



GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

A new program allows CLA students to get international experiences and make digital connections with people around the world.

In coming to Cal Poly, CLA Dean Philip Williams saw great opportunity to connect students and faculty with their peers around the globe through virtual collaboration. It is a perfect complement to Learn by Doing.

When COVID-19 eliminated the ability to travel, virtual exchange became more than an opportunity — it is now a necessity.

“We simply cannot just put global projects on hold,” Williams said.

International experiences can enhance empathy and help develop skills in communicating across different cultures. They also offer perspectives that can be eye-opening for college students, as well as faculty working with international research partners. Perhaps now more than ever, there is a need for human connection and a need to embrace global learning in order to make sense of a global crisis.

Global engagement allows CLA students to practice human connection, participate in cross-cultural dialogues, gain a deeper and more

well-rounded understanding of our global peers, and strengthen their ability to communicate and collaborate. By offering virtual exchanges, the CLA can help prepare students to contribute personally and professionally to the world they will someday lead.

In short, virtual exchanges are learning experiences enabled by technology and coordinated between partners that develop cross-disciplinary and intercultural skills.

Virtual Exchange officially launched in CLA this spring when faculty were invited to compete for Global Engagement Grants to create international experiences for students. The grants allow them to collaborate with students to develop high-impact virtual exchange components for existing courses, experiment with innovative practices, cultivate partnerships with like-minded teachers and scholars from around the world, and receive training on technology and best-practice teaching methods.



This year, program participants will study the Middle East along with peers and faculty at the American University in Kuwait; students in Spanish classes at Cal Poly will work weekly with students in English classes at Universidad Nacional de San Martin in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and another group of students will engage with a nonprofit in Palermo, Sicily, to study issues of diversity and immigration in contemporary Italy. These courses are taught and orchestrated by history Professor Farah Al-Nakib, Spanish and applied linguistics Professor Silvia Marijuan and ethnic studies Professor Elvira Pulitano, respectively.

“The dean and I were overwhelmed by the creativity of the faculty and are excited to watch how these exchanges dramatically change the Cal Poly experience,” said Josh Machamer, CLA director of international initiatives. “With 20 to 40 students in each of these classes, we are completely reimagining who can have access to a global experience.”

These digital connections offer a way for students to interact with people from different countries without having to pay the expenses of a traditional study abroad experience. This is especially important for students with lower incomes, who may not be able to afford spending a quarter or more in another country, or students whose documentation status may preclude them from traveling so easily.

Virtual exchange allows the College of Liberal Arts to continue connecting students to the world around them — and, in fact, increases the ability to do so. Projects are currently funded through annual gifts made to the Dean’s Excellence Fund. Going forward, an important fundraising initiative will be a separate International Initiatives Fund that could support virtual exchange and scholarships for students to travel internationally for either study abroad or another unique experience. Anyone interested in supporting CLA International Initiatives should contact Assistant Dean for Development Adam Jarman at 805-756-6776 or ajarman@calpoly.edu.

Josh Machamer Named Director of International Initiatives

As part of Dean Philip Williams’ vision for increased international opportunities for CLA students, Josh Machamer was named the new director of international initiatives for the college. He recently led the CLA Task Force on Internationalization and has served in several other capacities related to international education. In this new role, he will provide leadership for the support, development and advancement of internationalization efforts for the college, including building capacity in emerging areas of direct and virtual exchange and increasing student engagement in international experiences. Machamer also continues to serve as chair of the Theatre and Dance Department.

