

# Bridge Valley Community College Leading the Way

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When you think about innovative virtual international collaboration, one would not first think a small community college in West Virginia would be a major player. Since August 2019 Bridge Valley Community College in South Charleston and Montgomery has actively integrating virtual and cultural learners from all over the globe by utilizing Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

COIL is a relatively new pedagogical model that unites classrooms across geographical borders to form a virtual exchange program. Faculty teams up with faculty from various institutions around the globe to give students a multicultural classroom experience. Not only is it a multicultural experience, this model allows students to work on a project with international partners, thereby gaining valuable discipline specific skills.

Dr. Jon Rubin, the Director of COIL Coloration and consultant on the project, recently said in an interview, "The initiative at Bridge Valley is unusual because while for many reasons community colleges are ideal sites for COIL programs, they rarely make the level of commitment that Bridge Valley has made. In BridgeValley's pilot semester, the school has launched five COIL courses and expects to grow the program from there, so that most students at BV will eventually have this type of international experience, while in college. As far as I know, and I have recently surveyed most institutions currently developing COIL initiatives worldwide, BridgeValley is the only college supporting five COIL courses with three partner countries located on three continents, in its first year."

The COIL project originated at New York's Sunny system when the current President of BridgeValley, Dr. Eunice Bellinger, was a faculty member and administrator. Understanding the value of such a program for the students, Dr Bellinger has made COIL a priority for BridgeValley. Dr. Sherri Ritter, Campus COIL Coordinator, has been working with College faculty to learn COIL techniques, and have been collaborating with students and faculty partners at institutions in

Zimbabwe, Brazil, and India. Plans are underway to expand to Cambodia, Italy, and Canada.

“This is our opportunity to tear down walls, to help our students develop personal relationships with students from around the world,” said Dr. Ritter, “it is our duty as educators to help our students begin to understand the world and cultures around us and to destroy the fear associated with the unknown. This is our opportunity to build bridges instead of walls.”

Dr. Ritter went on to say, “Without the help and support of Dr Bellinger and the faculty of BridgeValley, this project would never have happened, it takes a dedicated and talented group of individuals, willing to step outside their comfort zone, to make this project a success.”

The following is a brief description of the classes currently offered at BridgeValley:

## **Real Interaction, Learning and Debate**

By using COIL to work together on global topics and international issues, our students are exposed to ideas that may be distinct from their own, unique cultural perspectives, and different thought processes as they work together on a project. Recently in one of the COIL classes a perfect incident occurred which demonstrates the power of this project. Students involved in a class discussion on love and marriage discovered students from their partner institution were biased toward the LGBT community. This became the teachable moment for both classes and opened the door for a frank discussion in a safe environment.

By actively preparing students to work in a diversified environment, the learning goes far beyond traditional content. The experience fosters students' sense of empathy and inclusivity. In a divisive world, open intellectual discussion where all sides are allowed to be debated was historically a core foundation of higher education. West Virginia students are participating first hand in real international experiences with encouraging collaborative faculty. In an economically distressed state such as West Virginia, it is encouraging to see an institution willing to rise to the challenge of developing the global skills so desperately needed for our students and state as we compete in a global society and create a diverse workforce.

**Dr. Calisa Pierce** taught an *Introduction to Humanities* class in the COIL format this fall. She collaborated with Shingirirai College located in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. BridgeValley students spent several weeks discussing various topics with students from Shingirirai.

**Laura McCullough** teamed up with Wilstel Open College to teach her *Fundamentals of Business Computer Technology* class. Sixty-three BV and Zimbabwe students spent 10 weeks working together, using the skills they acquired in the class, to create Tourism Flyers and to present those flyers to the class.

**Machele Kindle** worked with FATEC-Bauru in São Paulo, Brazil to offer a COIL class. For this project, 27 Brazilian students from a Data Mining and Analysis class and 10 BridgeValley Physical Science students worked to gather and present information on climate change. The project was, *Climate Change: Earth Surface Temperature Data*. Prior to participating in the COIL project, Ms. Kindle had the opportunity to travel to Brazil and meet with her partner institution. She was accepted to present at the **6th SEMTEC Symposium at Centro Paula Souza University** in Brazil. The name of her presentation was, *Collaborative Virtual Internationalization: A qualitative perspective from a project between faculdade de tecnologia do estado de Sao Paulo and BridgeValley Community and Technical College*.

**Liesa Kyer** worked on a project called, *Quality of Healthcare Equipment: Policies and Procedures*. Ms. Kyer worked with **FATEC-Bauru** in São Paulo, Brazil to have her students write a policy manual for her Health Care Management class. The Brazilian students specialize in health care equipment. The BV student worked collaboratively with the Brazilian students to learn proper procedures for each piece of equipment and created a manual on its care and operations.

**Dr. Peter Soscia** was the first instructor to teach a COIL class at BridgeValley. Dr Soscia collaborated with **Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies - Pune (SCMS-P)** India on a project titled, *Comparative Health Care Access - SCMS and BridgeValley*. Students spend time comparing the financial aspects of healthcare in the US to that in India.