student's words) "since we are unable to detach from our own upbringing and culture, asking the questions that we ask ourselves to others in a different culture provides an opinion that either confirms or contradicts our narrow view."

Finally, the UNF essays did reflect a solid understanding of objective #5, regarding power and other course concepts. All their reflective essays engaged the textbooks and demonstrated understanding of the concepts as they compared the two groups'

contributions to discussion on the topics of German power, corporate power, and information technology. The best example, perhaps, of a student's understanding of Joseph Nye's concepts of hard and soft power was her tongue-in-cheek analysis of the lack of German participation in these on-line discussions as a reflection of diminishing American soft power!

The Münster students' essays show that the participating students achieved the objective of understanding differing cultural perspectives, as well (#2). The German students noticed that cultural differences were especially strong and visible when the discussion came to questions of national history and identity. Not surprisingly, then, they found these differences to be most evident in the first substantive week of discussion, when the discussion focused on Germany's past and its implications for German power in the world today. Reflecting on the discussion on Germany's power in the world today, most students recognized cultural differences between German and American students speaking about their own country. Thus, they reported that they learned that perceptions of self and other are a result of different cultural beliefs and values. The discussion showed them that concepts such as 'pride' "cannot be taken out of the national context as the connotation is different in the US and in Germany." A German student, for example, mentioned that she was surprised about a UNF student's post wondering that there are countries which are not as patriotic as the US. Noticing these differences on national identities, an interesting discussion on the mutual perception of their own nation and those of their fellow students abroad evolved. Münster students also noted a difference in engaging with issues of national identity and history in the postings "Americans conceive national identity as a very strong feeling towards which everyone must adhere, whereas

the Germans conceive it more like a fact that they cannot influence and which is just a minor attribute of their personal identity." One German student noticed that identity- or history-related issues "created confusion (to some extent), but also special interest in these topics" among the two groups of students.

German students also noted considerable agreement between the American students and themselves on more general and global issues, in stark contrast to the differences on national identity issues. Thus, they found references to the global economy, corporate power, or the financial crisis, for instance, to show more common ground

Even on the international issues, however, students in Münster noted some differences, for instance, in the specifics of the role of corporations in global politics "Some Americans adhered to the view that multinational corporations have an influence on a state's foreign policy, whereas German students took more a systemic view, speaking about 'economic integration' that alters the shape of international relations." Likewise, one especially "confusing point," students in Münster observed, was the differing perception of the international dimension between German and US students. For instance, the European integration process was far more present in the thinking of the German students than in that of the Americans.

Differing cultural perceptions were highlighted again in the comparative essays regarding the differing understandings of power. The German students found that American students tended to take US 'hard power' as a 'given', while they described themselves as more reluctant to connect Germany with 'hard power.' This was at least the German students' interpretation of the on-line discussions. On the other hand, students in Münster were surprised by the US students' "affinity to soft power

approaches" which they attempted to explain in their comparative essays as reactions to recent developments in US Foreign Policy during the Bush administration.

Despite these differences identified, however, the German students – like the American students - were surprised "that the opinions and attitudes of the German and American students were not as different as […] expected." They wondered whether that resulted from an "elite perspective", i.e. both groups being university students.

German students reflected in their essays about how their country was perceived by the UNF students, but their essays also show that the German students gained a new perspective on their own cultural viewpoints as they were confronted with a foreign perception of themselves. One student at Münster noted that it was "interesting for a German to see the politics and the development of his country viewed by an outsider." Thus, educational objective #3 was achieved. On the one side, German students noticed how difficult their understanding of German power and identity is to communicate to outsiders. On the other side, while the German students pointed to the German reluctance to use hard power in international politics, they noticed in retrospect that "German students were not as afraid as former generations of the use of hard power." Rather, a "harmonization of ideas" seemed to have taken place with the American students being more interested in soft power and German students in hard power approaches in Foreign Policy.

The Münster essays did reflect a solid achievement of objective #5, as well. Students engaged the literature and demonstrated a critical understanding of the concepts as they compared the different theoretical notions of power and their applications in the discussions. Most German students focused in their reflective essays on Joseph Nye's

concepts of hard and soft power, one student even stated that he found in Nye his "new favorite author." Other students reflected on the shortcomings of Nye's concept of power vis-à-vis other concepts that were discussed in class. One student, for example, criticized the concept as "too narrowly defined" as it "lacks to a great extent an explanation of how power is actually put into use." This was especially the case when applied to corporate power and the implications of the current financial crisis.

Student Evaluation of Cross-Border Discussion Design, Process, and Success:

The students' evaluations on both sides showed some common points but also a few interesting differences. The following table summarizes the distribution of responses.

UNF Student Evaluations	Common Perspectives	Münster Student Evaluations
Effective learning experience		
Limitation of Blackboard technology		
Frustration with asymmetries in participation		
Intercultural sharing of ideas is "best part" of the activity		
Different levels of preparation and background knowledge for discussions		
Difficulty remembering to join the discussions		
Frustration with posts that added little to the discussions		
Pro/con more faculty involvement in discussions		More faculty involvement
Dissatisfaction with one-week time limits for discussions		Dissatisfaction with having three discussions within three weeks
Number of points attached to the assignments		
Suggested introducing a video-conferencing or other web-cam component.		
Pleased to have been included in an experiment to improve teaching and learning at their university		
		Comparative Essay helped significantly in reflecting on the experience

The anonymous UNF student evaluations (n=23) showed, on the whole, that students found the discussions across borders to be an effective learning experience that met the stated objectives. Forty-eight percent strongly agreed, and a total of eight-two percent strongly or somewhat agreed, that "discussions with students from a foreign university exposed me to differences in attitudes." Sixty-nine percent strongly agreed that "discussions with students from a foreign university exposed me to differences in attitudes." Roughly 2/3 of the UNF students had already undertaken some form of study abroad, and sixty percent strongly or somewhat agreed that "if students can't study abroad, discussions such as this would serve as a useful tool to expose them to different cultures and attitudes." It is worth noting, however, that those students who disagreed (thirty percent) did so quite strongly, and noted that the two activities should not be considered comparable.

Due to the small number of German students participating through all discussion rounds and completing the anonymous student evaluations on the German side, the evaluation cannot be considered statistically representative. However, the Münster student evaluations (n=5) showed that students on average agreed that the discussions across borders exposed them to cultural differences as well as differences in attitudes. In general, the German students experienced the on-line discussions with the UNF students as a means to engage with and effectively experience another culture. What is more, almost all of the students in Münster saw the discussions as a useful tool to expose students who cannot study abroad to different cultures and attitudes. Similar to the situation at UNF, however, the one student disagreeing with this proposition did so very

strongly. In general, however, both groups of students almost unanimously identified the intercultural exposure provided by the on-line discussions as “the best part of the discussions.”

UNF students were most frustrated by the lack of German participation and the limitations of Blackboard technology. Likewise, all Münster students criticized the limitations of Blackboard technology as not very user-friendly and manageable as well as the imbalance in course size. The latter aspect caused them to “feel overwhelmed” by the volume of American postings. Interestingly, they saw two different causes of this problems and accordingly suggested two different strategies to prevent this problem in the future. One the one sides, the students in Münster were critical of the lack of participation by their own classmates and suggested a more active faculty involvement with more efforts at reminding and motivating students as a solutions (even though the faculty felt that both in class discussion and reminders and several reminders per email would have solved this problem). On the other side, students in Münster felt that small course sizes would be preferable and foster a more engaged in-depth discussion by the participants. Therefore, they suggested limiting course sizes, which, however, is a matter of organizational policy and frequently quite difficult at public universities.

The evaluations of both groups of students also indicated a slight problem resulting from the different levels of preparation for the range of applications of power required by the on-line discussions. Due to the broader focus of the UNF seminar, students were somewhat dissatisfied with how well course readings and class activities prepared them for the on-line discussions. On the German side, there was a tendency among the students to judge the quality of their classmates’ statements higher than that of the UNF students’

contributions (while also being critical of the sophistication of some of their own classmates postings). Many Münster students were bored by the UNF students' constant references to Nye's concept of power.

Interestingly, both groups of students reported difficulty remembering to join the discussions – that there was an on-line component to a physical course. In particular in the German case, this turned out to be a real problem, as students are used to seminars meeting only once a week with not activities except readings in between meetings. Furthermore, both sets of students also noted that they were critical of the quality of some of the postings. Specifically, there was substantial frustration over classmates' messages that said little more, substantively, than "I agree."

Next to these common observations, there were a few interesting differences, however. Thus, American and German students appear to have different expectations regarding faculty involvement. There were equal-sized groups of UNF students who either wanted faculty involvement in the discussions and those who were strongly opposed to faculty involvement in the discussions. In contrast, almost all German students strongly preferred more active faculty involvement, feeling that this would increase the quality of discussion.

Kommentar [d1]: In a more extended version of the paper, it would be interesting to speculate why this is the case.

Moreover, the aspects of the time management that caused student dissatisfaction were different. UNF students reported frustration with the one-week time limits for discussions, which often cut of discussions just when they were getting to the most interesting points. Münster students, however, felt overwhelmed by the overall volume of online discussions in the limited time. They would have preferred to have the three discussions spaced a bit more apart from each other.

Some comments and criticisms were raised only by one or the other groups of students, finally. Thus, students at UNF commented on the number of points attached to the assignments and suggested introducing a video-conferencing or other web-cam component. And, despite their many criticisms (mostly constructive), the UNF students indicated that they were pleased to have been included in an attempt to improve teaching and learning at their university. German students, in turn, highlighted the value of the comparative essay in helping them reflect on the on-line discussions.

Faculty Evaluation of Cross-Border Discussion Design, Process, and Success:

We were pleased with the on-line discussions and found them to be an effective learning tool. We also learned how to improve the discussions in our next effort, and have begun considering how we might team-teach an entirely on-line course. We will break our appraisal of what went well and what could be improved down into the same categories as above: educational objectives, design and process, and assessment.

Objectives: As noted above, we found the discussions were successful in achieving the defined learning outcomes. We were especially pleased that both sets of students' clearly achieved intercultural learning and generally gained a new perspective on their own culture and attitudes. Though only minimally a problem in our discussions, we recognize that engaging with another culture introduces questions of political, ideological, and cultural sensitivities. This will have to be managed in future iterations of the activity and will be especially dependent on topic chosen.

Design and Process: It is with regard to design and process that we learned the most and can best improve coordination and planning of cross-border discussions in the

future. First, we definitely need better coordination of course topics and literature across borders. With similar course topics and a broader match in readings, the likelihood of a balance in the level of theoretical knowledge and ability to apply it would be higher. Moreover, a closer match in course topics would make it easier to refer to the content of the discussions in class sessions and vice versa. Second, we need better coordination on time frame for discussions, though we recognize this will continue to pose a challenge due to differing academic year schedules.

Third, better coordination is required on the question of course size. The unbalanced number of participants became a problem for American and German students alike, with the UNF students becoming frustrated by the weak German participation and the Münster students overwhelmed by the volume of American postings.

Fourth, the question of faculty participation will require further experimentation. We chose to "keep out of it" this time around, and student response varied. It was interesting to note that especially the German students demanded more faculty involvement, which might point to cultural particularity. With the Americans, however, as many students wanted faculty to get involved as did not. Next time, we may try more active on-line faculty moderation of discussions by both partners.

Fifth, we did not initially recognize cultural differences in the education systems. What the American professor considered standard, in terms of providing instructions, scoring rubrics, rules on syllabus, etc. to students, the German professor found surprising and overly directive. The German students were not used to having course activities several times a week and many failed to sufficiently participate – but because they knew

this was a graded assignment, this led to a high course drop-out rate (which then contributed to the imbalance in course size).

Finally, we ~~were~~ would like to see a higher level of discussion and more effective communication through posts. We were pleased with how well students expressed analytical opinions and utilized outside research for support, but there was room for improvement. We may integrate into the courses instruction on how to discuss and how to write effective posts. It was common that discussions garnered higher levels of interest and sophistication only very late in the week, lessening the impact of the learning experience. More faculty moderation or participation may encourage better discussion, as well as instruction on how to discuss.

Assessment: One area for improvement in our assessment techniques is determining how much the discussions added to learning of course concepts and content. We focused primarily on assessing the intercultural aspects of the discussions – as a potential substitute for study abroad. The discussions and essays did demonstrate that students achieved education objective #5, but we did not attempt to separate out how much of that was due to readings or in-class activities as opposed to "value-added" from the discussions.

Conclusion

The difference that culture makes - especially its impact on differing interpretations of theoretical concepts - is hard to learn from a textbook. Exposing students to other cultures via active learning across borders proved in our case to be an effective way to let students in the US and Germany experience other cultures, understand global issues from other

perspectives, and gain new perspectives on their own perception of topics like history, identity, and culture. As such we perceive our effort only to be a starting point, however. In the future, we are planning to co-teach a web-based course on International Governmental Organizations (IGOs), which we consider a particularly apt topic for teaching across borders. While study abroad remains the most transformational way to internationalize the curriculum, it may be that technology and creativity will enable universities to provide students – many of whom may never have the chance to study abroad – with educational experiences that go well beyond simply introducing international content into courses and meet many of the same educational and career-preparation goals as study abroad.

Appendix 1
Discussion Grading Rubric (UNF)

Discussions Across Borders
Scoring Guide

Each weekly discussion is worth a maximum of 5 points, for a total of 15 points during the term. To encourage true interaction through discussion, I expect each student to submit *at least* three posts per discussion/week. The sum of a student's posts are judged collectively so a particularly good post may get a student a lot of credit while another that is of poor quality may not benefit the student at all.

Excellent/Very Good [5 (A) or 4.5 (B+)]
- The student has obviously read the textbooks and makes useful references to them in his/her posts.
- Posts clearly articulate relevant ideas/opinions and respond to the question and/or the posts of others.
- It is obvious that the student has read the posts of others in the class.
- There are no fewer than 3 posts for the week.
- Mistakes in spelling and grammar are few and far between. Language is always appropriate for a classroom setting.
- Posts are always respectful of other students' opinions and culture.

Good [4 (B-)]
- The student generally demonstrates that he/she has read the textbooks but the linkages are occasionally weak or unclear.
- Posts generally articulate relevant ideas/opinions but sometimes drift off topic or only partially respond to the question being discussed.
- It appears that the student has read most of the posts written by others in the class.
- There are no fewer than 3 posts for the week.
- There are occasional spelling and grammar mistakes that sometimes make the student's arguments hard to follow. Language is occasionally inappropriate for a classroom setting.
- Posts are generally respectful of other students' opinions and culture.

Average [3.5 (C)]
- Student fails to consistently demonstrate that he/she has read the textbooks. References to the textbook are either token or included haphazardly.
- Posts usually drift off topic or only partially respond to the question being discussed.
- It appears that the student has read few, if any, of his/her classmates' comments. Posts repeat points others have made or are usually limited to "I agree" or "I disagree".
- There are only 2 posts for the week.
- There are numerous spelling and grammar mistakes that usually make the student's arguments very difficult to follow. Language is often inappropriate for a classroom setting.
- Posts are generally respectful of other students' opinions and culture.

Unacceptable [3 or lower (F)]
- The student fails to demonstrate that he/she read the textbooks. References to the textbooks are non-existent or inaccurate.
- Posts almost invariably have little or nothing to do with the topics at hand. Someone was just typing for the sake of typing.
- The student has obviously not even looked at the comments made by others and his/her posts make no attempts to engage anyone in a discussion of the issues.
- There are fewer than 2 posts for the week.
- Spelling and grammar errors make the posts virtually unintelligible. Language is usually inappropriate for a classroom setting.
- Posts fail to respect other students' opinions and culture.

Appendix 2
Discussion Instructions (UNF)

Discussions Across Borders
Instructions and Rules
(UNF)

1. Interaction with students at the University of Münster in Germany through discussion will constitute 15% of a student's grade. During the discussion period, logging on regularly and posting material will be required if a student wishes to do well.
2. UNF and University of Münster students can access Blackboard by logging in at **https://blackboard.unf.edu** (UNF students can also log in through MyWings; University of Münster students ***can not*** use MyWings to enter Blackboard.). UNF students use their N number and UNF password; German students will be assigned a userid and password.
3. Once you have logged on to Blackboard, click on "Int'l Studies: Capstone Seminar" to enter the course. (German students should not have any other courses to choose from.)
4. Once you have entered the course, discussion forums and threads can be reached directly through the "Discussion Board" link in the menu located on the left hand side of the screen and then on **2008FALL.INR4930.82727.01.**
5. Once in the discussion section, click on the forums/question and/or threads you wish to read.
6. There will be four required weekly discussions in response to questions posted by faculty members. Discussions will be the weeks of:
   October 27 (ungraded but required for UNF students)
   November 3 (graded; 5 points maximum)
   November 10 (graded; 5 points maximum)
   November 17 (graded; 5 points maximum)

The weekly discussions are time-limited and will begin at noon Sunday (or 6 p.m. Sunday Germany). All weekly discussions will conclude the following Saturday at noon (or 6 p.m. Germany). Students may post at any time during that week. This will be the only time that a student can post on that particular week's question. Students may NOT go back and post on a previous week's discussion question for credit after that week's discussion has been closed.

7. The instructors will post a discussion question each week. However, students are welcome to create new threads and pose their own questions or to discuss other, ***relevant*** topics as is appropriate.
8. There are a number of **Ground Rules** that students would do well to remember as they post messages during the semester:

Courtesy and respect for others is mandatory. Any comments that are disrespectful, insulting, disparaging, or otherwise inappropriate are prohibited. It is possible to disagree without being disagreeable. Students are expected to keep discussions civil at all times despite the fact that much of the material being discussed may be sensitive in nature.

The instructor will be the sole arbiter in deciding what comments are inappropriate. If students are in doubt, ask the instructor prior to publishing such posts.

Proofread your posts before you send them. Poor grammar and bad spelling make it difficult to follow one's ideas. Consider each post a "mini-paper" for the course and craft it accordingly.

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that his/her posts reflect an at least a basic understanding of the material. Making reference to the textbooks is the best way to demonstrate an understanding the material.

QUANTITY does not make up for **QUALITY** when it comes to discussions. Despite a minimum quantity of posts, I also demand quality. See the Scoring Guide for grading criteria.

Part of the discussion grade is interacting with your classmates and German partners. Don't wait until the last minute, put up a post or two, and then call it a week. It is better to post over several sessions than all at once.

Remember, these discussions are not some late-night, wander in, Yahoo chat room where anything goes. This is an assignment. You are receiving college credit for this. Treat it appropriately.

Appendix 3
Written Assignment (UNF)

INR 4930
Discussions Across Borders
Comparative Essay
5 points
Due December 2, 2008

Each student will write a 2-4-page paper comparing and contrasting the opinions and attitudes of the UNF students and University of Münster students during our Blackboard discussions.

- Focus on opinions and attitudes relative to power, Germany's power today, and/or corporate power:
- How were opinions similar?
- How were they different?
- Did you find the similarities or the differences more surprising?
- Did the Münster students' opinions about Germany's power change your views of that country (especially your views from the readings alone)?

In this essay, students must do the following:

- Clearly present criteria for comparison
- Demonstrate an understanding of the discussions held between UNF and University of Münster.
- Begin the paper with an analytical (or argumentative) thesis statement
- Provide specific examples or explanations of similarities and differences

The essays:

- Must be typed, double-spaced, have one-inch margins, and use 10-12 point fonts.
- Must document all sources (including the course text) using APA or MLA style, both of which require parenthetical references. Footnotes and endnotes are not acceptable.
- Must be at least two FULL pages to have met the assignment requirements.
- May utilize but do not require outside research.
- Do NOT require a report cover. Please staple or paperclip.
- Will be graded using the Comparative Essay Scoring Guide available on Blackboard.

I am happy to answer questions and review drafts. Hard copy drafts must be turned in to me at least one full week prior to the due date for review. (You cannot e-mail drafts or final papers).

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