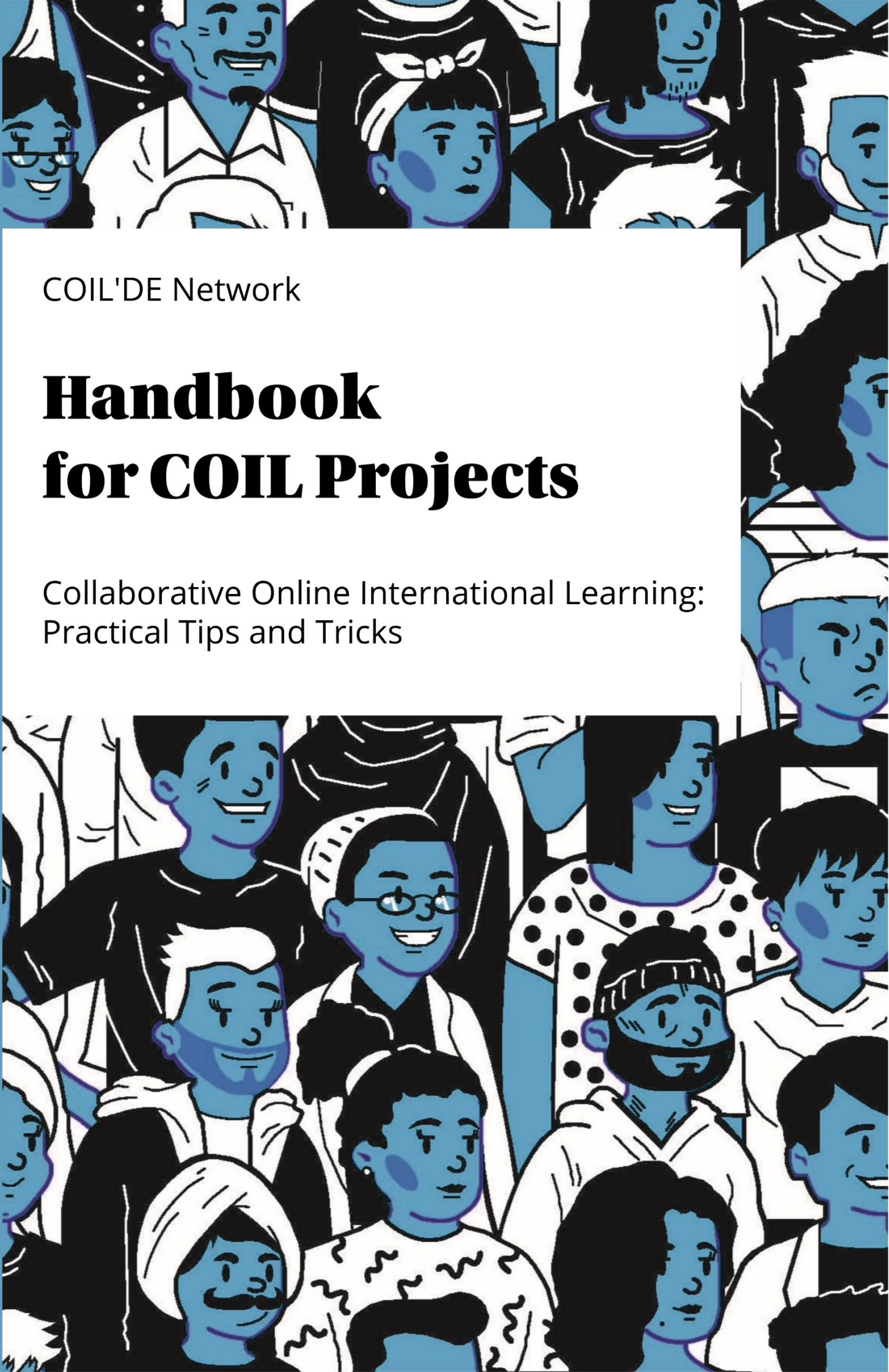


A stylized illustration of a diverse group of people, including men and women of various ages and ethnicities, rendered in a blue and black color scheme. The illustration is split into two sections: the top section shows a group of people looking towards the right, and the bottom section shows a group of people looking towards the left. The style is reminiscent of mid-century modern graphic design.

COIL'DE Network

Handbook for COIL Projects

Collaborative Online International Learning:
Practical Tips and Tricks

Source of cover image: COIL project “What If...?” led by Prof. Dr Sylvie Pagé, Mainz University of Applied Sciences, Department of Design, Prof. Alli Crandell and Prof. Scott Mann, Coastal Carolina University, South Carolina, USA. All rights reserved.

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About the publisher:

The COIL'DE network was founded in 2020 by Prof. Dr. Stephanie Swartz (Mainz University of Applied Sciences) together with colleagues from various German higher education institutions. It now comprises over 30 members from many colleges and universities across Germany. Regular meetings provide a forum for discussion on topics related to Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). The shared aim is to contribute to the establishment of COIL projects at German educational institutions and to expand networking among staff interested in COIL.

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Handbook for COIL Projects

Collaborative Online International Learning: Hands-on Tips and Tricks

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Foreword

In spring 2020, the world was shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the following two to three years, the world of work and educational institutions underwent a comprehensive, and in some cases complete, digital transformation. Although the pandemic is now several years behind us, digitalisation continues to be perceived as an asset within academic teaching. In the education sector in particular, lecturers appreciate the simplified communication channels and the opportunity to exchange specialist knowledge with other universities, both nationally and internationally, and to integrate this into their own lectures. Students who, for example, are unable to study abroad during their degree for financial or family reasons also benefit from digital networking and collaborative projects with fellow students from different cultures.

Virtual exchange, a concept that has existed since the introduction of the first telecommunications tools, has become increasingly important in recent years thanks to video conferencing on platforms such as Skype and Zoom, as well as collaborative digital tools such as Slack and Microsoft Teams. Virtual teamwork in projects with international partner universities, which are integrated into the curriculum and recognised as academic credits, is becoming increasingly significant. The US *State University of New York* (SUNY) has coined a term for this: *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL). By integrating COIL projects into their curricula, colleges and universities aim to better prepare their students for the digitalised, global workplace. Intercultural encounters and the development of language skills through COIL have now become an integral part of the 'internationalisation-at-home' strategy of many educational institutions. They regard this as a low-threshold, sustainable and inclusive way of internationalising their curricula.

As COIL projects came into increasing use at German universities at the start of the pandemic, it quickly became clear that there was a need for exchange and further development of this format. Although many materials and learning videos from the USA are available for this purpose, there are specific features of the German educational landscape that differ from the conditions at US institutions. In Germany, these are often state-funded institutions with limited financial and human resources. However, they often enjoy greater freedom when it comes to implementing a COIL project ("academic freedom"). Furthermore, compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation must always be ensured.

Driven by the need to develop specific solutions for the German educational landscape, a group of individuals interested in COIL founded the COIL'DE network in 2020, an informal network of German universities and higher education institutions. It consists of lecturers, COIL coordinators, staff from language centers and administrative staff, all of whom are interested in COIL and support one another in carrying out such projects.

The idea for this handbook emerged from the network's regular meetings.

With this handbook, we aim to provide practical support for anyone interested in COIL. We address fundamental questions (“How do I start a COIL project?”), share our practical experiences, and offer tips that are relevant for both beginners and those with more experience. We guide interested parties step by step through all phases of a project, from planning and onboarding to the selection of suitable digital platforms and the design of efficient collaboration. We also provide an overview of various project structures and present examples of successful COIL projects. Our bibliography offers further reading as well as a checklist for the successful implementation of COIL projects.

Although some chapters of the handbook focus more strongly on the perspectives of lecturers and participants, this work is aimed at a broad audience of those interested in COIL. This includes staff in continuing professional development as well as COIL coordinators who may not yet have carried out a COIL project themselves but wish to support lecturers in its implementation. Although the emphasis is on academic education, COIL projects also offer valuable experiences for pupils in secondary education, which is why teachers in this sector are also addressed.

COIL projects are evolving just as rapidly as the technologies that enable them. New technologies such as artificial intelligence open up opportunities on the one hand, but also bring new challenges on the other, necessitating innovative solutions. We therefore view this handbook as a dynamic work that grows and evolves alongside developments in this field. It represents a first step but is not a comprehensive report. There are certainly many other aspects that can be explored in greater depth in future publications. We hope, however, that this handbook will provide helpful support and make a motivating contribution to the dissemination of COIL within the German speaking educational landscape.

1. Fundamentals of COIL projects

The term *COIL* stands for *Collaborative Online International Learning* and is a form of virtual exchange in which teachers and participants collaborate across temporal and geographical boundaries using digital communication platforms. The collaboration typically lasts from at least four weeks up to several semesters. At least two partner institutions are involved, though several institutions may form part of a COIL project.

Participants are assigned to heterogeneous teams or, during the first meeting, form groups independently based on their interests and determine their roles and the distribution of tasks themselves. Together, they work on a project that has been agreed upon in advance by the instructors. Ideally, the project is embedded within the curriculum and the project results are incorporated into the participants' final marks.

The objectives of COIL include, among other things, the development of key skills such as intercultural competence, language skills and the ability to work across different time zones and schedules, as well as to organise themselves effectively within a team. Participants learn to carry out a project together with people from different backgrounds, thereby further developing their social and professional skills.

A glossary of various terms used in the context of COIL can be found in the appendix.

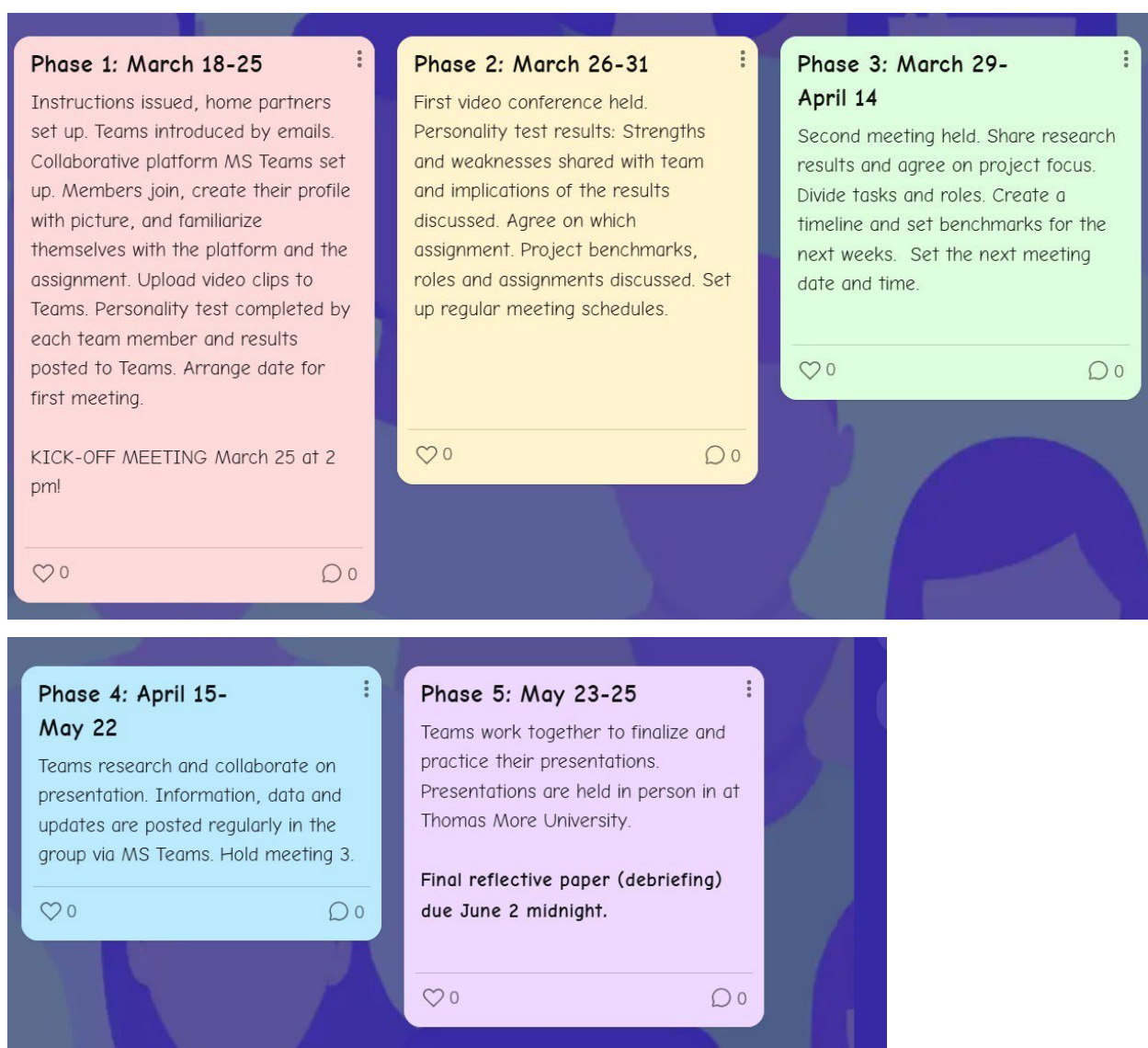
1.1 The process of a COIL project

Preparation for a COIL project begins several months in advance. If it is being carried out for the first time or is to take place over a longer period, sufficient lead time should be allowed for. Once a cooperation partner has been found, the instructors should ideally meet several times at least three months before the start of the semester. These meetings should preferably take place via video call on platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The aim is to build a relationship of trust and to clarify any potential misunderstandings at an early stage. In this way, the partners can also get a sense of the other's reliability and professionalism.

In the months leading up to the project launch, the key elements of the project are defined: the timeframe (four to eight weeks or a full semester), key deadlines (e.g. when the list of student email addresses must be available), relevant dates such as term dates, public holidays or grading deadlines, as well as the allocation of roles (e.g. who puts the teams together or monitors compliance with submission deadlines on the collaborative platforms). In addition, tasks and expected *deliverables* are defined, i.e. what is to be submitted and when, and how these contributions will be incorporated into the final mark or according to which criteria they are to be assessed.

Ideally, participants should be informed before the start of the semester or before the official launch of the project that they will be taking part in a virtual exchange with participants from a foreign university. This gives them sufficient time to prepare for the project and ensures they do not feel overwhelmed during the first session. An introductory email could, for example, include a short welcome video from the course coordinators at both partner universities, in which they introduce themselves and explain the project.

Shortly afterwards, participants should be assigned to groups so that they can be welcomed into their teams and encouraged to get to know one another. It is helpful, for example, if participants each record a short video introducing themselves and discuss their interests. This allows them to get to know their team members on a personal level. It is important to ensure they are sufficiently familiar with the task at hand and the collaborative platforms being used. An example of the workflow of a COIL project can be clearly illustrated using a visual platform such as 'Padlet'.



Source: Own illustration generated with <https://padlet.com/>.

To structure the project workflow, it is advisable to follow *Tuckman's model* of team development with its five phases: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning.

Forming phase

In the first phase, participants meet virtually and carry out icebreaker activities. They should be given sufficient time to get to know one another and build trust. Tutors should place particular emphasis on this aspect. Participants from Germany or other Western-influenced cultures tend to focus immediately on the task at hand and invest comparatively little time in building relationships. However, this can lead to misunderstandings, reduced trust and, ultimately, unsatisfactory results, particularly in cross-cultural teams. It is therefore important that during this phase of the course, instructors create space to discuss potential cultural differences and the challenges of the project, ideally together with the participants and in the spirit of a solution-oriented exchange.

Storming phase

In the second phase, participants should be encouraged to speak openly within the team about their expectations regarding the collaboration. Roles must be clearly assigned: who will take charge of coordination within the team? Who will take on which tasks? In addition, benchmarks should be defined collectively – that is, deadlines by which specific tasks are to be completed.

Norming phase

To cement mutual agreements, a project contract can be drawn up, for example, which all team members sign. Such a contract is particularly helpful if conflicts arise or a team member does not take their role seriously. The contract then serves as a shared reference and promotes reliability within the team.

Performing phase

During the performing phase, instructors take on a supportive role but should not act in an overly controlling manner. A key objective of the COIL project is for participants to learn to deal with challenges and conflicts independently and to develop solutions on their own.

At the start of the project, however, it can be helpful to ensure that all team members are actively involved. If someone fails to respond or drops out of the course, the matter should be followed up promptly to establish the reasons. In the case of members joining later, some teams may need additional guidance to ensure a smooth integration. A brief check-in at the start of each session provides an opportunity to discuss any difficulties or clarify questions.

Continuous communication between the teaching staff involved is also essential to ensure consistent responses and to resolve any ambiguities promptly. It is also advisable to check the activities on the learning platform used (e.g. Moodle, Teams, Slack, etc.) at regular intervals. However, participants should be able to interact

freely and comfortably with one another without feeling as though they are under constant surveillance ('Big Brother' effect).

At the same time, a certain amount of 'gentle pressure' – such as deadlines or friendly reminders (including a tongue-in-cheek emoji) – can be very helpful in maintaining the flow of work.

Adjourning: Celebrating the conclusion

The final phase, the wrap-up, should not be overlooked. The successful completion of a project deserves recognition and should be celebrated. This can take the form of a virtual meeting within the teams or a larger, joint closing event involving all participants and instructors.

Once all teams have submitted their work and this has been assessed by the respective instructors according to pre-agreed criteria, it is advisable to discuss the results amongst the instructors in an online meeting before they are announced. If necessary, a re-assessment may also take place at this stage. A joint assessment of project work helps to maintain high quality standards and ensure fairness. Experience shows that this approach is very well received by participants.

At the end of the project, participants receive their certificates, micro-credentials or digital badges (see examples in the appendix). Even amidst the hectic end of the semester, lecturers should take the time to congratulate one another, say their goodbyes – and not lose sight of potential opportunities for future collaboration.

1.2 Advantages of COIL projects

For instructors, incorporating COIL projects into their lectures offers numerous benefits. Collaboration and exchange with colleagues are at the forefront. International exchange exposes instructors to new ideas and teaching methods, provides fresh impetus for their lectures and, in particular, inspires experienced lecturers to adopt innovative approaches. This enthusiasm also rubs off on the participants.

Of particular interest to instructors is not only the exchange within their own discipline, but also interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues from other fields, as is the case in many COIL projects. They forge new contacts, broaden their horizons and gain new perspectives.

Furthermore, COIL projects offer instructors the opportunity to conduct academic research with international partners, the results of which can be presented at international conferences or published in specialist journals. Joint research projects can even spark ideas for societal innovations.

The successful implementation of COIL projects requires thorough preparation on the part of both participants and the instructors themselves. The use of digital platforms necessitates reflecting on and further developing one's own technical

skills. To minimise potential misunderstandings or difficulties in collaborating across different cultures and time zones, it is essential to address cultural differences, language barriers and other norms and working practices in advance. In this way, instructors not only strengthen their own intercultural competence but also provide the best possible support to their participants.

For public institutions with limited resources, COIL offers a cost-effective and sustainable approach to implementing internationalisation strategies. This is particularly true for low threshold '*internationalisation at home*' policies, which play a central role at many universities and higher education institutions. COIL projects are also gaining significance in the context of digitalisation strategies, particularly in the field of digital teaching, and are thus coming to the attention of university management. They not only offer numerous positive opportunities for individual lecturers but also serve as a unique selling point for an institution.

The benefits of COIL for participants are as varied as the different learning objectives of the projects: the improvement of language skills and intercultural competencies, the development of virtual project management skills, or, for example, the enhancement of employability. Participants usually communicate in English, today's lingua franca, thereby improving their language skills. They also gain experience in using digital communication channels such as Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp, which are utilised in the collaborative work. As already mentioned, this creates an opportunity to test their intercultural and communication skills in a safe environment before entering the real world of work. Through their experience with virtual collaborative projects, participants can demonstrate their employability and qualifications to international companies. Micro-credentials such as certificates and digital badges, which are issued upon completion of a COIL project, attest to and reinforce the skills acquired by participants.

1.3 Challenges of COIL projects

The preparation and implementation of COIL projects is time-consuming. Several meetings with the COIL partners are required to define content, timetables, teaching platforms and communication channels, the composition of the teams, and evaluation criteria. During a project, continuous communication between the partners is essential, and conflict management may be required – particularly if individual participants fail to respond or do not actively participate, or if other unforeseen problems arise. Project outcomes are often evaluated jointly, for example in a Zoom meeting.

Differences in academic calendars, such as deadlines for submitting grades, as well as varying assessment systems, can create additional challenges and stress. Furthermore, the significant time commitment and extra workload involved in a COIL project are often not taken into account when allocating teaching hours to staff.

Another obstacle could be the technical or administrative support required. COIL projects sometimes require assistance from the internal IT department or the administration, which is not always met with approval – for example, when it comes to accessing internal teaching platforms or purchasing new software.

Data protection can also pose a challenge. The involvement of the data protection officer is required, which in turn presupposes a fundamental understanding of the purpose and objectives of a COIL project. It can be particularly problematic if the COIL partners come from countries where EU data protection regulations do not apply, such as the USA, or where only alternative platforms can be used, for example WeChat in China (more on this in section 5.1.2).

Although COIL projects offer numerous benefits for participants, they are not always met with enthusiasm. Innovative teaching formats are accompanied by uncertainties. Participants may not yet know their team members, may fear that their own marks/grades will suffer due to a lack of cooperation from other members, or may feel uncomfortable speaking English. Some would certainly prefer to focus on a script and be able to sit an exam. Instructors should not forget to emphasize the importance of the project for the learners' skills development. The instructor's ability to persuade plays a crucial role here, as their own enthusiasm rubs off on the learners and lends credibility to the project.

Coordinating across different time zones presents a particular challenge. Projects involving participants from the US and Asia are therefore especially demanding, particularly when teams span a wide geographical area. Meetings often have to take place early in the morning, late in the evening, at weekends or even on public holidays – which some participants find unfair. Furthermore, differing academic terms, timetables and exam periods complicate collaboration. Participants who work alongside their studies face an additional burden as a result.

Communication exclusively via digital platforms can sometimes be difficult, particularly in a foreign language. Unstable internet connections, the use of mobile phones instead of PCs or laptops, problems with video transmission and other technical limitations can hinder collaboration.

Added to this are differing perceptions regarding punctuality, reliability and the importance of the project for one's own studies. Cultural differences also play a role, for example in the way opinions or criticism are expressed—whether directly or indirectly— or whether there is a preference for individual or collaborative work.

To address these challenges and highlight the benefits of a COIL project, a well thought-out and carefully implemented schedule with comprehensive preparation and follow-up is required. Lecturers can reduce participants' feelings of uncertainty by explaining the project in detail and clarifying any open questions at an early stage. However, it should be emphasized that not all problems need to be resolved in advance.

Rather, participants should be encouraged to develop their own solutions. Learning from mistakes is a fundamental part of course objectives. Within this safe environment, participants can gain experience and learn from their mistakes before encountering greater obstacles in their professional lives.

The challenges and potential solutions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

1.4 Different formats of COIL projects

The format of a COIL project can vary greatly depending on the focus of the respective courses and the objectives being pursued. At university and college level, it makes sense to integrate the project into an existing lecture, an optional module or a specialisation. The project results can be included in the marking, either in full or in part.

The following section presents some formats that are used in practice. However, these represent only a selection and are by no means exhaustive. For specific practical project examples, please see Chapter 6.

- **Short COIL projects (4 weeks)**

These are particularly suitable for work-study or part-time degree programs, as well as for master's programs where participants have heavy workloads and little flexibility in terms of time. The assignments should therefore be manageable, and the number of virtual meetings kept to a minimum. Ideally, these should take place during the regular lecture schedule. The main aim of such short formats is intercultural exchange and discussion, rather than extensive assessments such as written reports or group presentations. A suitable form of assessment could be a reflection paper on the outcomes of the discussions and the experiences gained.

- **Medium-length COIL projects (6–8 weeks)**

Although projects lasting around two months cover a manageable period, they nevertheless provide an intensive and enriching experience. A clearly structured timetable with task descriptions and deadlines is helpful here. Despite the limited duration, sufficient time should be set aside for participants to get to know one another. Collaborative work, such as jointly written texts or presentations, can be included in the overall course mark. Nevertheless, the focus should not lie exclusively on the output. Joint learning and exchange remain central here too.

- **Long-term COIL projects (one or more semesters)**

These formats are rather the exception and require a significant amount of organisational effort. However, they offer particularly comprehensive learning experiences. Detailed project planning with a transparent timeline, clear benchmarks and fixed deadlines is essential in order to maintain an overview and to be able to realistically assess the workload. The tasks can be

significantly more complex than in shorter projects. Assessment should also be clearly comprehensible, transparent and set to a high standard to do justice to the significance of the project.

- **Client-based COIL projects**

The involvement of companies lends the project a high degree of practical relevance and authenticity. The tasks are defined in collaboration with the industry partner, for example as a market analysis or strategic consulting recommendation. This enhances the project's significance and also makes it attractive to companies: they receive relevant information free of charge and get to know potential future employees. It is particularly enriching when company representatives are involved in the final presentation, for example as a jury. Their professional feedback represents valuable added value for the participants.

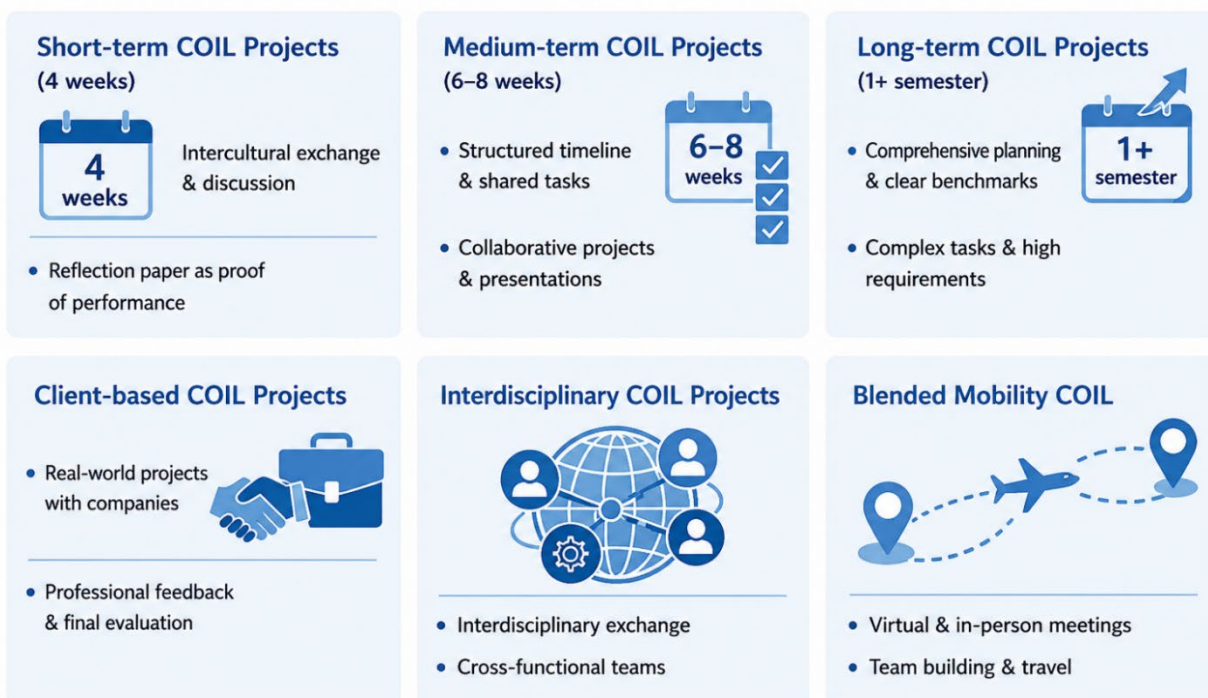
- **Transdisciplinary COIL projects**

These projects specifically bring together participants from different disciplines, thereby facilitating interdisciplinary exchange – in addition to the cultural aspect. They foster an understanding of other ways of thinking and the ability to recognise connections beyond one's own field of expertise. Such projects could, for example, link social work and medicine, computer science and teacher training, or design and economics. This combination creates a learning environment with an added benefit: it opens up perspectives for participants that they might not have encountered in their regular studies.

- **Blended Mobility COIL projects**

The blended mobility format can be used in all the COIL project formats mentioned above. Participants meet in person at least once – for example, for a joint kick-off meeting or for the final presentations. Due to the travel involved, the blended mobility format is more cost-intensive but offers participants the opportunity to get to know one another in person. This can boost motivation, promote team building and thus facilitate collaboration.

Different COIL Project Formats



Source: Compilation generated using AI

2. Planning and preparation of a COIL project

The following section outlines some key aspects that should be considered in the run-up to a COIL project. These include defining shared learning objectives in consultation with the appropriate partner and agreeing on suitable collaborative platforms. Consideration should also be given to how the project can be integrated into the respective curricula.

2.1. Defining learning objectives

The first step in planning your COIL project is to define learning objectives. It must be established which skills and knowledge the participants are expected to acquire during the course. Which intercultural, academic or professional skills might be relevant to the participants, and how will their success be assessed? For example, the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable, Time-Bound) could be used to formulate project objectives. This not only helps to structure the course but also provides participants with a sense of security.

An important aspect of COIL is the joint design and planning of the course with all participating COIL partners. Naturally, one of the partners may draw up an initial project outline in advance – but this should not go beyond a draft. It merely serves

as a starting point for joint discussions about the respective ideas, wishes and requirements for the activities.

If there is a concern that this might make the design process too one-sided or overly influenced by one of the partners, it is advisable for all participating partners to draw up their own draft as a first step. Subsequently, commonalities and overlaps can be sought and identified, revealing where the partners complement one another.



Tips for formulating learning objectives

- Focus on learning outcomes (What should participants be able to do after the learning unit?)
- Describe observable and verifiable behaviour
- Explain behaviour using clear, unambiguous verbs (**not:** know, be familiar with, learn, ...)
- Set realistic objectives
- One specific objective per statement

Examples of learning objectives for a COIL project:

- Students are able to apply digital communication strategies within international teams to collaboratively address a practical problem.
- Students can identify culturally diverse perspectives and integrate them into collaborative problem-solving.
- Students can present work outcomes in an intercultural context clearly, in a manner appropriate to the audience, and in a foreign language.
- Students can analyse conflicts within intercultural online teams and implement appropriate solution strategies.
- Students can constructively evaluate feedback from international partners and derive concrete measures for improvement from it.
- Students can use digital tools (e.g. Padlet, Miro, Microsoft Teams) to collaboratively structure content and jointly create a product (e.g. report, presentation, concept).

2.2. Finding partner universities and organisations

Choosing the right partner institution plays a crucial role in the success of your project. This can be done through networks, online platforms or personal contacts. Potential cooperation partners include visiting lecturers, PhD students or staff from organisations within and outside the university. Online networks within a specific subject area also offer opportunities for contact. Existing partnerships at your college or university are a good starting point. The COIL coordinators at your institution or the International Office are responsible for providing support in finding

a suitable COIL partner. When making your selection, you should ensure that the partner institutions have sufficient resources and interest to participate actively in the project.

Do not underestimate the importance of personal rapport in your COIL partnership. A successful and long-term collaboration requires that all partners involved are on the same wavelength and enjoy working together. Therefore, make a conscious effort to take the time to get to know one another better and build a professional, personal relationship. Further recommendations for finding international partners can be found in Chapter 7.3 Networks and Funding Opportunities.

2.3. Selection of suitable technologies and tools

The process of selecting suitable communication and collaboration tools begins as early as the first meeting with the COIL partner. It is essential to raise awareness of the data protection requirements of the respective institutions at an early stage.

Experience shows that European universities subject to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) often insist on the use of internal university platforms. However, these are often only available to external partners on a limited basis or via guest accounts, which can lead to practical difficulties in collaboration. It is therefore important to review these at an early stage and reach an agreement on the tools to be used – even if some of them may operate in a data protection grey area.

The use of messaging services such as WhatsApp is often problematic. Although teachers would like to ban their use for data protection reasons, many participants still resort to them. Reasons for this include the irregular use of official learning platforms and everyday familiarity with such apps. Conflicts arise when some members of a team advocate for WhatsApp, whilst others categorically reject it. Instructors should be prepared for such situations.

It is therefore advisable to hold discussions about the use of technologies and tools right at the start of the project. It is helpful to establish clear rules regarding which applications are permitted or undesirable, and for which applications participants can make their own choices. In particular, it is important to address how to handle the exchange of personal data, such as students' email addresses – including with partner universities. Information and consent forms provided by the data protection officers of the respective institution can help to address any concerns participants may have at an early stage.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of the digital tools frequently used in COIL projects, along with their key functions and limitations.

2.4. Time management and coordination of time zones

Offering a course as a COIL or embedding COIL into an existing course takes time. Once a partner has been found, it is advisable to draw up a timetable for the project. It is important to consider not only the timeframe for carrying out the actual COIL project, but also the time required for planning and organisation. It is advisable to be as generous as possible with the schedule so that you can respond flexibly to unforeseen situations (e.g. illness, technical difficulties or other important professional commitments) and the associated delays in the project. The earlier you start planning, the better.

It is unlikely that all COIL partners involved will always be able to work on the preparations at the same time. It is highly likely that everyone has other tasks (courses, exams, projects, research tasks, etc.) that cannot simply be postponed. Different time zones and varying academic terms and exam periods further complicate coordination on both sides. It can be helpful to first outline the individual steps and tasks of the planning in broad terms. This creates a clear structure that clearly shows by when individual elements must be completed in order to be ready for use in good time. Deadlines should definitely be set jointly so that all partners involved have the opportunity to check their feasibility and appropriateness and adjust them if necessary.

It should be agreed at an early stage when the COIL course or COIL project will be implemented. Researching the relevant semester dates, as well as exam periods, public holidays or semester breaks, is a prerequisite for this. A project period as close to the middle of the semester as possible is ideal. If synchronous meetings are to take place together, identify overlapping time slots in which these are possible. This is not always straightforward, particularly when there are significant time differences, and your participants may need to show some flexibility (e.g. for meetings in the evening or early morning). Ensure that this is communicated to all participants well in advance.

2.5. Integration of the COIL project into the curriculum

Depending on the institution, different strategies can be adopted for integration into the curriculum. From the students' perspective, the relevance of the project is enhanced if it is organically embedded within the study program, so that, ideally, active participation in the project can lead to the award of ECTS credits.

Suitable module types can often be incorporated and taken into account in an appropriate form when new degree programs are being designed. These could, for example, be compulsory elective modules with a project-based higher education teaching concept and learning objectives in areas such as internationalisation, globalisation or management skills.

To ensure that COIL projects and other international projects are firmly embedded within the university's curricula, it is important that COIL enthusiasts also share details of exciting projects within their own institution and encourage colleagues to

get involved. Their own experiences and innovative COIL implementations can be presented at regional and national conferences. Exchanges via suitable platforms, such as 'COIL'DE' or the Higher Education Forum on Digitalisation, can provide both inspiration and a platform for this.

At present, however, it is evident that the integration of COIL projects into the curricula at the participating universities is regulated in highly varied ways, depending on the department and the degree of internationalisation. The following models, for example, can be found:

- Full integration of project activities into the teaching and learning process of a module at a participating university:
 - Inclusion in workload calculations
 - Earning credit points
 - Grading of a module, in whole or in part, based on the work completed in the COIL project or on a reflection on the course of the project in the form of an examination.
- Integration of COIL activities into a module in the form of a project assignment:
 - Interaction with participants from the participating universities takes place outside of course hours
 - Participants are largely self-organised
 - Forms part of the work to be completed.
- Participation in COIL activities is entirely voluntary – possibly with the incentive of certificates and/or micro-credentials.

It should be noted that, on the one hand, a closer link to module-related teaching activities contributes to greater participant engagement in the project. On the other hand, it can also lead to effects such as an excessive focus on grades or reduced patience with process flows. However, in many cases, the advantages of strong extrinsic motivation outweigh the disadvantages. This is particularly useful when complex project activities and group dynamic challenges require a certain degree of perseverance or resilience. In the case of COIL activities that are self-motivated and take place without academic credit (in the sense of module grades and ECTS credits), difficulties or even dropouts are more likely to occur. This applies particularly when such activities are scheduled close to academic examination periods.

3. Implementation of the COIL project

This section focuses on teamwork. Below are some suggestions on how to best promote teamwork (e.g. through onboarding activities at the start of the project) and how to support communication between culturally diverse participants. It also addresses potential technical challenges that may arise during implementation. Equally important is the final evaluation of the project, to learn from the experiences gained and improve future initiatives.

3.1 Introducing participants to the project

Onboarding and the facilitation of group dynamics play a central role in every COIL. It is important that participants view the onboarding activities as an essential part of the project and not merely as a preliminary discussion. Sufficient time (at least 20 minutes) should therefore be allocated for this.

For the COIL project, an engaging 'game idea' is helpful, one that can be broken down into a sufficient number of steps and milestones. 'Icebreaker' activities are very useful for this, such as the following examples:

- **Designing a shared flag:** In small groups, participants design a flag that represents all team members. Aspects of their cultures, personalities and goals should be incorporated into the design.
- **Global Team Map:** All participants mark on a world map which country or city they come from and share an interesting fact or cultural feature about that place. This helps to foster geographical and cultural understanding within the group.
- **Proverb exchange:** Each person presents a proverb or idiom from their own country. Participants from other countries try to guess the meaning and explain how the proverb is used in everyday life.

Examples of effective ways to get to know one another during online onboarding:

- Short **video profiles** created by all participants about themselves and their interests, and shared with each other in advance
- **Personality tests** as a conversation starter
- **Blog posts** about their background, experiences, and their own strengths and weaknesses

The specific 'icebreaker' activity should also be tailored to the particular course group and their level of experience in terms of scope and intensity.

3.2 Communication and collaboration within the team

The well-known phases of team development – ‘Forming’, ‘Storming’, ‘Norming’, ‘Performing’ and ‘Adjourning’ – are evident not only at the level of the participants but also in the collaboration between the coordinators. It is often the case that new partners in regularly conducted COIL projects initially adopt a wait-and-see approach before they can assume their role in the team/consortium with confidence and productivity. Often, rules of conduct and management strategies that were agreed upon within the framework of a COIL project need to be renegotiated when new project partners and institutions join and bring their own ideas and institutional culture to the table.

In this context, it is not only important that the term ‘culture’ extends beyond national and regional dimensions, but that institutional cultures are also considered (e.g. the orientation towards certain values or the way in which processes are carried out and decisions are made).

It is evident that one of the universities or institutions involved in the project often takes on a certain pioneering role. This may be the host institution, the university that potentially contributes specific resources, or the institution subject to the strictest reporting requirements or quality management standards.

In this context, it is particularly important to ensure effective onboarding, not to assume that new partners are familiar with one’s own or standard processes, and to clearly communicate one’s own needs and limitations in order to manage these responsibly within the consortium. Furthermore, each participating institution should guarantee an appropriate level of commitment.

To ensure regular communication between project leads, fixed meeting dates aligned with the project timeline are recommended. Such regular meetings can help to identify and address emerging conflicts in good time, strengthen contact between partner institutions, and facilitate agreements on timelines, deadlines and individual requirements.

3.3 Cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication

In this text, the term ‘cultures’ refers not only to nationalities, but to any group within which ideas, customs, behaviours, values and/or modes of communication are shared and passed on, e.g. a specific ‘scientific, disciplinary culture’. Intercultural competence can be understood as the ability to respond sensitively to situations involving people who have been socialised in different cultures. In intercultural situations, therefore, what matters is the ability to demonstrate appropriate communicative and behavioural responses.

Cultural competence is often described as the ability to interact successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds. We demonstrate intercultural competence when we are aware of how our own experiences and our own cultural lens can influence our perception of situations and behaviours, and when we adapt

our communication, attitudes and behaviour accordingly to accommodate these differences.

It is important to always respond appropriately and with understanding to unfamiliar situations. Clarifying misunderstandings or ambiguities is just as much a part of this as dealing respectfully with different cultural norms or communication styles.

Cultural humility complements intercultural competence by emphasizing a willingness to learn from others through an ongoing process of self-exploration and self-criticism, whilst recognizing and accepting differences.

3.4 Key points for developing intercultural competence and fostering cultural humility

1. When designing intercultural learning activities, whether in person or online, make sure to set aside time for participants to introduce themselves and get to know one another. The resources listed on the following page include activities such as the *Diversity Profile* and *Story Circles* (Deardorff, 2020), which facilitate intercultural interaction.
2. Inform participants of the intercultural competencies the course aims to develop and encourage them to take responsibility for their own competency development. A list of specific competencies can be found in the *Competency Framework*, listed below under Resources.
3. The development of intercultural competences and the cultivation of intercultural humility require communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. In academic settings, participants simultaneously develop and apply academic competences. If participants feel challenged by their language skills in the language of instruction, this will impact their intercultural competences. As an instructor, one can consciously create diverse participation formats by not only encouraging oral contributions in plenary sessions, but also facilitating written responses (e.g. via chat, short notes or digital tools), allowing more time for formulation, and, where necessary, permitting the use of other languages or employing tandem or group work in which learners can support one another.
4. Encourage meta-discussions among participants about the course. For example, at the start of the course, participants could share and discuss their expectations of the course, as well as post questions about the course in a digital discussion forum. The instructor can publish the participants' responses, post their own questions in the discussion forum, and share these findings in the next lesson. Discussions on common topics that are relevant to all participants can help them to explain and question educational or social norms, practices and behaviours.

5. Plan opportunities for experiential learning where learners from different educational and social backgrounds work together on a task. Ensure that the instructions for the task are clear and available both verbally and in writing. Ensure that the task is clearly and simply defined and give the group time to organise and collaborate in their own way, as well as to discuss and review the results. Offer tasks where different backgrounds are an advantage, as they provide complementary 'expertise' and perspectives (e.g. experience with different languages, political systems, academic fields, etc.)

Resources for developing intercultural skills and fostering cultural humility:

- The University of Warwick's "**Competency Framework for Effective Intercultural Interaction**" lists competencies in four categories: "Knowledge and Ideas", "Communication", "Relationships", "Personal Qualities" and "Dispositions". Each competency is explained using examples from an international education programme. https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/3272/1/WRAP_Spencer_Oatey_gp_competency_framework.pdf
- The "**Framework of Academic and Intercultural Competences and Recommendations to Students**" (Drozdova and Taulea, 2022, p.40) may be useful to share with all participants embarking on an intercultural learning experience. https://doi.org/10.37804/1691-6077-2022-13-24-45?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle
- The "**Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles**" (Deardorff, 2020) explains how "Story Circles" can be used to facilitate international dialogue. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370336>
- The module on **group dynamics**, provided by "Educational Quality at Universities for Inclusive International Programmes" (EQUIIP), focuses on integrating all participants into meaningful intercultural learning in the multicultural and multilingual classroom. <https://equiip.eu/module/group-dynamics/>
- UNESCO offers many publications on the topic of intercultural dialogue. <https://www.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/en/publications>
- The website of the German Sociological Association (DGS) features upcoming events and further information on the subject of cultural sociology: <https://soziologie.de/sektionen/kultursoziologie/portrait>

3.5 Technical support and troubleshooting

The selection of suitable tools and Learning Management Systems (LMS) is a key prerequisite for success. If an LMS is chosen that is actively used by only one of the partner institutions involved, this may result in participants from that institution having a certain technological advantage. Conversely, an LMS that is new to all participants could ensure that all learners are on an equal footing – though it may

also take a considerable amount of time before all participants are able to use the new system efficiently.

Answering the following questions may be helpful when deciding on tools:

- Should all participants be integrated into a university's LMS, or should each group use its own LMS and additionally utilise shared collaborative tools?
PLEASE NOTE: Due to technical requirements, some LMSs do not make it easy to integrate external users. The training burden on participants should not be too high.
- Which tools offer good interfaces and archiving options? Is there a plan to reuse the materials beyond the project cycle?
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): Where should the shared collaboration tools be hosted, and what guidance must be provided to participants if the scope of the GDPR is exceeded?
- The advantage of using open-source products is that they often offer straightforward interfaces (e.g. SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Model), which is compatible with many LMSs).
- Commercial tools that incur costs should be avoided where possible, unless funding for their use is secured in the long term. A trial account, where work products may no longer be fully accessible after a trial period has expired, is not a service provided free of charge and poses difficulties as soon as the project is offered over several semesters or annual cycles.
- When using digital tools, attention should always be paid to scalability. A suitable tool for a group of up to 50 participants may no longer be appropriate if 150 participants need to be supported in a larger cohort. It is also important to familiarise yourself with data limits. This applies in particular if the project involves data-intensive files, such as video recordings.

It is important to bear in mind that an overabundance of technical tools can overwhelm participants. To ensure, for example, that online appointments are arranged or meeting minutes are sent reliably, it should be clearly specified which tools are mandatory for everyone to use. If the documentation of meetings or work processes also forms part of the assessment, this point should be given even greater weight. This is because lecturers should not have to search for submissions across different tools or portals. Furthermore, it is important to spare participants the effort of double submission – for example, once in a project's group work environment and once on their home university's LMS – wherever possible.

If participants are working together in small groups, they should always agree on a contingency plan in case a digital service is temporarily unavailable due to server outages or maintenance work.

3.6 Evaluation and feedback during the project

Evaluations are not merely a tool for data analysis and the presentation of results. From a pedagogical perspective, they provide valuable feedback on where teaching and methodology can be improved and what is already working well. In COIL projects in particular, the focus is not only on the subject matter but also on intercultural exchange: how do people work in other countries, what is their focus, what priorities are set, and which factors are particularly important there. For example, at the start and end of a COIL project, you could ask the following questions in a very accessible way:

- Have you ever attended a seminar involving international exchange?
- What do you expect from a COIL course?
- What was your overall impression of the course in the COIL format?
- Which expectations were met?
- What surprised you, or what new things did you learn?

We recommend sharing the evaluations before the event and again shortly before it ends. The response rate is particularly higher for the latter option than for a subsequent email reminder sent after the event. Sample questions for a post-project survey can be found in the appendix.

4. Evaluation and conclusion of a COIL project

Unlike in regular courses, presentations or assignments are evaluated jointly with the COIL partners. Various aspects need to be considered. The conclusions drawn from a COIL project for future projects may also vary. These points are discussed in more detail in this section.

4.1 Evaluation of learning outcomes

Performance assessment, in particular, can lead to certain conflicts within a COIL project. The reasons for this are varied. On the one hand, the requirements of the various examination regulations must be considered; some of these stipulate specific forms of examination, thereby preventing participants from being treated entirely equally across institutional boundaries.

Furthermore, the situation is complicated by the need to consider differing national or regional grading scales and guidelines for passing an examination. This circumstance is taken into account in the credit transfer for international higher education entrance qualifications, amongst other things, through the application of the *Modified Bavarian Formula* (Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of 15 March 1991, as amended on 18 November 2004).

In this respect, it may be sensible to carry out a joint assessment and grading of the individual components within the framework of a COIL project, but to convert the marks into the national grading systems afterwards.

The credit transfer mechanism should be communicated transparently in advance to prevent frustration among participants in the final phase of the project. To highlight the importance of the COIL project within the course, the deliverables should account for at least 10% of the overall mark – even if further work needs to be completed, for example to meet the requirements of specific examination regulations.

Voluntary participation without grading (see section 2.5) or subjectively awarded partial marks have proven less successful – particularly in situations where only participants from one institution require a mark, whilst others are not graded. Experience shows that this can lead to frustration within teams if, for example, participants who are particularly committed due to the greater significance of the work for their academic careers encounter team members who, due to a lack of incentives, are only willing to make a minimal commitment.

The coordinators from all participating colleges and universities should reach a consensus in advance on which partial achievements or implementation criteria are to be considered and with what weighting. Ideally, the assessment scale is determined jointly and shared in the form of a transparent assessment rubric or uploaded to the LMS. It may also be worthwhile to share explicitly with the participants, as assessment rubrics involve a certain degree of abstraction and participants – depending on their native language and assessment practices in other modules – may not yet be sufficiently familiar with the relevant descriptors in English.

Clearly communicated assessment criteria can also be an effective way of ensuring high-quality work, as they enable students to check for themselves, before submitting their work, whether all the specified criteria have been fully met. The impression of being assessed by different standards should be avoided at all costs, even if the instructors have a certain degree of discretion when awarding final marks.

To counteract the appearance of arbitrariness, it is also recommended that instructors from the participating institutions hold a joint ‘assessment meeting’ at the end of the project. Once the individual assessments have been made, they can compare them with one another and determine the extent to which there is agreement. Discussing assessment criteria and priorities also proves to be academically enriching, as it opens up new perspectives and contributes to reflection on one’s own assessment practices.

When several international partners are involved in the project, such meetings can be challenging due to time constraints or time differences. In such cases, digital evaluation forms that can be edited collaboratively and simultaneously are helpful. Each teacher enters their assessment into the relevant sections, resulting in an overall mark. Tools such as 'Google Sheets' or similar platforms have proven particularly useful for this purpose.

4.2 Feedback from participants and partners

Regardless of how often a project has already been carried out, there is always room for improvement. An online survey can be used to gather constructive feedback from participants. Suggestions for improvement can be incorporated into future iterations, whilst tried-and-tested aspects should be retained. A final discussion with the project partners is essential to gather all impressions and develop the next project in a targeted manner. The following always applies: a conscious and culturally sensitive approach to the expression of opinions and constructive criticism is crucial to maintaining the long-term success and sustainability of the COIL partnership.

Of course, not every point of criticism can be addressed exactly as intended. Compromises are often necessary. It should also be kept in mind that not everything that did not work perfectly during the course of the project necessarily constitutes a structural problem. Various factors – such as external circumstances or individual team dynamics – may have influenced the implementation without being directly attributable to the project concept. It is therefore advisable to bear this aspect in mind and to carry out the project several times before making fundamental changes.

Feedback from participants should also be viewed in a nuanced manner. Whilst this can provide valuable insights for future projects, experience shows that participants often view their own involvement critically or are reluctant to accept the additional workload that typically accompanies a COIL project. Furthermore, respondents are often reluctant to answer surveys, and open-ended questions are rarely answered in concrete terms.

Short reflective assignments, on the other hand, have proven to be significantly more insightful. In this case, participants engage with specific questions and are encouraged to provide concrete examples or suggestions for improvement. When reflections are required and assessed as a mandatory component at the end of the project, the feedback is generally much more substantive.

4.3 Sustainability and continuation of the collaboration

Ideally, COIL project partners are so enthusiastic about the collaboration that they wish to continue the project. The best-case scenario is for lecturers to be able to offer the course every semester. In practice, however, this is often not possible. Often, a project can only take place once a year (e.g. due to unfavourable semester dates), and sometimes it remains a one-off offering. This may be the case if staff or material resources cannot be guaranteed over longer periods.

In addition to structural constraints, collegiality and a shared interest in the partnership play a decisive role in the continuation of a COIL project. For the coordinators of the participating educational institutions, too, it is a key motivating factor if collaboration in international projects contributes to their own academic and professional development, enables new insights and provides exciting impressions of partner institutions. It is therefore up to each individual to make the collaboration as positive and constructive as possible, to support other instructors in achieving their respective objectives, and to create a collegial environment that goes beyond purely business-like communication.

This also means that the same minimum requirements apply to teaching staff as to participants: reliability, regular and timely contact, adherence to deadlines, and the careful fulfilment of one's own tasks. It is also helpful to communicate difficulties in achieving certain objectives or meeting deadlines at an early stage, so that compensatory measures can be put in place. It is equally beneficial for a partnership to inform lecturers at other colleges and universities about interesting international events within one's own institutional environment, extending invitations and actively fostering cooperation.

4.4 Success factors and best practices

Experience shows that the success of a COIL project depends largely on careful planning in advance, a well-structured conclusion and transparent assessment. Participants want to know exactly what is expected of them. As COIL projects are still unfamiliar to many and their requirements are therefore difficult to assess, there is often a fear of failure. This uncertainty can lead to resistance or rejection among participants, which has a negative impact on the course of the project.

To avoid or at least reduce frustration, sufficient time should be invested in onboarding – with a clear focus on the added value of the project. As lecturers themselves should be convinced of the benefits of their COIL project, this enthusiasm must also be conveyed to participants in a tangible and credible manner. This can take place even before course selection and the actual start of COIL activities. A convincing, positive attitude is particularly valuable when participants are dealing with frustrations or overcoming dry spells and need to be motivated to do so.

Reflections on COIL projects often reveal that, shortly before assignment deadlines, frustrations and internal conflicts can arise, which may trigger an immediate decline in identification with the project's approach. It is interesting to note, however, that with the passage of time following the joint celebration of the project's success, a significantly more positive view of the COIL activities—including the conflicts experienced and overcome—often becomes possible.

Such challenges during the course of the project can prove more serious if, although the project has been launched, the participants are subsequently left largely to their own devices. This quickly gives the impression that the project serves merely as a stopgap and, from the teachers' perspective, holds no real significance.

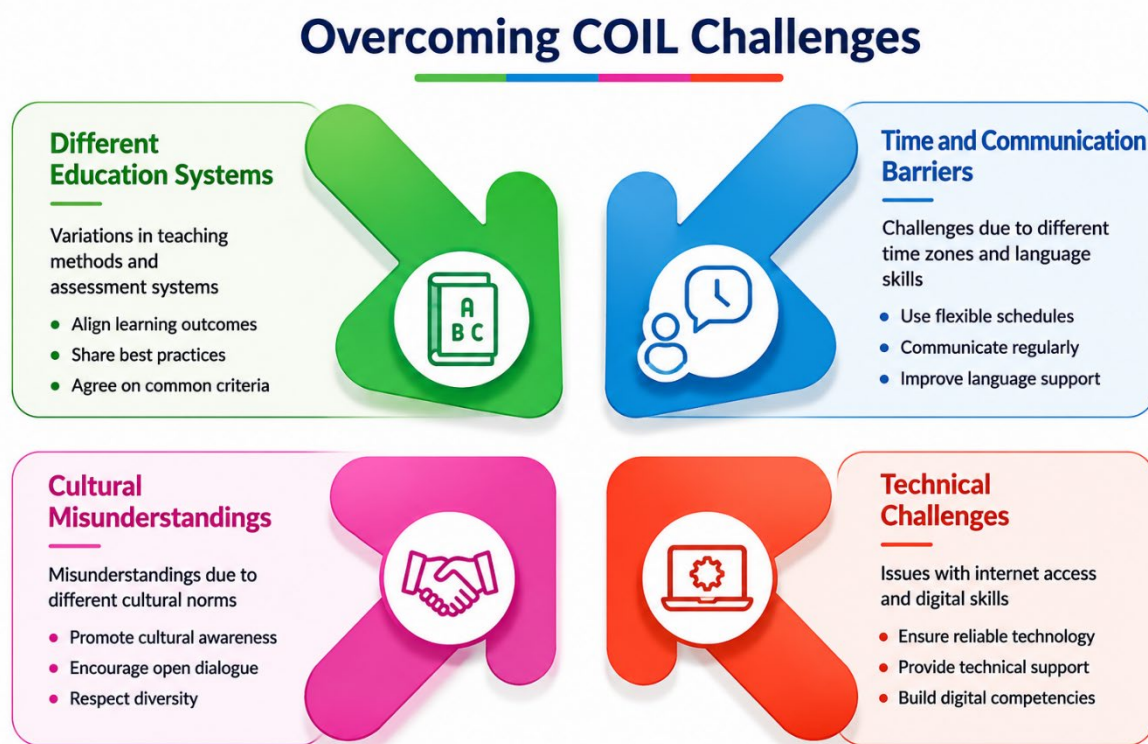
To highlight the significance and benefits of a COIL project, it is advisable to award so-called 'micro-credentials' at the end. These include certificates that list the names of the partner institutions, a brief description of the project, and the skills acquired. Digital badges are particularly attractive to participants, as they can display them on professional networks such as LinkedIn. These micro-credentials can be designed in-house or created and awarded using learning platforms such as 'Moodle'. There are also various paid providers in this field.

5. Challenges and solutions

Project work via digital communication channels that spans multiple time zones and takes place in a foreign language presents numerous challenges that both teachers and learners are often not necessarily familiar with. This chapter addresses various challenges and solutions reported by experienced 'COILers'.

5.1 Challenges

Collaboration in intercultural teams on digital platforms presents specific challenges that must be overcome to ensure successful cooperation. These include, in particular, time and communication barriers, technical challenges, cultural misunderstandings, and dealing with different education systems. These challenges are analysed below, and potential solutions are presented.



Source: Own representation (generated with AI).

5.1.1 Time and communication barriers

One of the greatest challenges in COIL projects is time differences, which make collaboration considerably more difficult. This can be particularly problematic when interactive learning formats such as group work or live discussions are planned, as these require direct and simultaneous participation. Participants spread across different time zones must coordinate their working hours to be able to participate in synchronous sessions. In cases of extreme time differences, this can mean that individual group members are forced to work at inconvenient times of day, which can have a negative impact on their concentration and participation.

In addition to purely temporal aspects, the nature of communication in COIL projects can also be challenging. Students are often accustomed to using certain forms of communication in their local academic environment, which may differ from the expectations and practices in an international context. For example, in some cultures direct feedback and spontaneous contributions to discussions are common, whilst in others more formal, structured forms of communication are preferred. Such differences can lead to misunderstandings or uncertainty, thereby reducing the effectiveness of collaboration.

Language proficiency presents a further obstacle. Although English often serves as a lingua franca, participants' language levels frequently vary considerably. This not only can lead to communication difficulties but also may result in participants with lower language proficiency contributing less actively. Research shows that participants with lower English proficiency often feel inhibited about contributing orally to discussions or formulating complex ideas in writing. This can result in certain group members being less visible in the learning process and an unequal distribution of workload and responsibility within the groups.

5.1.2 Technical challenges and data protection

One of the greatest difficulties lies in the compatibility of the platforms used. Universities employ various learning management systems and video conferencing tools, which lead to problems with collaboration. Unfamiliar software can create additional barriers for participants and teaching staff, as they must spend time on installation and familiarization, thereby complicating the work process. Furthermore, not all students have the same technical resources. Whilst some have high-performance devices and a stable internet connection, others may have limited access to fast network infrastructure. This can mean, particularly in regions with poor internet coverage, that participants are unable to fully take part in video conferences or collaborative online projects.

Technical issues are another common challenge in COIL projects. Disconnections during virtual sessions, incompatibilities between software solutions, or difficulties with file transfers can disrupt the learning process. Particularly when participants in different countries are working with varying technical standards, problems often arise that cannot be resolved immediately. Inadequate technical support exacerbates these difficulties, as participants and instructors are often left to their own devices when faced with unexpected technical hurdles. Universities offering COIL programs must therefore ensure that reliable IT support is available to provide rapid assistance in such situations.

Another key issue is the data protection and security requirements, which vary between different countries. In the European Union, the handling of personal data is subject to the strict guidelines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Universities must ensure that data is not stored or passed on to third parties without explicit consent. In the United States, less stringent data protection regulations apply, meaning that some platforms which are used there without issue do not meet legal requirements in Europe. In other countries, such as China, there are, in turn,

strict restrictions regarding access to certain online services. These differences can result in some universities being unable to use certain software solutions, which further complicates collaboration. A further problem arises from the storage of data in international cloud systems, as students often do not know where their data is ultimately processed or who has access to it.

In addition to these technical hurdles, the digital literacy of the participants also plays a decisive role. Not all participants and instructors are equally familiar with the use of digital tools. Whilst some work with video conferencing systems, cloud services and collaborative documents without any problems, others struggle to find their way around new platforms. This means that some participants need more time to familiarize themselves with the technical requirements, which slows down the work process. This becomes particularly problematic if no introduction to the systems used is provided or if no clear instructions on how to use the various digital tools are made available.

5.1.3 Cultural misunderstandings

Participants from different academic and national cultures bring with them varying expectations, communication styles and learning habits, which can lead to tensions and misunderstandings. Consequently, differences in academic culture give rise to a key problem. Every higher education institution has its own teaching methods, assessment standards and expectations. In binational or multinational COIL projects, this can mean that participants from different countries have differing ideas about how tasks should be completed, how strictly deadlines must be met, or how actively they should participate in discussions. For example, a study on COIL experiences between Mexican and US students showed that the groups had very different perceptions of the course. Whilst the US students appreciated the open style of discussion and the interactivity, the Mexican students found the lack of a clear structure and specific instructions problematic. The cause often lies in differing teaching traditions. In some countries, a strongly teacher-centered teaching style predominates, whilst other education systems place greater emphasis on independent learning and open discussions.

Differences in the approach to hierarchy and authority can also lead to problems. In some cultures, instructors are expected to play a dominant role in the classroom, whilst in other education systems participants are given greater personal responsibility. This can lead to frustration when, for example, participants from countries with a strongly hierarchical education system suddenly have to operate in a COIL project environment where independent contributions are expected of them.

Another common problem is cultural differences in communication. Some participants tend to use a direct style of expression, whilst others prefer more indirect forms of communication. This can lead to misunderstandings, particularly in written discussions or group work. For example, in cultures where harmonious interaction is prioritised, it may be perceived as rude if someone voices direct criticism. In other cultures, however, clear, direct communication is regarded as efficient and necessary.

Furthermore, differing expectations regarding collaboration and group work can lead to difficulties. In individualistic cultures, the focus is often on personal responsibility and individual performance, whereas in collectivist cultures, group harmony and shared responsibility take precedence. These differences can result in group work being ineffective or participants feeling that their partners are not contributing adequately to the project.

5.1.4 Dealing with different education systems

Higher education institutions in different countries vary considerably in their teaching methods, academic standards and assessment systems, which can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in collaboration. Participants and staff must adapt to new structures to ensure a successful intercultural learning experience.

A key issue is the heterogeneity of curricula and teaching approaches. Whilst some education systems are strongly research-oriented and encourage students to think critically and work independently, others focus on structured content with fixed syllabuses and strict guidelines. In COIL projects, this means that participants work with differing expectations regarding tasks and assessment. In some cases, they are accustomed to actively expressing opinions in open discussions, whilst in other academic cultures a more reserved attitude towards lecturers and group work prevails.

These differences can lead to misunderstandings when participants apply their usual working methods to a joint project whilst adhering to different standards.

Another obstacle is the assessment methods and performance requirements. For example, grading systems and examination formats vary considerably worldwide. Whilst in some countries, continuous assessment through projects and group work predominates, in others academic success is based on a few written examinations. Participants in COIL projects, therefore, often have to adapt to new assessment criteria, which can lead to uncertainty. Instructors also face the challenge of assessing the performance of participants from different educational systems in such a way that their varying academic backgrounds do not lead to disadvantages.

Different academic calendars further complicate the synchronisation of COIL courses. Semester dates and exam periods vary by country, requiring close coordination between partner institutions. In some cases, participation in international projects clashes with the examination period, or the COIL course timetable does not fit in with the regular course of study. These organisational challenges can result in participants not being able to engage in the projects on an equal footing or having difficulty meeting the requirements of both institutions.

5.2 Possible solutions

The following table groups the various challenges into four categories and presents possible courses of action.

Time and communication barriers	<i>Possible solutions</i>
• Different time zones make synchronous collaboration difficult • Different communication styles and cultural influences • Language barriers due to varying levels of English proficiency	• Additional use of asynchronous formats (forums, shared documents) • Clear communication rules and intercultural awareness • Promoting written communication • Support through language training or peer tandems
Technical challenges	<i>Possible solutions</i>
• Different platforms/LMS and software standards • Lack of technical equipment or unstable internet connections Data protection conflicts (e.g. GDPR vs. other legal requirements) • Varying levels of digital literacy	• Joint selection of compatible tools • Provision of technical checks and introductions • Clarification of data protection issues in advance (e.g. consent form, see Appendix) • Technical support for all participants • Provision of guidance materials on platform use
Cultural misunderstandings	<i>Possible solutions</i>
• Differences in academic culture (e.g. feedback culture, need for structure) • Different communication styles (direct vs. indirect) • Different expectations regarding group work and role allocation	• Intercultural onboarding and awareness training • Clear allocation of tasks and facilitation of group processes • Promotion of metacommunication and reflection • Explicit negotiation of shared working standards and expectations
Differences in education systems	<i>Possible solutions</i>
• Different curricula and teaching approaches • Different assessment systems • Inconsistent semester dates and examination periods • Transparent communication regarding teaching and assessment criteria	• Development of common rubrics and assessment guidelines • Jointly determining the timing of project phases • Close coordination between teaching staff at both institutions to harmonise calendars and requirements

6. Best practices and case studies

This chapter first lists and explains criteria for successful COIL projects. It then presents selected COIL projects from various disciplines. Some of these examples go into detail regarding the project concepts, whilst others present the syllabuses, thereby demonstrating how the COIL project is structured and experienced from the participants' perspective. The concluding example, GIPE++, illustrates a comprehensive COIL project funded by the DAAD involving partner universities from several countries. This is intended to highlight just how diverse and multifaceted COIL projects can be.

The appendix to this handbook contains a detailed checklist that is useful when planning a COIL project.



Source: Compiled with AI

6.1 Criteria for the successful implementation of COIL projects

Area of action	Best practice
Choosing a Partner	Select a suitable institution whose goals align with the project. Partners should be motivated, reliable, and committed to collaboration.
Project Planning	Teachers should jointly develop and coordinate objectives, content, project timelines, and assessment methods.
Intercultural Preparation	Students should be prepared for cultural differences through training and orientation activities to prevent misunderstandings and strengthen intercultural competence.
Use of Technology	Combine synchronous and asynchronous tools. Video conferencing, forums, and virtual collaboration platforms support flexible and effective teamwork.
Team Dynamics and Trust	Build trust through introductory activities, icebreakers, and early virtual meetings to strengthen team cohesion.
Learning Activities	Design authentic, collaborative tasks that are practical and address real-world challenges within international teams.
Flexibility and Adaptation	Consider public holidays, semester schedules, and time zones. Timelines should be flexible and adapted to partner institutions' academic calendars.
Support for Teaching Staff	Provide systematic training and support for instructors in collaborative course design, educational technologies, and intercultural facilitation.
Quality Assurance	Conduct regular evaluation and reflection. Students and instructors should systematically review collaboration processes and use findings for continuous improvement.
Fairness / Equality	Distribute tasks fairly, considering differences in language proficiency and subject knowledge, while ensuring all members participate actively.

Source: Own compilation based on: Vázquez-Villegas et al., 2024; Zolbanin & Gosalia, 2024; Vahed, 2022.

6.2 Successful case studies from various disciplines

Below are six COIL projects, each differing in their focus and level of complexity.

6.2.1 Case study: Competence & Career Centre (CCC), RheinMain University of Applied Sciences

General information	Description
Credits for students	Scope: 2 ECTS, for degree programmes such as Computer Science, Media or Engineering; COIL integrated either as an advanced course or as part of the module ' <i>International Digital Collaboration and Communication</i> '. For voluntary participation: recorded in the Transcript of Records as an extra course. The course takes place online.
Topics	Varies: e.g. Mindfulness & Well-being, Academic Writing, University Education Systems, Space & Identity
Course description	5–7 sessions, ideally 4 within shared course times: 1. Session: Getting to know each other (general university information, breakout sessions with icebreaker activities); 2. Session: Joint input on the topic & breakout session with discussions; for Mindfulness: inclusion of university sports for an online relaxation exercise for everyone & joint reflection 3. Session: Preparation for the interviews, group formation by this point at the latest, usually already in the second session 4. Session: Mutual interviews, self-organised 5. Event: Concluding session as a gallery walk (online) Some accompanying meetings are for HSRM students only, regardless of their international university.
Cooperation partners (to date)	University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, USA; University of Kentucky, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University – Ukraine; University of Kentucky, – Kentucky, USA;
Joint project/joint work	Mutual interviews on course topics, in German or English (depending on agreement and students' proficiency), breakout sessions, independent organisation and documentation of the interviews, gallery walk presentation
Challenges	Time difference, academic/semester schedules, native English speakers vs. non-native speakers (first or additional language), digital tools, group sizes (imbalance between course participants)
Co-operative courses	USA: Course format: German learners at various levels. Integration into the local curriculum: as part of a compulsory project which, along with other elements, counted towards the final assessment; Ukraine: Prospective English teacher training students; integration into teaching there: an additional, voluntary project which awarded extra marks towards the final grade.

Further information	The 2 CP requirement for students at the HSRM is further covered by the following content: accompanying lessons with in-depth study of the respective topic, a reflection report as a final assignment, and reflection tasks/writing assignments on the topic throughout the course. Focus on cross-cultural comparison as part of intercultural competence; reflection on one's own background, particularly in the Space & Identity course; the foundation course must be completed to participate in the course
Tips & Tricks	Consult with the partner institution at least 6 months before the planned course; allow time for this, with a minimum of 2 hours online for the initial contact. Thereafter, aim for a 1-hour meeting every 3 weeks to keep abreast of group development (size, topic, etc.). For advanced course options: There is a course entitled 'Working in International Teams' which is well suited as preparation (1 CP). Not all students take this, but the structure is appropriately tiered and makes sense for the module. Any IT system that enables breakout sessions is suitable as a basis. Programmes such as <i>InSpace</i> or conference software work even better for collaboration, as the shared experience can be better replicated with 'classroom' or 'gallery walk' modes.
Assessment	The following will be assessed: a portfolio containing at least the following: course objectives, final reflection on objectives, interview- Draft, revision, documentation, final poster, final reflection on the course as a whole. Optional: deliverables from joint breakout sessions during the course.
Joint final presentation	Gallery Walk: 90 minutes are divided into two time slots, 2 x 35 minutes with a 10-minute break. All students are divided into two groups. One group presents for 5–7 minutes, whilst the others 'walk' virtually through the breakout sessions. In theory, it is also possible to leave the room whilst someone is still presenting; 'Walking Feet' is permitted. Ideally, there should be a list of topics provided in advance, and students must decide, as they would at a conference, which topics interest them most. The aim is not for everyone to see everything, though as lecturers we try to organise it so that we can all hear each presentation at least once. The Gallery Walk means students are not faced with the challenge of listening to endless presentations in one go, but only a selection. At the same time, the repeated presentations provide practice for those giving them. However: the system must be communicated extremely clearly beforehand; it worked well three times, but once it was difficult because the students did not stick to the time limit (5–7 minutes) at all. Keep this in mind. The moderator has a greater role here; ideally, there should be perhaps even three people (two lecturers, one moderator).
Contact	Nadine Scholz, nadine.scholz@hs-rm.de , link to website

6.2.2 Case study: Wiesbaden Business School, RheinMain University of Applied Sciences

Background	Description	
Credit allocation for students	Students receive a certificate for their participation in a COIL, which lasts 6 to 8 weeks. The experience students can draw upon the experiences they gain during the COIL in the oral and written components of the assessment.	
Topics	Intercultural and linguistic skills, AI, collaboration techniques, future skills, lean and agile management, technical projects, business plans, SDGs, sustainability, HR topics, reflective topics and other Topics	
Course description	6–8 weeks of COIL. During this period, students meet independently to work collaboratively on 4 to 5 assignments in English. The tasks are deliberately designed to give students considerable freedom in devising their solutions (Problem-Based Learning).	
Cooperation partners (to date)	Universities in Poland, Turkey, India, Ukraine and Germany	
Joint project/joint work	Students work largely autonomously. At the end of the COILs, <i>Final Product Presentations</i> and <i>Reflective Meetings</i> are offered	
Challenges	The participating lecturers (COIL instructors) must meet at least every 14 days (preferably every week) to discuss the current situation and the tasks ahead for the COIL groups. The success of this collaboration depends not only on academic considerations, but also, to a large extent, on informal level and personal interaction.	
Cooperative courses	In most cases, COILs are embedded within existing courses at the partner institutions. COILs with participants who are not enrolled in a course taught by the participating COIL instructors are less common.	
Other notes	It is very important that lecturers and students have comparable expectations. Therefore, the project must When designing such a course, it is particularly important that students are able to build a working relationship with one another. The same applies to the COIL instructors involved.	
Tips & Tricks	Exchange and collaboration. The COIL lecturers involved should also meet in person, for example at academic conferences.	
Assessment	Students receive a certificate. The exact assessment procedures vary among the respective partner institutions.	
Joint final presentation	Students present the results of their COIL in the form of an online presentation. In addition, there are reflective meetings afterwards to discuss the collaboration process in more detail.	Here are examples of previous certificates: Example 1: Certificate Ex. 2: Certificate

Contact and further information	Hubertus Weyer, Hubertus.weyer@hs-rm.de - Here is a description of a COIL involving four lecturers from three participating universities and around 100 students: - Key aspects of COILs at Wiesbaden Business School	Reports on final presentations from COILs at Wiesbaden Business School and at COIL partners: Example 1: Reports on final presentations Example 2: Reports on final presentations
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6.2.3 Case study: Intercultural Communication Activity (Bachelor's), Mainz University of Applied Sciences

This activity is designed to enable students of Business Administration and Cross-Cultural Marketing at two partner universities in Mainz, Germany, and Bogotá, Colombia, to work together in virtual teams. Each team is asked to investigate a dilemma collaboratively and share their findings with their teams. The findings are then used by students in each country to complete a collaborative presentation as well as their respective coursework assignments.

The dilemma is as follows:

1. You have recently joined a multinational company and will be transferred to work at the company's office in the country where your international colleagues are based.
2. Familiarise yourselves with the new location. Come up with five questions per country or region regarding everyday life (shopping, housing, leisure activities, schools, banking, etc.) and business etiquette (dress code, relationships with colleagues and superiors, benefits) in the country of relocation.
3. Meet your international partners via ZOOM, who are your relocation mentors, and discuss your questions.
4. Work together to prepare a Prezi presentation that introduces the cultural differences and elaborates on the information you have gathered about your new location. Upload this presentation to your respective university platforms.
5. Please refer to your respective professor's guidelines regarding any further course requirements.

Here are the tasks you will need to complete, in this order, to finish this assignment:

Task 1: You will be assigned team partners from your home country, as well as from Colombia and the USA. All team members should create a short video clip about themselves and upload it to the collaborative platform (Microsoft Teams).

Task 2: The German team members will make the initial contact. Team members should respond immediately. Get to know your team members and arrange a date and time for your initial Zoom meeting straight away.

Task 3: All communication must take place via the collaborative platform (MS Teams). Additional communication channels may also be agreed upon, such as: WhatsApp, Facebook group, Hangouts, Zoom, Google Drive / Google Docs, etc.

Task 4: Organise and hold an initial Zoom meeting (we recommend Zoom due to its reliability and the ability to record meetings). After icebreakers, discuss the assignment. Assign roles (note-taker, facilitator, organiser, etc.) and tasks, and agree on deadlines. Schedule your main mentoring meeting. At least two Zoom teleconferences and regular contributions to MS Teams are expected.

Please note that all members of the team should be present at these meetings! Working around professional schedules and time differences is part of the learning outcomes for this assignment! Attendance at the meetings and regular contributions to the collaborative platform will affect the final grade or passing this project for each student.

Task 5: Prepare 5 questions regarding everyday life and business etiquette in your future country of relocation and upload them to MS Teams so that your “mentors” can prepare answers. There should be 5 questions for each country or region.

Task 6: Hold a mentoring session (allow 2 hours) to discuss the questions you have prepared and any other information that will be helpful for your relocation. This meeting must be recorded and uploaded to MS Teams, as well as to the relevant university’s learning management system (LMS) if required.

Task 7: Create a **7–10-minute** Prezi team presentation. **Include the following in the presentation:** a **brief** overview of the foreign locations, the advice and information gathered on successful relocation (each team member must contribute at least two slides), as well as answers to the following two questions:

1. How would you sum up the virtual team experience?
2. What have you learnt from the experience?

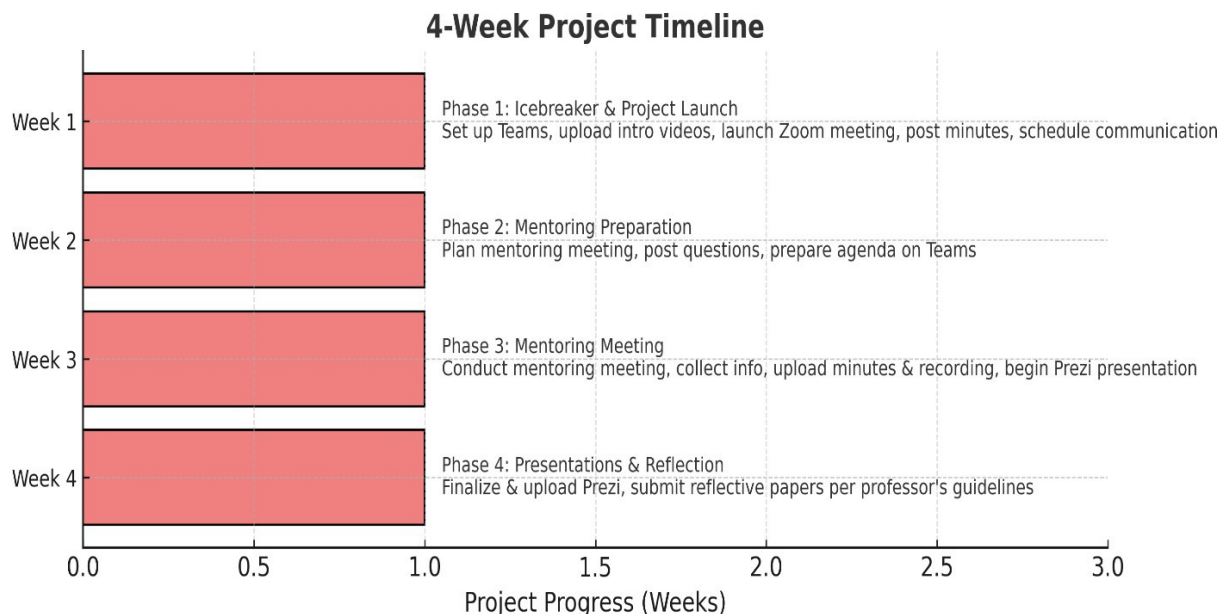
The answers to these questions can be presented as a slide or a video, and can be completed either individually or as a group.

Task 8: Upload the presentation to MS Teams and your LMS or Seafile.

Task 9: Submit a reflective paper on the virtual team experience to your respective LMS or Seafile. Please refer to your respective professor’s guidelines and deadlines for the paper.

Note: It is important to organise your submissions to MS Teams in a structured manner. Please create channels and upload video clips, agendas, minutes and recordings to different channels. This will enable your team members to find everything, and ensure your submissions are not overlooked by your professor.

Tasks and Timeline:



6.2.4 Case Study: Intercultural Communication Assignment (Master's), Mainz University of Applied Sciences

As part of this course assignment, Business Law students from Mainz University of Applied Sciences, Germany, and Management students from Pfeiffer University, USA, engage in a short virtual discussion involving the analysis of an internal company communication in the form of a memo. For this purpose, students grouped in teams from both universities are expected to join and discuss the internal memo. Students must agree on the collaboration platform of their choice, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Details regarding the assignment can be found below under "Requirements for the virtual assignment." Attendance and active participation in the virtual assignment are mandatory. Furthermore, a reflective paper must be completed. The paper is to be written and submitted individually. For details regarding the reflective paper and submission requirements, please see below under "Requirements for the reflective paper".

Requirements for the virtual assignment

1. After receiving an email with the team members' contact details, get in touch and agree on a time and communication channel.
2. Read through the two internal company memos, which you will receive on [Tool/Platform]. Decide for yourself which of the internal memos was written by ChatGPT and which was written by a human.
3. Meet with your teammates on [Tool/Platform] at the designated time and discuss your opinions on the source of the memo. In addition, discuss the following questions:
 - (1) Would either memo be an appropriate method of communication in your business context? Why or why not?
 - (2) Do you anticipate different reactions among American or German employees to this communication and the requirements of complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)?
 - (3) Which approach would be best when considering your audience: tone, length, content, or effectiveness?
 - (4) Do you view AI-generated communication as an effective tool for internal and external business communication? Are there differences in cultural appropriateness and effectiveness when using AI-generated communication?
 - (5) What best practices would you recommend to bridge differences when communicating in an international business setting?

Requirements for the reflective paper

1. Summarise the main points of your team discussion regarding questions 1–3.
2. Answer question 4 in greater detail. Did you identify differences in the approach to AI-generated communication in the workplace between Germans and Americans? Explain and provide examples.
3. List five best practices that you believe are relevant for the use of AI-generated communication in an international business context. Explain why you have chosen them.
4. How did the virtual discussion go? Did you learn anything new about interacting with Americans / with Germans?

6.2.5 Case study: Blended Mobility Consulting Project (Bachelor's), Mainz University of Applied Sciences

Project Goals

This project focuses on developing students' critical thinking, communication and teambuilding skills, with the following specific objectives:

1. To help you learn how to collaborate in virtual teams.
2. Introduce you to a virtual communication platform and emerging smart meeting tools.
3. Have you assessed how effective you are in virtual collaboration?
4. Teach you negotiation and leadership skills in virtual collaboration projects.
5. Provide you with an opportunity to develop analytical skills by examining, analysing and assessing a real organisational challenge and providing recommendations.
6. Work together to create a professional presentation on your findings.

Consulting Project Assignment

You will be participating in a collaborative global virtual teams project (also referred to as COIL – *Collaborative Online International Learning*) with students in Germany and students in Belgium. In mixed-nationality teams of 5–6 students, you will work on this project over the course of 6 weeks. At the start, your team must focus on **one** of two assignments:

Assignment 1:

1. Select an industry you wish to work in and identify a company that interests you. Explore the company's online presence via its website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, Instagram page, blog and so on. Find popular online press articles about the company of your choice.
2. Assess the company based on one of two topics:
 - a. *Planet* (environmental sustainability)
 - b. *People* (social impact / diversity and inclusion)
3. Gather and analyse relevant facts and data to generate ideas about what your company is doing and how it is addressing the pressing issues to fulfil its responsibility to the Planet or the People.
4. Evaluate your company based on the following frameworks and/or principles, depending on whether you have selected Planet or People:
 - a. *Planet*: You must use at least three of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>) as criteria to evaluate the company's efforts to serve the Planet and provide evidence for your conclusions.
 - b. *People*: You must use the four core values from Beach and Segars (2022) to evaluate the company's efforts to serve the People and provide evidence for your conclusions.
5. Provide recommendations on how the company can improve its efforts to address each of your conclusions; where necessary, provide additional evidence to support these recommendations.

6. Create a presentation that introduces your topic, provides an analysis, and offers recommendations. Details on the presentation criteria can be found in your respective universities' learning management systems (LMS).

Assignment 2:

1. Select a tourism sector you wish to work in and identify a company you are interested in. Explore the company's online presence on its website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, Instagram page, blog, and so on. Find popular online press articles about the company of your choice.
2. Agree within your team on which country should be your focus – Germany or Belgium. Investigate your company's promotion of your selected country to the German or Belgian target audience.
3. Gather and analyse relevant facts and data to generate ideas about what your company is doing and how it is addressing the interests of the target audience as well as the tourism industry in your respective country.
4. Assess the effectiveness of the current promotional campaign for your country. You should be asking yourself questions such as these, amongst others:
 - a. Does the promotion of the respective country have recognition value?
 - b. Does the promotion of the country in question reach its target audience?
 - c. How culturally appropriate is the promotion of the country in question?
5. Provide recommendations on how the company can improve its efforts to address each of your conclusions; where necessary, provide additional evidence to support these recommendations.
6. Create a presentation that introduces your topic, provides an analysis, and offers recommendations. Details on the presentation criteria can be found on your respective universities' LMS.

Course Materials and LMS

You will use your university's LMS to access course materials (handouts, articles, etc.) and submit assignments.

Communication Platforms

You will use a combination of Slack and Zoom for your virtual team communication. You will work in Slack online communities where you will exchange documents, edit documents, and use its messaging system. Please refer to the document "How to set up your virtual communication infrastructure." You will use Zoom for online meetings with your teammates. Students may choose other messaging tools such as WhatsApp, but this is entirely voluntary. Please be sure to sign the consent form regarding the exchange of student email addresses between the two partner universities and submit it to your instructor before the project begins.

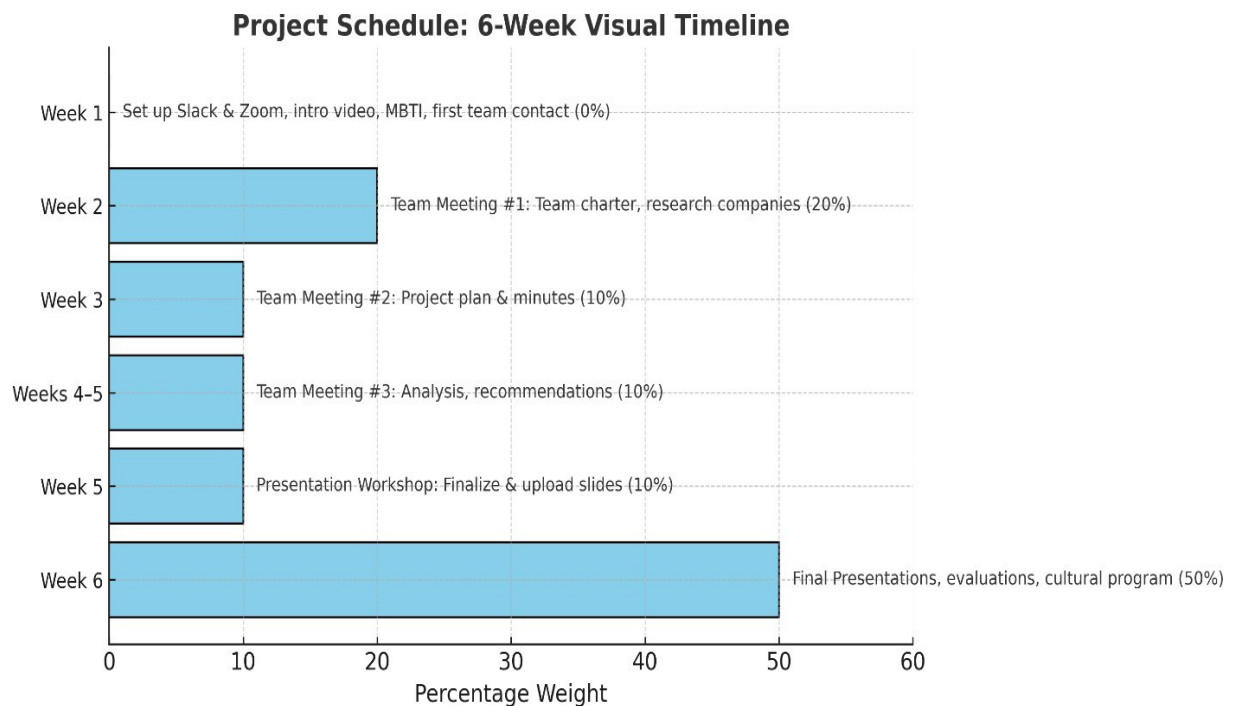
Assessment

Your mark will be based on your participation in the project, completion of all the assigned tasks, and the quality of your presentation.

Statement on OpenAI

You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet capable of producing text that meets the standards of this project. To uphold academic standards, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism.

Project Schedule, Timeline and Grade Weighting



6.2.6 Case study: GIPE/GIPE++, Westphalian University of Applied Sciences

The “Global Sustainable Intercultural & Interdisciplinary Project Experience” (GIPE++) project is being carried out at Westphalian University of Applied Sciences and is funded until the end of 2027 by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) as part of the “HAW.International” programme, as well as with funding from Erasmus+ (KA171). It builds on the positive experiences gained from the DAAD project “Global Intercultural Project Experience” (GIPE), which has been running since 2019 and will be completed in autumn 2023, further develops the proven concept of intercultural project-based learning, and lays the foundations for its sustainable integration at Westphalian University of Applied Sciences (WH) in collaboration with selected partner universities.

GIPE++ enables students to gain international, intercultural and interdisciplinary project experience as part of their regular studies. Together with students from partner universities (currently: Universidad Católica San Pablo (UCSP) in Arequipa, Peru; Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Windhoek, Namibia; and Universitas Katolik Indonesia in Jakarta, Indonesia) for one summer semester – for example, as part of an elective module worth 6 CP – on a project for a real ‘client’ in the country of one of the partner universities in the Global South, with a focus on interdisciplinary and intercultural collaboration and addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), particularly the fight against the consequences of climate change.

GIPE++ combines project-based learning (PBL) within interdisciplinary teams with international online collaboration (COIL) and face-to-face intercultural exchange during a two-week Spring School, which takes place every April at the Westphalian University of Applied Sciences:

The intensive personal exchange between lecturers from the participating universities in supervising the students has already led to research and teaching collaborations, joint publications and projects, thereby also promoting internationalisation and sustainable networking with the partner universities.

Despite the COVID-19 restrictions and challenges in 2020–2021, all GIPE projects were successfully completed. With the exception of 2020, the project results were presented and handed over to the ‘client’ on site by WH students together with students and supervisors from the respective partner university. Great importance is attached to the sustainability of the results, ensuring that the implementation, application and further development of the concepts, prototypes and solutions developed are carried out by “clients” and partner universities.

In the summer semester of 2025, 33 students, supported by lecturers from all partner universities, will develop a concept for sustainable tourism, a website with a booking system for local private accommodation, and a social media strategy in four mixed subprojects (so-called “streams”), a concept for sustainable tourism, a website with a booking system for local private accommodation, a social media strategy, relevant

content, and a fundraising & crowdfunding concept for an island community (“Pokdarwis”) on *Untung Jawa Island* in Indonesia.

In 2026 and 2027, further student projects are to be carried out, a new partner university is to be brought on board in each year, and sponsors are to be secured to ensure the programme’s long-term continuation once DAAD funding has ended. An international conference on the topic of ‘Intercultural Project-Based Learning’ is also planned for autumn 2026 at the WH (info: <http://ipbl2026.org>).

Profile: Key features of GIPE and GIPE++

- GIPE = COIL + on-site collaboration (Spring School or handover)
 - Funded by the DAAD with funds from the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), project ID 57510482 and 57755632
 - Implementation of *Intercultural Project-Based Learning (IPBL)*
 - Interdisciplinary teams of students from various academic disciplines
 - Project language: English (all meetings, communication & documentation)
 - Projects for real clients with a focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)
 - A new project for a new client every year during the summer term!
 - Low-threshold opportunity – participation possible even without travel!
 - Visibility of internationalisation on campus (*Internationalisation@Home*) ● Students receive certificates and 6 ECTS credits upon successful completion.
 - State-of-the-art tech stack, methods and tools (with introductory tutorials) ●
- Challenges:
- 12 time zones from Peru to Indonesia: synchronous meetings at 12:00 UTC
 - Different academic calendars (lecture periods)
 - Varying levels of prior knowledge among students: Introductory tutorials are essential!
 - Recruitment of teaching staff (“guides”) from all partner universities
 - Commitment from the universities (university management/IO, financial contribution)
- The reward for all the hard work?
 - A unique intercultural project experience for students
 - Acquisition of methodological/subject-specific and personal/intercultural skills
 - Intercultural experiences for staff too (academic and administrative)
 - Many friendships extending beyond the project: the vibrant GIPE family

Contact and contact person:

Westphalian University of Applied Sciences Gelsenkirchen – Bocholt – Recklinghausen

Prof. Dr. Manfred Meyer (Project Manager): manfred.meyer@w-hs.de

Website: letsgiipe.org

7. Resources for COIL: Digital tools, training opportunities and networks

The following section presents a number of collaborative tools that can be used for COIL. It should be noted that such digital tools are constantly evolving, with some being updated or replaced by new ones. This overview therefore does not claim to be exhaustive.

For further training in the field of COIL, a number of relevant resources are listed below, along with networking and funding opportunities. This list is intended merely as a guide and is not intended to be an exhaustive overview.

7.1 Platforms and tools for COIL projects

The key insight regarding COIL projects is that there is no single 'perfect' tool for digital collaboration; rather, a well-thought-out combination of different platforms is required. It is crucial to keep the number of tools used to a minimum in order to avoid complexity and overwhelming participants.

It is equally important that all project participants have access to shared, clearly defined platforms and receive training in how to use them. In addition to technical aspects, factors such as time differences, varying levels of digital literacy, and linguistic and cultural differences also play a central role.

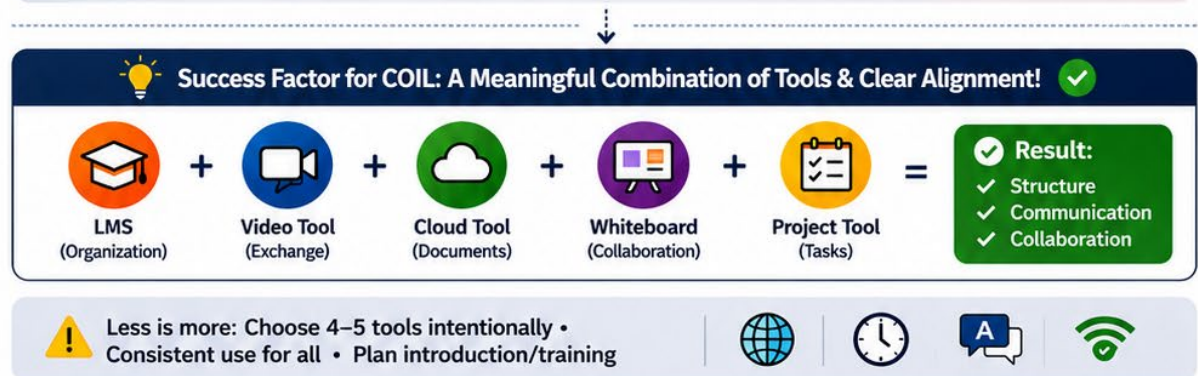
In conclusion, it is clear that successful COIL projects thrive above all on the effective interplay of tools: learning platforms serve to organise, video conferencing systems enable direct exchange, cloud services support joint work on content, and collaborative tools foster creative processes. The greatest challenge lies not so much in the technology itself, but in its pedagogically meaningful integration, coordination between international partners, and the reduction of complexity to ensure effective and sustainable collaboration.

Important: Always check which tools are permitted at the participating universities!

Digital Tools for COIL Projects

Overview, Opportunities, and Challenges

1  Learning Management Systems (LMS) Course organization • Materials • Assignments • Communication	✓ Advantages ✓ Centralized organization ✓ Data protection compliance ✓ Clear structure	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Inflexible ✗ Unintuitive ✗ No real-time collaboration
Examples:  Moodle  Canvas  Blackboard		
2  Video Conferencing Tools Synchronous meetings • Breakout rooms • Intercultural exchange	✓ Advantages ✓ Direct communication ✓ Breakout rooms (small groups) ✓ Personal intercultural exchange	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Time zone differences ✗ Technical problems ✗ Zoom fatigue
Examples:  Zoom  Microsoft Teams  Webex  BigBlueButton		
3  Cloud & Document Tools Collaborative editing • Storage • Sharing	✓ Advantages ✓ Real-time collaboration ✓ Version history ✓ Location independent	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Data protection risks ✗ Internet dependency ✗ Version conflicts
Examples:  Google Drive  Microsoft 365 (OneDrive)  Dropbox		
4  Collaborative Whiteboards Brainstorming • Visualization • Idea collection	✓ Advantages ✓ Creative & interactive ✓ Visual collaboration ✓ Engaging participation	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Not very clear for beginners ✗ Requires training ✗ Costly (pro version)
Examples:  Miro  Mural  Padlet  Conceptboard		
5  Project Management Tools Task distribution • Planning • Progress monitoring	✓ Advantages ✓ Clear tasks & roles ✓ Transparency ✓ Self-organization	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Effort required to maintain ✗ Complexity ✗ Overuse can be counterproductive
Examples:  Trello  Asana  MeisterTask		
6  Communication Platforms (Chat) Direct exchange • Channels • Integration	✓ Advantages ✓ Fast communication ✓ Centralized place ✓ Tool integrations	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Information overload ✗ Distractions ✗ Important info can get lost
Examples:  Slack  Microsoft Teams (Channels)  Discord		
7  Specialized COIL/Learning Platforms Collaborative learning • Discussion • Reflection	✓ Advantages ✓ Didactically specialized ✓ Promotes reflection & dialogue ✓ Interculturally suitable	✗ Disadvantages ✗ Less widely used ✗ Requires training ✗ Additional access may be needed
Examples:  Howspace  Kialo  Nearpod		



7.2 Further training opportunities and courses

BeCOIL resources

- Explanatory videos on COIL in German and English:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNd7dVowmzv5lM3lpLmqzSO8t0U6CIsZo>
- Serious game on COIL: <https://geometria.becoil.de/> (educational game)
- Self-learning course (BeCOIL in collaboration with FernUniversität Hagen):
<https://moodle.hu-berlin.de/enrol/index.php?id=132245>
- How to COIL: How to design Collaborative Online Courses with international colleagues
[Recording from 29 January 2024](#)

SUNY COIL CENTER

The COIL Centre at the State University of New York (SUNY) has been working for more than 15 years to promote and professionalize the practice of collaborative international online learning and virtual exchange. It serves SUNY institutions and also offers services to higher education institutions around the world. Our global 'Community of Practice', the SUNY COIL Global Network, serves as a hub for the exchange of information and ideas, professional support, partner matching and the sharing of resources. Workshops, advisory services and further information can be found on the website: <https://coil.suny.edu/>.

7.3 Networks and funding opportunities

COIL'DE

Since the end of 2020, the network of those interested in COIL has been meeting regularly via Zoom to discuss COIL-related topics. The members of the network come from various German universities and colleges. These include professors, lecturers, the head of a language centre, COIL coordinators, and colleagues working in the fields of e-learning and curriculum design. Once a year, a hybrid Barcamp is held, hosted by one of the participating German universities or colleges in the network.

Website: <https://www.hs-mainz.de/studium/studiengaenge/wirtschaft/fachgruppen/fachgruppensprachen/sprachkurse/coil/netzwerk/>

Contact: coil@hs-mainz.de
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13007759/>

UNICollaboration

UNICollaboration is an interdisciplinary professional organisation dedicated to promoting the development and integration of virtual exchange across all disciplines and areas of interest in formal and non-formal educational settings, including higher education.

Website: <https://unicollaboration.org/>

Contact: info@unicollaboration.org

IVEC

The International Virtual Exchange Consortium (IVEC) is a global, inclusive community of practitioners, researchers and experts in the field of virtual exchange, providing a forum for dialogue and growth. The aim of the community is to advance pedagogy and research in the field of virtual exchange through networking, the organisation of an annual conference, the exchange of best practice and the support of professional development.

Website: <https://iveconference.org/about/>

Contact: info@iveconference.org

COIL CONNECT

COIL Connect is an initiative of the COIL Virtual Exchange Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization based in New York. Its mission is to promote the international growth of the COIL Virtual Exchange at an institutional level. General membership of COIL Connect is free of charge and open to all. However, this website is specifically aimed at higher education institutions that have developed COIL VE programs or are in the process of doing so, and that appoint a COIL coordinator to manage their program. COIL Connect also supports new COIL VE practitioners in the development, integration and institutionalization of their program.

Website: <https://coilconnect.org/>

Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP)

BIPs enable a short study or professional development stay abroad, carried out as part of a jointly offered course. A central element of BIPs is the mandatory virtual component, which facilitates content preparation, support

and follow-up of the short mobility phase. BIPs are designed to encourage staff at higher education institutions and universities to design learning modules with colleagues abroad,

[Link to the website](#)

Contact: erasmus-mobilitaet@daad.de

Please contact your International Office, your Head of Department and/or your COIL representative for information on funding and support.

8. Appendix

8.1 Templates

Consent Form

Declaration of consent for virtual teams

Following a two-year transition period, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) has been in force since 25 May 2018. We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to your rights, which have been expanded by the GDPR, using the contact details we already hold for you as a basis.

Your right to data protection and privacy also includes the right to decide for yourself who you wish to be in contact with and communicate with, share knowledge and experience with, and who may use your personal information.

As part of your degree program's virtual teams project this semester, we will be forming working groups with students enrolled at our partner universities to facilitate collaboration and exchange.

For this purpose, we will pass on the following information to the partner university or universities and the project participants there, provided that you give your consent.

The partner university will not pass the data on to any other third party and will delete your contact details after completion of the project in accordance with applicable retention requirements.

For more information on your rights as a data subject, please see the data protection information on the website of (insert university name): [insert university website](#)

Surname:

First name:

Date of birth:

I hereby give my consent to my contact details

☐ Email address _____

☐ Mobile phone number _____

☐ -----

being passed on to the partner university and its students for the purposes of collaboration in virtual teams in the summer semester / winter semester / _____ within the context of my aforementioned degree programme. I expressly object to any disclosure to other third parties.

Place, date

Signature

Example of a post-project survey

Was the COIL project voluntary or compulsory?

- voluntary
- mandatory

Did the COIL project involve physical mobility to another country?

- yes
- no

How long did the online phase last?

- One day
- More than one day

By taking part in the COIL project, I ...

- ...have improved my ability to work in a team
- ...have improved my foreign language skills.
- ...have improved my digital skills.
- ...have strengthened my intercultural competencies.
- ...have been encouraged to study abroad or work in an international environment

None of the above.

How would you rate your experience of collaborating virtually with students from the partner university on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor)?

I would recommend participating in a COIL project to other students.

- yes
- No

If no, why not?

Do you have any further comments regarding your COIL experience?

8.2 Examples of micro-credentials

Digital badge

Virtual Business Professional / Virtual Business Professional



Virtual Business Professional

This badge demonstrates successful participation in a six-week global virtual team project that was organized by the Department of Business Communication at the University of Southern California and partner institutions.

Created on: 15 Mar 2020



Offered by
Virtual Business Professional

Badge Details

EARNING CRITERIA

Recipients must complete the earning criteria to earn this badge

This badge demonstrates successful participation in a six-week global virtual team project that was organized by the Department of Business Communication at the University of Southern California and partner institutions. Participants worked with team members from across the world to develop a research report for a client company. Key skills developed include the following:

- Collaborating in global virtual teams
- Using the latest collaboration and meeting technologies for virtual teamwork
- Assessing and evaluating team effectiveness and team collaboration
- Examining, analyzing, and assessing a real organizational challenge for a client company
- Collaboratively writing a professional research report with findings and recommendations

[View External Criteria](#)

We Issue [Open Badges](#)

[View JSON](#)

Certificate



(These examples are the property of the USC Marshall School of Business and may not be used or distributed.)

8.3 Glossary

Term	Definition
COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning)	Virtual collaboration between students and lecturers from different countries to promote intercultural and subject-specific skills.
Virtual Exchange	General term for international virtual educational formats; COIL is a form of this.
Intercultural competence	The ability to communicate and work effectively and respectfully with people from different cultures.
Blended mobility	A combination of virtual and physical mobility formats (e.g. COIL project + stay abroad).
Asynchronous communication	Communication at different times, e.g. via forums or emails, helpful when dealing with different time zones.
Synchronous communication	Real-time communication, e.g. via video conference or live chat.
Internationalisation at Home	International learning opportunities for students at their home university, without the need to travel abroad – COIL is an example of this.
Learning Outcomes	Clearly defined skills or knowledge to be achieved through COIL (subject specific and intercultural).
Co-teaching	Joint planning and delivery of courses by lecturers from different countries.
Project-based learning	A teaching approach in which students work together on practical projects – often integrated into COIL.
Digital collaboration tools	Tools for virtual collaboration, e.g. Zoom, Google Docs, Padlet, MS Teams.
Learning management system (LMS)	System for managing and delivering online learning content, e.g. Moodle, Canvas.
Linguistic accessibility	The ability for all participants to communicate actively and clearly, even when language proficiency levels vary.
Cultural sensitivity	Awareness of cultural differences and their respectful consideration in the learning process.
Reflection	Critical examination of one's own experiences and learning processes – a central component of a COIL project.

8.4 Planning checklist

- ☐ Which project(s) will the participants be working towards together?
- ☐ How long will the project last and how is it integrated into the course modules?
- ☐ How many participants are involved, how many teams will there be, and how will the teams be formed?
- ☐ What shared learning objectives have been set?
- ☐ How will the learning objectives be assessed and evaluated?
- ☐ How will the participants introduce themselves to one another and get to know each other?
- ☐ Are activities and communication synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination of both?
- ☐ When, where and how do participants work together?
- ☐ What personal information are participants permitted to share? Are there any restrictions regarding data protection?
- ☐ What teaching strategies are used to achieve the learning objectives within the existing framework (e.g. time zones, language, technology)?
- ☐ What preparation do participants receive regarding cultural differences and potential challenges?
- ☐ Which technological platforms and tools do you and your international partner institutions use? Which of these are available to participants?
- ☐ What level of technical training and support is provided to participants?
- ☐ Which partner is responsible for training and supporting participants?
- ☐ How will participants access the online part of the course? What devices will they use?
- ☐ What type of internet access do participants have? Is it reliable?
- ☐ Does the course require special software? If so, do participants have access to it?
- ☐ How will participants' performance be assessed? Who is responsible for performance assessment? Is there a common assessment strategy and corresponding tools (e.g. rubrics, online reports)?
- ☐ Is there a system in place to provide participants with timely and appropriate feedback?
- ☐ Do participants have a way of contacting you or your partners for support or to ask questions?
- ☐ How is participation (attendance/contribution) recorded and assessed?
- ☐ Is regular attendance important for assessment? If so, how is online participation measured?
- ☐ What type of final evaluation is carried out at the end of the course?

[] What criteria are used to determine participants' success?

[] How is feedback used to improve the course in future?

[] Are there contingency plans for technical issues, course cancellations, low attendance, etc.?
How is flexibility applied in such situations (e.g. schedule adjustments)?

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