

Barbara's Notes on *Student-Initiated Research Outside the Classroom*

Facilitator: Joselyn Schultz Lewis
Panelists: Zack Bluestone and Matt Smallcomb, Telepresence Forum
Brian Cook and Brian Kesten, Student Commission for Unity (SCU)

Significance of pursuing own projects outside of class –

Zack and Matt:

Global classroom- especially enjoyed meeting counterparts in Doha – created student forum to keep the conversations going on the Arab-Israeli conflict from the Middle East perspective. Compared notes from US and Doha students. Collaborative white paper.

SCU: Put together research methods and civic engagement ideas into survey, especially Jesuit ideas – how close are we? Are we an inclusive community? More than 60 students in 1.5 years. Brian Cook recommends “ways to create a culture of questioning and critical inquiry.”

Telepresence forum was created to continue dialogue, not necessarily research. Doha students wanted a connection, too. Whole new level of diversity of opinion on the Doha campus re: Obama election. Taboo issues – building trust – started light to build trust, then “push” level as friends. Face to face component was a big benefit of the global classroom (to build trust). Led to white paper (process and substantive issues). Conversations – people were extremely biased on both sides. Wanted to use technology. Great example of “where you sit is where you stand” (Matt). Can't get 98% of the Middle East perspective on the GU campus. Project has made him (Zack) consider:

1. identity issues, open dialogue to break down stereotypes and biases.
2. How Islam is practically applied, with interaction with Doha students.

Brian C: “We suffer from not having a dialogue in an intelligent space about these issues” (of diversity). Guiding principle: open democratic dialogue – anyone could bring up anything.

Brian Kesten: Gap in solidarity as people of faith and with friends. “What kinds of things drive me and push me and make me feel satisfied when I go to bed at night?” Are we creating spaces in class where we can have dialogues about identities? Gap in experience – and wanted to articulate and validate issues.

Brian C: What is ‘the Georgetown experience’? What are our ideals and what are we doing about these issues? Discussion re: contradiction in community: minority and mainstream.

Matt: Something rigid about classroom experience that doesn't allow you to get to know each other well enough to “research the other.”

Formal/Informal learning –

Zack: Huge difference in interaction in class after the trip to Doha (trip is key). A “line” between profs and students in regular classes. After student-initiated projects – classroom discussion is better because students know each other better, including strengths and weaknesses.

Brian Kesten: Informal, but academic, conversations – formal learning provides base and info for informal learning to thrive.

Brian Cook: “detriment to my education b/c I missed class.” Have to take ownership of projects outside of class – create something you want to be proud of.

Zack: Informal learning projects have made formal learning more important, made it more real. “More of a reason to pay attention to every little detail you can soak up.”

Brian Cook: What role does (or should) faculty play in bringing all kinds of people together in the classroom – but not giving students the skills to interact, communicate appropriately? His advice to faculty is that they should try to do this in the classroom.

Matt: Trying to “create” student-initiated projects in class may be counterproductive. What may help – bringing students together outside of class, especially people they don’t know.

Zack: Profs should create more opportunities for such projects. Application process to get into the class. Make more meaningful bonds between students – make it seem like the work is actually important. Tap into real world projects – something that has more dramatic repercussions for the future.

Brian Cook: Gay Cima Gibson (faculty member in English) – makes meaningful connections with students; office hours; personally invested in empathy and action. Responsible for work and circle of learning. Personally invested.

Brian Kesten: RA experience – building community with students. One prof made him come to office hours. Questions why was that true only in this class? Conversations about the curriculum do happen in small classes.

Zack: Allow for an organic experience – class decision-making. Look for faculty perspective: train for how they can use students to advance their research. How to build in a better experience for students. (CNDLS, GUROP) GU could do a better job of telling profs that.