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**TÍTULO:** El impacto de los cursos de negocios a través de colaboración en línea para la internacionalización del Currículo.

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**RESUMEN:** El artículo presenta los resultados de la evaluación aplicada al proyecto conjunto México-Estados Unidos de América denominado “Colaboración en Línea para el Aprendizaje Internacional” (COIL- siglas en inglés) aplicado en un módulo de curso de negocios que fue integrado en dos unidades de aprendizaje de negocios diferentes, uno llevado a cabo en una Universidad Mexicana y el otro en una Universidad Estadounidense. Los resultados mostraron que un proyecto de Internacionalización a Distancia (IaD-siglas en inglés) a través de la metodología de COIL, como parte de una iniciativa más amplia de Internacionalización en Casa (IAH- siglas en inglés), puede construir las bases para que los estudiantes desarrollen una conciencia global, habilidades de comunicación intercultural y conocimientos disciplinarios actualizados.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Educación en Negocios, Internacionalización del Currículo, Internacionalización en Casa, Internacionalización a distancia.

**TITLE:** Business courses impact through online collaboration on curricula internationalization

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the results of the evaluation applied to the joint Mexico-United States of America project called “Collaboration Online for International Learning” (COIL) applied in a business course module that was integrated into two units of learning of different businesses, one carried out in a Mexican University and the other in an American University. The results showed that an Internationalization at a Distance (IaD) project through the COIL methodology, as part of a broader Internationalization at Home (IAH) initiative, can build the foundations for students develop global awareness, cross-cultural communication skills, and up-to-date disciplinary knowledge.

**KEY WORDS:** business education, curricula internationalization, internationalization at home, internationalization at distance.

**INTRODUCTION.**

Despite all the important positive changes that have happened in the past several decades regarding internationalization of higher education (IHE), there is still a need for continuous research and improvement regarding the different initiatives needed to reach the desired level of internationalization in all higher education initiatives.

Within higher education institutions (HEIs) in the world, there is still a high social demand to solve the agency problem that arises from traditional student international mobility opportunities that Leask (2015) explained by mentioning that “the uneven flow of students from the South to the North, resulting from excess capacity in the North and unmet demand in the South, has also

contributed to brain drain from the very countries that can least afford it, especially if students are encouraged to stay on in the receiving country as migrants. Thus, poorer sending countries lose, while wealthier receiving countries benefit from the home country government or aid agency funding that has supported the students as well as the subsequent intellectual and economic contributions the students make as graduates” (p. 18).

It is in this context that the internationalization of curricula becomes a major engine of change through the Internationalization at Home (IAH) strategy based on Internationalization at Distance (IaD) projects that can benefit the majority of students (in many universities is more than 99% of total students) that cannot access international mobility opportunities.

This case study was aimed at examining a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project in order to provide evidence that corroborates, or not, previously identified benefits for students participating in this type of project. Such benefits include global awareness, multicultural abilities, and up-to-date discipline knowledge that better prepares students for career opportunities (Mudiamu, 2020). These major contributions are of the highest importance for business students since the nature of their career requires graduates that can perform successfully in a global and multicultural business community. The COIL project analyzed in this case study generates scientific evidence to propose a new way to improve the business-related disciplines through student acquisition of global and multicultural abilities, which are especially important in the actual business world where sometimes multicultural communication is taken for granted.

## **DEVELOPMENT.**

### **Literature review.**

Since, “the massification of higher education and the increasing importance of higher education and research for the global knowledge economy, result in an increasing importance of its

internationalization” (De Wit, 2019, p. 15), internationalization of higher education (IHE) has been one of the main objectives that many universities around the world have recently included as part of their institutional goals and strategies.

“What now is called ‘internationalization of higher education’ as a concept and strategy is a recent phenomenon that has emerged over the last 30 years” (De Wit, 2019, p. 9). Many IHE programs in higher education institutions (HEI) have reached levels of significant importance and have focused mainly on students’ international mobility and, at a moderate level, international faculty collaboration.

As Jones (2015) mentioned, “in some universities the focus of internationalization of the curricula is primarily on outbound students’ mobility involving a small percentage of students” (p.4). However, leaders of IHE around the globe have recently brought new ideas to redefine the concept and adjust the model to a more practical and feasible version. Those new strategies formally include the idea of curricula internationalization and internationalization at home (IAH).

According to Beelen & Jones (2018), the concept of internationalization at home was developed in Europe during the late 1990s by Bengt Nilsson from the University of Malmö (Sweden) as an alternative to the ‘study abroad’ feature promoted by the Erasmus mobility program. However, it was not until years later that universities around the globe understood that the IAH strategy was the best way to reach and obtain the internationalization of the majority of the university community. More specifically, for many universities there is now a strong focus on curricula internationalization in order to provide students at home with strong global awareness and perspective, the opportunity to develop multicultural abilities and skills, and up-to-date discipline knowledge.

Aponte & Jordan (2020) confirm the importance of this statement by saying that “the current digital and interconnected world requires addressing the training of students from a global perspective, aspiring to train them as global professionals, with skills for lifelong learning and for their global

employability. All must be recognized that learning today is acquired by doing connections and transiting through international networks of learning, research and practice, to interact, associate and collaborate in the possibility of generating new content, knowledge and innovation” (p. 419).

When talking about curricula internationalization, it is important to define what exactly drives curricula internationalization. Zapp and Lerch (2020) state in their recent research the factors that effectively drive a curriculum to be internationalized, and also identify the factors that do not have any direct impact on the international level of a curricula. They identify that functioning in a globalized economy, working with international nongovernmental organizations, and having an internationalized student body do not increase the odds for an internationalized curriculum. On the other hand, they identify as important factors for gaining an international curriculum the specific academic area involved (mainly social sciences and business programs), the operation of an international office at the university, and membership in international university associations. These three factors are important to consider when building an institutional strategy to impact the level of internationalization in a curriculum.

Valtins, Tipans & Muracova (2020) state that there are some other factors, traditional and non-traditional, that need to be assessed while determining a level of curricula internationalization, mentioning that while “higher education institutions are very accustomed to and focused on the number of international students, international cooperation agreements, visiting guest professors and international projects, another dimension could be added if we start to account and measure things that are happening in the digital communication, online data exchange, usage of mobile devices and other technologies” (p. 14). This thinking leads to the consideration of the significance of online tools to conduct activities as part of an essential strategy to reach the goals of an international level curriculum.

In their reflection, while discussing one possible component of an IAH strategy, Mittelmeir et al (2020) define the new concept of Internationalization at Distance (IaD), which they identify as the use of online and other technologically supported academic activities to exchange knowledge and ideas across geographic borders, instead of students moving across the globe. “At the same time, IaD learning activities have a broader intended audience than simply “home” students, given the physical distance between students and their corresponding institutions, staff, or peers.” (p. 4). This approach suggests that curricula internationalization has more possibilities to explore by using online tools.

Regarding the aims of an international curricula, Jones (2015) mentions that “students themselves are showing increased interest in international and intercultural experience, while research indicates a rising demand by employers for university graduates with enhanced global perspectives and intercultural competence” (p. 1).

According to Furtado et al. (2019), “IAH is a relevant alternative for HEIs to integrate international and intercultural perspectives into the experiences of students, whether they occur through virtual collaboration or at the local campus, especially because IAH can serve a larger part of the academic community” (p. 103). So, specifically in IaD, it is incredibly important to investigate if experiences at home through virtual cooperation in fact have brought benefits to students and faculty.

Identifying the main benefits or challenges in a virtual international co-learning experience is also highly important to justify the existence of such initiative in the process of curricula internationalization. For that purpose, there is a need to identify both faculty and student benefits, which taken together represent the benefits to the overall curricula. This subject is relevant, according to Swartz, Luck, Barbosa, & Crawford (2019), who argued that in order to conduct a virtual collaboration such as a COIL project, faculty must be willing to leave their comfort zone and adapt their own pedagogies to another diverging set of values, teaching alongside other colleagues,

sharing materials and knowledge, and agreeing on standards and grading rubrics. Faculty effort must be compensated by seeing their students truly benefiting from this virtual collaboration project as a consequence of having achieved faculty's academic goals.

In this regard, Mudiamu (2020) explored faculty experience in the creation and teaching of a COIL module and identified how faculty made meaning of their participation. Mudiamu (2020) mentions that faculty interest in participation in virtual cooperation is based on the perception of COIL as a professional development opportunity since "COILING allowed them to work with their peers to improve their teaching skills, further internationalize their curricula, create more engaging class content and design improved course outcomes" (p. 97). Also, "COIL gave them the opportunity to grow a larger international network in their field or discipline for publishing and research" (p. 98).

Regarding faculty perception of the impact of a COIL experience on students, Mudiamu (2020) found that faculty experienced COIL as providing robust global learning for their students, enabling them to gain deeper engagement with course content as well as meaningful connections with classmates overseas. They considered COIL a way to get their local students to engage with each other around cultural difference, and to gain awareness of potential stereotypes that they had about others, both locally and internationally. They believed that "this self-reflection in a global context engendered cultural humility for the students and the faculty" (p. 148).

Another study was conducted by Barbosa, Santos & Prado (2020) and included the analysis of students' perception on two IAH projects. One of the projects was conducted through classroom work with international exchange students and local students on the campus of a Brazilian university, and the second one project was conducted through an online collaboration between the Brazilian university and a Mexican university.

After using participant observation and focus groups as techniques for collecting data, Barbosa et al. (2020) concluded that, no matter if the international experience is in the classroom or in a virtual environment, it was demonstrated that the international component of the experience provides positive “impacts of IAH on students, namely regarding motivation, satisfaction, and the development of professional competencies, as well as expectations about the value of such experiences for their future employability” (p. 95).

Duffy, Stone, Townsend & Cathey (2020), using a case study regarding collaboration between a university in the USA and a University in Thailand, evaluated the impact on USA students and concluded that students “developed cross-cultural communication and critical thinking skills, an increased awareness and mindfulness of global and cultural dynamics, higher levels of perceived proficiency in global collaboration, and experienced transformative learning as a result of participating in the virtual exchange project” (p. 1). Almedia et al. (2018) also contributed by identifying as one of the main attributes acquired by students in an IAH project an “interculturality” in cognitive, intra and interpersonal aspects.

Moreover, in the specific academic field of business, Sadovskaya & Matskevich (2019) reported the findings of a case study of a COIL project between a Dutch university and a Belarusian university. Based on the qualitative data analyzed, Sadovskaya & Matskevich (2019) concluded that, “the project provided value to the development of students’ intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural and communication skills along with improved flexibility when working on a project in an unpredictable environment of a virtual international team, which in turn will be a valuable addition to their competencies when presenting themselves to a future employer” (p. 227). Thus, most of the research that has been issued in the recent years tends to declare that virtual exchanges, COIL included, do reach the main goal of developing student global collaboration, multicultural awareness and sensitivity, and cross-cultural communication skills.



The present study aims to confirm these findings through the examination of the efforts and results of a recent Mexico-USA collaborative COIL project but also to contribute to the existing dialogue on the value of IaD strategies, such as COIL, as facilitator for the building of global awareness, multicultural abilities and up-to-date discipline knowledge in the business education field.

### **The Iad Project through Coil Methodology on Business Courses.**

Professors from the University of Guanajuato (UG) in Mexico and LaGuardia Community College – CUNY (LaGCC) in the USA met in May 2019 at the SUNY Global Center in New York City in a COIL Preparatory Workshop for Collaboration, aimed at connecting professors from Guanajuato with professors from the New York City metropolitan area in the interest in working together on COIL projects. One professor from Guanajuato found mutual interest with a professor from LaGuardia in a collaboration between an Investment Projects class at Guanajuato and an Introduction to Business class at LaGuardia. Both professors were interested in integrating global and multicultural awareness perspectives into their classes, as well as providing their students with a multi-cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication experience and multicultural/global business learning, and found this COIL project to be an excellent opportunity to do so.

LaGuardia is located in Queens, New York City, USA, and serves students who have come from many parts of the world. The approximately 19,000 degree-seeking LaGuardia students represent 150 countries and 98 different native languages. As of Fall 2018, sixty-five percent of the student body was considered under-represented minorities, Hispanic, Black (Non-Hispanic) and Native American, with Hispanic student enrollment at forty-eight percent.

The COIL program at LaGuardia was created in 2016 as a global learning initiative to support the development of core competencies across the curriculum, in particular the global learning competency, which is used to develop and assess students' ability to understand global issues and

events, communicate knowledge in global contexts, and demonstrate ethical engagement and global self-awareness. This project represented the first COIL experience for business students, but over thirty LaGuardia courses from different disciplines have benefitted from COIL exchanges, as the institution has utilized COIL to facilitate IAH by connecting LaGuardia with nineteen institutions abroad.

The University of Guanajuato (UG) was founded in 1732 and it has campuses in most of the cities of the State of Guanajuato, Mexico. It serves students from all economic and social areas but mainly supports students from rural and developing areas within the state. UG is a research-oriented institution and it is the main higher education institution in the state that promotes social mobility since many of its students are the first generation of the family receiving higher education. UG has around 24,000 students in the undergraduate and graduate academic programs, and it also manages a high school level with more than 14,000 students.

The COIL program at UG was created in 2019 as a project oriented to develop curricula internationalization in the school of business located in the City of Guanajuato. The school of business at UG is the largest school accounting more than 2,000 students in both, undergraduate and graduate levels. This initiative is part of the widely spread institutional policy for internationalization that UG has developed during the last 50 years through many initiatives that include more than 200 agreements of collaboration with HEI around the globe. The COIL program has developed 8 different courses in the business area and faculty is getting prepared to expand the number of regular courses participating in this initiative.

Through work performed in a SUNY COIL training program, the COIL module for the two classes was created based on three main learning objectives for both groups of students: demonstrate a better understanding and awareness of similarities and differences in the culture, language, and career goals of students from the two countries; express an awareness and acceptance of the

different values, standards and practices that comprise the Mexican and American business cultures; and understand some of the differences between operating a business in Mexico and operating the business in the USA.

Students would achieve the first objective through the completion of the icebreaker assignment, with students sharing and commenting on videos in which they introduced themselves and discussed their background, and then creating and sharing videos of team presentations in which they described what they learned about their new classmates.

Students would achieve the second objective upon completion of an intercultural business activity in which they researched and shared with their team what they felt were positive and negative aspects of business culture in their home country and then expressing in a synchronous online meeting what their team discussed and learned about the Mexican and American business cultures.

Students would achieve the third objective through their work together on a business report that would include a financial analysis and identification of the different factors to consider when doing business in Mexico and the USA.

In the fall 2019 semester, the COIL module was implemented for the first time in UG and LaGCC. A total of 45 students participated in and completed the courses taught in UG and LaGCC, 18 students from UG and 27 students from LaGCC. All of these students were involved in the COIL experience. Students were divided by teams which included both USA and Mexican students. In addition to helping the students better understand, the similarities and differences in culture, language, and career goals, the icebreaker activity also initiated students from both classes engaging in close communication and online international relationships.

In the first part of the main activity, students were asked to reflect on the main features of businesses in their own country and share them in a forum with their international teammates. In

these reflections, students identified the cultural and traditional aspects of society and business that in their opinion most impact business performance and stakeholder satisfaction.

As mentioned, the goal was for students to achieve awareness and understanding of cultural and social aspects of doing business in USA and Mexico. In the second part of the main activity, students were prompted to create a joint report, using financial forecasting indicators, that would include a financial analysis and projection for a business operating in both countries, identifying the common and different aspects of doing business in both Mexico and the USA. The goal was to provide students with a better understanding of the different conditions and factors that apply when doing business in both countries and, in a broader sense, the need to account for local differences when doing business abroad. All the activities were conducted according to plan, and few adjustments related to timing were needed.

**The results of the evaluation process: perception of students on the IaD experience.**

At the end of the COIL activities, a questionnaire was given to all participating students to capture students' perceptions on how the COIL experience had impacted their vision and understanding of the multicultural and international dimensions.

A total of 29 questionnaires were collected, 18 from UG students and 11 from LaGCC students. The questionnaire was designed according to an existing LaGCC evaluation questionnaire for COIL modules and also included some aspects of a SUNY-COIL evaluation questionnaire.

The new questionnaire focused on the evaluation of seven different aspects and the results are described as follows: Students were asked if their perspective on the subject changed as a result of participating in the COIL collaboration. The COIL module was focused on two main topics: multicultural issues and international business.

Most of the UG students stated that there was some level of change in different aspects regarding multicultural issues and some international business concepts and perceptions. The most common change perceived was increased awareness of the challenges and difficulties of working in teams with individuals from other cultures, especially on an online basis. UG students also reflected that their perception of several business-related issues, such as labor rights and business administration, changed in a positive way.

Other changes mentioned by smaller numbers of students included the breaking of old paradigms, increased awareness of different ways of thinking and doing things, experience and improved communication with international peers, recognition of the importance of traditions in the USA and an improved opinion of USA students. All of these are considered positive impacts of the COIL experience perceived by Mexican students in what was for many their first international experience. Despite the positive evidence provided by the significant majority of the UG students' perceptions, there were a couple of students that declared that they did not perceive any change on the subjects experienced. This is a variable that deserves further analysis in following COIL experiences to identify causes for this lack of improvement or change in perceptions of the main subjects studied.

Most LaGCC students responding noted a positive change in their perspective as well. Among the more popular responses were a better understanding of cultural differences, increased interest in learning about different places around the world, and a better understanding of the difference in costs in the two countries. Students also mentioned the following: gaining a more global point of view, understanding better why certain businesses operate as they do, awareness of different languages used in foreign business, experience interacting with people from different countries, better understanding of the different classes they are taking, and increased appreciation for things in the USA that many take for granted, like pensions or employer retirement plans. A couple of

students also noted no real change of perspective, and this also needs further examination in subsequent COIL projects.

When evaluating how their cultural background had influenced their interaction and work with their international partners, the majority of the UG students replied that their cultural background had some influence. Some of those influences noted were: preconceived ideas and higher expectations of USA students as hardworking and leadership-oriented, similarities in background that helped but also differences in background that made it harder to communicate and work together, cultural backgrounds not oriented to working online, helpful previous international experience for some, and personal ways of doing things that affected communication. Nevertheless, almost a third of the total students stated that their cultural background had no influence on the interaction at all.

Students from LaGCC mostly responded that their background had an influence on their interactions with their Mexican teammates. The fact that LaGCC has one of the most diverse student populations in the world seemed to heavily factor here. Many mentioned that their background enabled them to be more open to different ideas and perspectives and more understanding of certain topics.

Some students mentioned that their ability to speak and read Spanish, as well as their own experience with English as a second language, helped them communicate better with their teammates. Also, some of these same students mentioned that their experiences in what they felt were somewhat similar Latin cultures helped them better understand the culture of their Mexican teammates. One student mentioned that moving to USA from another country provided experience with differences in business but realized through this COIL experience that there is much more to learn. A student from China interestingly shared that she had never had such an experience and was therefore shy in the beginning, but that this experience helped her to be more outgoing as she found it interesting to talk to people from such different background and cultures.

When evaluating the impact of the COIL experience on how students' view the world, all the UG students disclosed that it had a positive impact on their view of the world. The majority mentioned specific aspects such as the change of positive and negative stereotypes about the USA and its culture, the improvement of their perception on their own country's culture, and the improvement of some of their multicultural abilities such as patience, learning to work with different cultures and multicultural awareness. Also, a few UG students mentioned as positive impacts their increased awareness of the importance of working with people regardless of nationality and background and their growing consciousness of the importance of cultural diversity in local and international businesses.

In terms of how they view the world, all responding LaGCC students also reported positive changes from the project. Most of the responses seemed to fall under three broad areas. Students mentioned being more aware of the different experiences people have and more open-minded to different opinions and perspectives that arise from these experiences, as well as being more cognizant of the commonalities shared despite these differences. They also mentioned having a better understanding of the challenges of communicating with people around the world, and also the benefits, such as growing and learning from each other, that can be received by overcoming these challenges in communication. And finally, students discussed gaining a better understanding of the differences in business and government policies in different countries and the impact these can have on people's lives.

The COIL experience caused some stressful moments on participating students. The UG students mentioned two stressful aspects: speaking and understanding the English language, and the lack of feedback or timely response from the international peers. Nevertheless, four of the students did not identify any stressful concerns.

Students from LaGCC did not have the same anxiety experiences regarding language as they were accustomed to projects and assignments in English, although many of the students were also not native English speakers. They expressed stress and anxiety mainly in the electronic communication aspects of the module, as some reported difficulty in getting in touch and staying in close contact with their team partners and receiving full team involvement and responsiveness, especially with some balancing work and school. Some comments also included the finding of communication and the use of Excel for beginning business students to be intimidating at first and learning of the need to persist through communication difficulties. One student reported no stress or difficulty and that their teammates were responsive and helpful.

Participating students were asked about any communication adjustment due to the interaction with international peers. The majority of the UG students manifested that they had to improve and be more careful regarding how to speak and write English, and that they also had to use more body language to overcome the limitations of the level of English language. A few students said that they had to adapt to different accents due to some students' nationalities and mother tongue influence and decided to use more writing instead of talking through videoconference. Only one student said that language limited communication. Nevertheless, five students did not identify any negative or positive aspect of their communication with international peers.

LaGCC students mentioned their need to adapt to new technologies and methodologies of communication, as they were not used to communicating with classmates solely through technology with no opportunity for regular face-to-face meetings in the classroom. They referenced just getting used to checking their email and other tools to ensure that they stayed in good communication. Others mentioned the adjustments they had to make to communicate better with students not as familiar with the English language.



Using Google translate, slowing down speech, learning to focus on listening and paying attention, repeating themselves a bit, being mindful of different cultures and the need to be respectful, and writing in Spanish at times were some of the adjustments noted. One student reflected on their own weakness in communicating orally and that they found writing and texting to teammates much easier. Several others noted no real change, and that communication was the same as at home with peers.

Students were asked about interest in further exploration as a result of the COIL connection and they identified several possible actions that they would like to pursue after this experience. UG students responded with two main possible actions or explorations in the future: continue exploring cultures, education and business in other countries, especially in the USA, and continue interacting with students from USA, including possibly visit them and also expanding interaction to other countries. Only one UG student stated that they would like to apply the learned knowledge to the real business world.

LaGCC students expressed the desire for the expansion of this type of project in other courses for further collaboration with students from other countries to gain more perspectives and learn more about cultures, businesses, economies, etc. They discussed the desire to travel to Mexico and other countries to explore them physically and learn more about their peers' school, work, and lives by seeing things firsthand, and to further develop global relationships and networks.

There was a distinct interest by some in learning more about business in other countries – different business cultures and how businesses operate and thrive in different countries and more about people from other countries running businesses together. One student also expressed wanting to get more experience in business overall in order to further apply what they learned through this project.

There were several aspects identified as a major takeaway for participating students as a result of the COIL experience. The UG students mentioned the main benefits generated by the collaboration

as follows: they learned the English language better and they learned more about how to do business in the USA, and also realized the importance of dealing successfully with international teams. A few students also mentioned that they learned about the importance of cultural diversity, and how to work with others on business projects.

The responses from LaGCC students in terms of their major takeaway from the project were similar to each other, but still varied. Some mentioned the opportunity and experience of speaking to students from another part of the world who share the same ambitions, goals, and interests, and being able to learn about their culture and lives. Others mentioned learning the importance of teamwork and the ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds, and to be adaptable and accessible. One mentioned realizing that working with others from different parts of the world was not as difficult as they thought. One student insightfully commented that more communication between different people might reduce the problems that people in the world sometimes have with each other and another discussed their work as a major life experience – making a friend in Mexico, looking at the world in a new way and perhaps building a lifelong personal and business relationship. Some of the takeaways were more specifically business focused. One student mentioned some new business ideas and was definitely surprised by the price differences between the countries and perhaps saw some opportunities arising from that. Others mentioned understanding better how businesses work and how to make them better, understanding more about business culture in Mexico, and a new perspective on their academic studies – helping them better understand what they are learning in class.

Participating students in the COIL experience were asked to mention any suggestions to improve the COIL module for future editions. Over half of the UG students included at least one suggestion to improve the COIL module. The UG students' suggestions were: 1) improve the communication methodology between students and start with a synchronous class to explain the methodology and

later break out in rooms for student teams; 2) add a traveling component to the COIL experience; 3) invite another international class to participate in the COIL module; 4) improve audio and video connections; 5) include one activity with basic Spanish language; and 6) increase the number of synchronous sessions.

More than half of the LaGCC students also offered suggestions and their recommendations included: 1) communication improvements – perhaps requiring the use of Whatsapp or GroupMe, perhaps a live Zoom meeting right off the bat for everyone to meet, and exchanging numbers and information earlier to establish contact and communication early and often; 2) adjustments for time – either more time for COIL activities versus the regular part of class or perhaps just two COIL activities instead of three to reduce conflicts with the rest of the coursework; 3) more opportunities to apply what was learned; 4) finding ways to ensure full team participation; 5) a class ambassador that would assist class COIL activities; 6) team leader training and support, 7) adding fun and more connectivity with personal/nonbusiness Zoom activities – family, pets, friends, etc.

## **CONCLUSIONS.**

The results of the evaluation applied to all participating students in the IaD project were diverse and provided a wide spectrum of impact on students and hence on the practice of curricula with a focus on internationalization.

As Zapp & Lerch (2020) mentioned, the three elements that make a curriculum international are the specific academic area involved, having an international office at the university, and membership in international university associations.

In this project, Guanajuato has an international office while LaGuardia does not, but has a COIL program to coordinate and facilitate IAH. Both institutions have membership in SUNY-COIL that works as an international university association around the world, and the project was applied in a business program in both institutions. Thus, these elements are considered the starting point of

success for the IaD initiative since both institutions are working in a strategic manner in an IAH policy within the institutional and school levels.

The present research validated the concept proposed by Valtins et al. (2020) regarding the evaluation of curricula internationalization not only by measuring the traditional indicators, but also by measuring the digital activities carried out through online cooperation. The COIL project evaluated accounts for the measurement of students' perception of an online-based academic collaboration and learning experience.

The results gathered support on what Mittelmeier et al. (2020) found to be the benefits of online cooperation including technological support and academic activities to exchange ideas across the borders without moving from the home institution. The feedback provided by the participating students generated enough evidence to conclude that the IaD project under the COIL methodology effectively enabled students to develop multicultural and international learning, on both a personal and business level.

Most of the students identified the experience as having a positive impact in this area, especially regarding improving the desire of working in international teams online. Although there were a few students that stated that they did not perceive any change, this should be taken into consideration in further studies to identify the best way to make sure that all students are involved and learn from the experience.

Among the main findings, the study found that there is a significant impact of the cultural background of students that influences the way they communicate. However, it is important to mention that the cultural background worked positively and negatively in the way students communicated, but at the end, students took advantage of the positive impact and learned to how to deal with negative aspects.

In order to assure a better level of success in this projects, new strategies have to be developed in the planning stage of the COIL project in order to design exercises that can create a better understanding of the cultural background of students participating. The study also provided sufficient evidence to assure that a COIL project can positively impact a student's view of the world in a variety of ways. The online international collaboration was confirmed to be a means of enabling a larger number of students to develop global awareness.

Of course, any challenging project can have additional stress, especially if the project requires the use of a different language and involves interacting with many more cultures than people are accustomed to working with. A COIL project is no exception, but students participating in the evaluation mentioned that stress was existent, but not the main issue.

According to the different responses, students learned to deal with stress and had to develop skills to overcome it and be successful in the project. That is considered an important beneficial characteristic from a COIL project. Another important finding in this case study was the fact that students confirmed that a COIL project encouraged them to continue learning more about multicultural aspects, applied both to personal life and to the business world.

More specifically in the business area of this study, there were several major takeaways for students. The most relevant of these were the improvement of foreign business language, consciousness of own ability to participate in international entrepreneurship, building of multicultural business team working ability and acquiring international business communication and problem-solving abilities.

All of the recently published authors on IAH and IaD analyzed in this study agree that there are many benefits for faculty involved in online collaboration projects, according to the faculty perceptions researched. Moreover, authors mention the need to assess the benefits generated for students participating in such an initiative.

This study provided detailed beneficial impacts, and also areas of opportunity to continuously improve a COIL methodology project with a population of students. Results showed that this COIL enhanced project provided students with the basic knowledge to start building a concept of “cultural humility,” as Mudiamu (2020) proposed.

The online collaboration project demonstrated that an IaD project under the COIL methodology can build the foundation for students to develop global awareness, multicultural communication skills and up-to-date discipline knowledge. These three main objectives of IaD initiatives should be further studied in future cases in order to continue developing a common ground to support projects and develop curricula internationalization in universities around the world to assure access for all students to high quality and equal higher education. This can become an efficient strategy to help overcome the challenges mentioned by Leask in 2015 regarding higher education in a world separated by a North and South reality.

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