University of Reading

Peer learning and student ownership in an international environment: a student-created website on human rights and peacebuilding

Article

Published Version

Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Open Access

Gilder, A. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8861-1433, Bentley, M., Ali, N. M., Antoniou, N. and Lai, D. (2022) Peer learning and student ownership in an international environment: a student-created website on human rights and peacebuilding. European Journal of Legal Education, 3 (1). pp. 49-67. ISSN 1750-4686 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/105001/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

Publisher: European Law Faculties Association

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

University of Reading

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

European Journal of Legal Education
Vol. 3, No. 1, June 2022, 49–67

Peer learning and student ownership in an international environment: A student-created website on human rights and peacebuilding

Alexander Gilder, Michelle Bentley, Nasir M. Ali, Nicola Antoniou, and Daniela Lai*

Abstract

In light of COVID-19, activities under the remit of the Legal Advice Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London needed to adapt. Technology and the normalisation of online collaboration presented an opportunity for international cooperation between students at universities around the globe. To capitalise on the changing dynamics, Royal Holloway established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies in Somaliland with the aim of pursuing student-led projects, as well as other research related collaboration. In this article we recount the formulation of a student-led, inclusive, international project that saw students in the UK and Somaliland work together on a website (www.knowaboutpeace.com) that freely disseminates information on human rights and peacebuilding for stakeholders in Somaliland and the Horn of Africa, with additional relevance for UK actors working in Somaliland. The project utilised approaches of peer learning, student ownership, enquiry-based learning, international collaboration, and social responsibility to build an activity and environment that promoted deeper learning, critical thinking, and social change.

Keywords: Peer learning, student ownership, human rights education, peacebuilding.

* University of Reading; Royal Holloway, University of London; University of Hargeisa; Royal Holloway, University of London; and Royal Holloway, University of London, respectively.

ISSN 1684-1360 print/ISSN 1750-4686 online
© 2022 European Law Faculties Association

Introduction

Students must learn how to collaborate and work across cultural boundaries in today's internationalised working environment. It is important that we prepare graduates for roles where they must work in teams – not only within their organisation but with partner organisations and other stakeholders. Cultivating effective and successful relationships is key in a globalised working environment. To support both the learning and professional development of students at Royal Holloway, University of London (Royal Holloway) and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Hargeisa (IPCS) we put into action a student-led project whereby students from both institutions worked together in collaboration to produce a publicly accessible website. The website (www.knowaboutpeace.com) provides information on peacebuilding and human rights to interested persons in Somaliland and the Horn of Africa, as well as targeting relevant actors in the UK working on issues in Somaliland, such as the Representative Office of the UK in Hargeisa. In so doing, the project sought to put into practice research on peer learning, student ownership, enquiry-based learning, international collaboration, and social responsibility to mutually benefit students in the UK and Somaliland and promote more effective learning. Below we outline the formulation of the project and our collaboration with IPCS, the usefulness of inclusive peer learning in an internationally-collaborative learning environment, and reflect on future projects and lessons learned.

Building international projects into the Legal Advice Centre at Royal Holloway

Opening in early 2020, Royal Holloway's Legal Advice Centre has begun numerous clinics and projects, such as advice for the local community on contract, land and family law, Street Law, and legal advice leaflets. We wanted to go further than traditional offerings regularly seen under university Legal Advice Centres and introduce projects not only on international legal issues, but also multidisciplinary clinics and projects which non-law students could become involved with from other departments, such as Politics and International Relations. However, amidst COVID-19 the running of the Legal Advice Centre and its programmes needed to adapt to the changing circumstances. One project that started during the UK's first national lockdown was a collaboration with the Afghanistan & Central Asian Association

(ACAA), based in Feltham.[1] The project aimed to increase access to both users of the Legal Advice Centre at Royal Holloway and ACAA to legal information and guidance, that is presented in a way that deals specifically with COVID-19 related legal issues. As part of summer placements, students researched the effects of COVID-19 on employment, social isolation and domestic abuse, and housing vulnerabilities in order for ACAA to be able to better advise its service users. The relationship with ACAA has developed further and the Legal Advice Centre at Royal Holloway and the Law Clinic at King's College London are working together to create legal information to assist those affected by recent events in Afghanistan, and who managed to come to the UK.

The next step was to not only undertake work internationally with more partner organisations, but importantly to involve a range of students in those new projects. To achieve this, in November 2020 Royal Holloway concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IPCS in Somaliland. The key purposes were to pursue student-led, international projects under the remit of the Legal Advice Centre, promote research collaboration between the two institutions, and carry out impact generating activities aimed at building the reputation of both institutions. We collaborated with Royal Holloway's Centre for International Security (a multidisciplinary centre housed within the Department of Politics and International Relations) to bring on board colleagues from other departments and build a partnership that students and staff at Royal Holloway across a variety of programmes could benefit from. The MoU also sought to tie in with IPCS's strategic objectives and ongoing programmes for knowledge dissemination and peace advocacy. The partnership with Royal Holloway for a student-focused project complemented IPCS's existing research-focused partnerships with other UK institutions including University College London, University of Manchester, Durham University, and the University of Birmingham.

The first project under the MoU would be a student-focused and student-led research project under the Legal Advice Centre. Research skills are important for both Royal Holloway and IPCS's students, as is engaging with external stakeholders. A diverse array of careers may include active collaboration with external partners and speaking to audiences beyond the employee's

[1] Nicola Antoniou, Jill Marshall, Alexander Gilder and Rabia Nasimi, 'Royal Holloway, University of London and Afghanistan and Central Asian Association: New Partnerships and Challenges during Covid-19 in the Clinical Legal World' (2020) 27 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 155-178.

organisation. The distinguishing feature of the project though would be performing research collaboratively where students in the UK and Somaliland mutually benefit, gaining new perspectives, insights, cultural awareness, shared resources, and networking possibilities. Making use of new online collaborative tools we could explore innovative methods of engaging our students and providing enquiry-based and experiential tasks was one way of doing this. An enquiry-based online project would, at least in the short term, provide a way for students to work internationally with one another on topics of mutual interest.

The resulting project produced a publicly accessible website that provides information on peacebuilding and human rights to interested stakeholders in Somaliland and the Horn of Africa. When we advertised the project in early 2021, we importantly did not require students to submit grades or CVs. Instead we asked for broad expressions of interest via submission of a form that asked students to explain their motivation, what they would bring to the project, and what skills they hoped to gain. We wanted to ensure students would not be disadvantaged due to their performance in previous years of study or to deter first year students from becoming involved. It is all too common for selection processes to unconsciously favour applicants from particular backgrounds where a student has experience or can receive help on such an application that requires a cover letter or CV, for example. To be inclusive and build a project where peer learning would take place in a diverse environment it was key to encourage a range of applications based primarily on motivation to be involved.

Importantly, no students who expressed an interested in being involved were turned away from the project. We received more applications from Royal Holloway students, which was to be expected due to the size of the institutions (13 from Royal Holloway and 7 from IPCS) and all applicants went on the participate. We ensured (1) all applicants were given roles in either research or administration of the project to allow all interested students to benefit from the project and opportunity to collaborate internationally and (2) students from IPCS were all assigned research roles to encourage IPCS students (all of whom were master's level students) to assume leadership roles in the conduct of the research. The students represented degree programmes from several disciplines including law, peace and conflict studies, and politics, multiple nationalities, and from all levels, including first year undergraduates up to master's students.

The students were split into two teams, one to focus on human rights and the other on peacebuilding. The teams were made up of a range of students from IPCS and Royal Holloway with the project leads ensuring balance on the research teams to remain conscious of the need to prevent the project from advancing a neo-colonial view of peacebuilding and international human rights law. The project leads also wanted the students to experience working with students on different degree programmes and at different stages of their studies. To that end, both teams had a variety of students from first year undergraduates through to master's students and a mix of law, criminology and peace and conflict studies students.

Accounting for the disciplinary experience of the IPCS students, one team made up of four IPCS students and four Royal Holloway students examined peacebuilding and created explainers for the website on the role of individuals and local communities in the peacebuilding process. Drawing on literature on 'everyday peace' and localism in peacebuilding the website explains how the local has become an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction. More importantly, the peacebuilding section links to existing work undertaken in the region by IPCS and makes suggestions for where future work can enhance 'everyday peace' in the Horn of Africa.

The second team, made up of five Royal Holloway students and the remaining three IPCS students, investigated human rights protections in Somaliland. The website outlines international human rights standards applicable to those living in Somaliland and provides easily understandable explainers of how those rights function. The team also examined the deeper issues underpinning human rights in Somaliland – examining the key concerns in their wider academic context and the theoretical frameworks behind them including conceptualisations of human rights as well as ideas around national and transnational justice. In both teams students were encouraged to divide the responsibilities for research to ensure a diverse array of points of view from the students accounting for cultural diversity in the final work produced. Each team was allocated a further two students to assist with administration and proof-reading materials. The students allocated to the support roles were predominately first year undergraduates. The decision was made to include support roles in the project for inclusion of all students and importantly for less experienced students to learn from others.

The website was wholly produced by the students and has been disseminated publicly and more specifically to various stakeholders in Somaliland, such as civil society and community leaders to promote peace and human rights, a core objective of IPCS. Both teams had the opportunity to engage in a range of activities examining peacebuilding and human rights, such as writing easily understandable explainers of human rights applicable in Somaliland, examples of how communities can mobilise to promote peace, and individual blog posts from students where they explored a topic of their choice related to the project. Emphasis was placed on the freedom of students to choose what they wanted their blog post to cover to promote enquiry-based learning.

Each group of students were assigned two staff supervisors to guide their work. Supervisors were from both IPCS and Royal Holloway, and within Royal Holloway from both the Department of Law and Criminology and Department of Politics and International Relations. By having staff from both institutions provide supervision the project was able to continuously remain conscious of the need to incorporate different cultural perspectives and be locally-led ensuring relevance of the research for the target populations. Despite having supervisors, the onus was placed on the students to manage their project and assume leadership responsibilities with supervisors taking a backseat. Students were expected to liaise with one another, divide tasks, set internal deadlines etc. Supervisors could be called upon to attend team meetings and to review drafts, but project management would be the responsibility of students. To emphasise this point, students were asked to sign Legal Advice Centre volunteer agreements committing to the project for a fixed period.

Inclusive peer learning in an international environment

We actively sought to incorporate several important pedagogical approaches into the project in order to benefit the participating students and support both their intellectual and professional development. We specifically ensured that students would have and develop extensive ownership of the project – as well as to work together, across cultural and international boundaries, to expand and lead their own work and research activities. By giving the students significant freedom to choose their direction – in particular the selection of topics for their solo blog posts – the participants have then been able to develop autonomy as learners and researchers through enquiry-based learning and to improve their social and communication skills through the processes of peer learning. In addition, the project incorporates core aspects of social responsibility in order

to garner motivation from the students that they are working on, and learning about, highly important global issues and that their work will be disseminated to interested parties to have real impact in respect of social development and political decision-making. Furthermore, that – in relation to the group nature of the project – the *shared* social responsibility between the students involved has enhanced the international collaboration as the learning participants were able to advance their ability to work across cultural boundaries, learn new skills from their peers, and build trust – all while working towards the achievement of shared goals.

In considering these benefits in more detail, student ownership advances educational skills and achievement by encouraging and facilitating students to take responsibility for their own learning. Ownership is considered here to be more than commitment, identification, or internalization on the part of a learner – where this is understood in respect of this project as a mental connection to a learning experience 'in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of it is "theirs" (i.e., "It is MINE!")'.[2] This pedagogical approach towards promoting ownership ties into experiential modes of learning, whereby the focus is placed on 'learning by doing' and in which the student is guided to question and engage with their own learning and the processes which underpin this – and where this autonomy encourages the learner to take control of that experience and so develop both their learning and the core educational, professional, and social skills involved, including critical analysis.[3] This approach is also associated with higher levels of student satisfaction.[4] Significantly, student ownership has been shown to be especially beneficial in relation to group learning projects – such as the one developed in this project.[5] Within the group interactive structure, students become 'more personally involved in the experience and are able to express their individuality and personality'; Woods adds that this approach to collaborative learning also promotes a 'sense of friendly rivalry' that increases

[2] Jon L. Pierce, Tatiana Kostova and Kurt T. Dirks, 'Toward a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations' (2001) 23(2) *The Academy of Management Review* 298-310, 299.
[3] Linda H. Lewis and Carol J. Williams, 'Experiential Learning: Past and Present' (1994) 62 *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 5-16; David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development* (Pearson 2015).
[4] Xuesong Zhai, Jibao Gu, Hefu Liu, Jyh-Chong Liang and Chin-Chung Tsai, 'An Experiential Learning Perspective on Students' Satisfaction Model in a Flipped Classroom Context' (2017) 20(1) *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 198-210.
[5] Charles M. Wood, 'The Effects of Creating Psychological Ownership among Students in Group Projects' (2003) 25(3) *Journal of Marketing Education* 241-49.

student interest and engagement, leading to higher levels of self-reported learning.[6]

In response to these identified benefits, the outlined project explicitly gave the student participants extensive control over, and responsibility for, the website content to significantly enhance their commitment to learning, where this relates to the project, their degree more widely, and also in respect of developing employability skills. Students have undertaken formal organisation of meetings and the keeping of meeting minutes to arrange their activities and decide amongst themselves the division and nature of tasks. Supervisors have advised on the possible paths forward and draft material to be published on the website – not least to ensure that the students still felt supported in terms of their learning process, to ensure the work was legally accurate prior to publication (as this is intended as a publicly accessible and usable online resource), and where professional overview by educators is recognised as an important aspect of peer-led learning – but students were still given the primary responsibility of deciding key features of their work, such as core content issues on what topics would be covered and issues such as how their work will be presented to audiences online.[7]

In addition – and facilitated by the group structure of collaborative learning projects – incorporating ownership into education exercises is also positively connected to the promotion of peer learning, which comprises a further core aspect of this learning project.[8] Peer learning has been shown to dramatically improve academic achievement, social/communication skills, as well as learner motivation for study.[9] When engaged in peer-led learning, students 'take greater ownership of their learning experience, show fuller engagement, improved grades, and demonstrate better retention'.[10] These benefits are

---

[6] *Ibid*. 247.
[7] Barbara Crossouard, John Pryor, 'Becoming researchers: a sociocultural perspective on assessment, learning and the construction of identity in a professional doctorate' (2008) 16(3) *Pedagogy, Culture, & Society* 221-237, 234.
[8] David Boud, Ruth Cohen, Jane Sampson, 'Peer Learning and Assessment' (1999) 24(4) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 413-26, 413-4; Kyle W. Galloway and Simon Burns, 'Doing it for themselves: students creating a high quality peer-learning environment' (2015) 16(1) *Chemistry Education Research and Practice* 82-92.
[9] Keith J. Topping, 'Trends in Peer Learning' (2005) 25(6) *Educational Psychology* 631-45, 635.
[10] Christine Keenan, 'Mapping student-led peer learning in the UK' (Higher Education Academy, 2014) https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/mapping-student-led-peer-learning-uk, 5.

especially relevant in terms of online learning.[11] This approach includes and encourages the development of virtual learning communities, of the type promoted within the outlined project; in particular, that 'collaborative group work and the utilisation of online discussion forums provide important avenues for students to discuss, negotiate and obtain peer feedback about their work'.[12] In addition, peer learning is associated with higher levels of psychological well-being – which has been especially important during COVID-19 and has become a core aim of the exercise.[13] This aim is in response to analyses that demonstrates the positive impact of virtual learning communities on student wellbeing and learning during the pandemic.[14] With these benefits in mind, our outlined project has given students the opportunity to form new relationships (despite the pandemic), particularly with students internationally and across different levels of study, to contribute to their learning experience. By participating in a longer-term and more culturally diverse collaborative project than they may have experienced elsewhere in their degree, learning from peers with different cultural outlooks, and the focus/social interaction this project gives them during the pandemic, has: changed how they think about learning (to be more inclusive and open to alternative ways of learning); significantly improved their academic skillset (especially research, critical thinking, and understanding/explaining complex concepts); and had a positive impact on their mental health.

Maximising engagement and student motivation is important – which we sought to achieve by ensuring that learners feel they are working on topics which they feel give them drive to carry out research and make a difference, including in respect of political impact. In developing this point, we additionally wanted to avoid a situation wherein students felt they were carrying out a project wholly envisaged and guided by staff interests, but

---

[11] Charles Juwah, 'Interactions in online peer learning', in Charles Juwah (ed), *Interaction in Online Education: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Routledge 2007); Zehra Altinay, 'Evaluating peer learning and assessment in online collaborative learning environments' (2016) 36(3) *Behaviour and Information Technology* 312-320.

[12] Mike Keppell, Eliza Au, Ada Ma and Christine Chan, 'Peer learning and learning-oriented assessment in technology-enhanved environments' (2006) 31(4) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 453-64, 463.

[13] Jana M. Hanson, Teniell L. Trolian, Michael B. Paulsen and Ernest T. Pascarella, 'Evaluating the influence of peer learning on psychological well-being' (2016) 21(2) *Teaching in Higher Education* 191-206.

[14] See e.g. Doris Laury Beatriz Dzib Moo, 'Impact of Virtual Learning Communities on University Students During Confinement by Covid-19' (2020) 16(76) *Revista Conrado* 56-62.

instead to provide space for students to make the project their own, linking to the importance of student ownership. To promote these aims, we specifically adopted an enquiry-based learning approach as the basis of our pedagogical design. Enquiry-based learning involves the outlining of an area of investigation, allowing students to identify key questions and research objectives themselves, facilitating the students to investigate sources on an largely independent basis, report back to their peers, and to reflect on the overall learning process.[15] Such enquiry-based learning has been shown to strongly promote learning achievement and engagement,[16] successfully producing 'independent learners with transferable skills',[17] through greater learner autonomy,[18] and also via a deeper sense of pride in their own work and the new capabilities they have developed.[19] As well as responding to an innovative challenge, our students are learning for themselves how to comprehend/explain difficult ideas, design/manage a project, present their academic work in clear and effective ways, and undertake individual work on topics of their choice to maximise their interest. Enquiry-based learning is also demonstrated to promote employability skills.[20]

Of all these benefits of enquiry-based learning, we were especially concerned with the promotion of critical thinking. The Australian Technology Network outlines that university-level learning should articulate qualities, skills, and understandings which its students will develop during their period of study; within this context, one key skill that is valued as a graduate outcome across a range of disciplines is critical thinking.[21] Critical thinking is an extremely broad and heavily contested term than can refer to many different forms of

---

[15] Mark Hepworth, 'Developing academic information literacy for undergraduates through inquiry based learning' (2009) 8(2) *Innovation in Teaching and Learning in Information and Computer Sciences* 2-13, 3.
[16] Noel Capon and Deanna Kuhn, 'What's So Good About Problem-Based Learning?' (2004) 22(1) *Cognition and Instruction* 61-79.
[17] Tim Deignan, 'Enquiry-Based Learning: perspectives on practice' (2009) 14(1) *Teaching in Higher Education* 13-28.
[18] Mike D. Bramhall, Justin Lewis, Allan Norcliffe, Keith Radley, Jeff Waldock, 'The strategic development of learner autonomy through enquiry-based learning: A case study' (2010) 24(2) *Industry and Higher Education* 121-25.
[19] Sue Palmer 'Enquiry-Based Learning Can Maximise a Student's Potential' (2002) 2(2) *Psychology Learning & Teaching* 82-86, 84.
[20] Rysia Reynolds, David Saxon, Graham Benmore, 'Impact on the Student Experience of Extending Problem-Based and Enquiry-Based Learning' (2006) 20(5) *Industry and Higher Education* 359-70.
[21] Nickolas James, Clair Hughes, Clare Cappa, 'Conceptualising, developing and assessing critical thinking in law' (2010) 15(3) *Teaching in Higher Education* 286-297.

analytic capacity across different disciplines,[22] although this concept is more widely associated with the top three tiers of Bloom's taxonomy as a general understanding.[23] In response to this variety of interpretations, and in seeking to engage with the identified plurality of understanding, we sought to expose and educate students concerning a range of critical modes of thinking – including those that fall outside the types of analysis they may have previously been used to within their own discipline where the project involved students across the social sciences; indeed, that enquiry-based learning is recognised as a particularly effective means of engaging in interdisciplinary teaching, specifically for the purposes of promoting critical thinking.[24] By actively involving a mix of students – from law, criminology, and politics and international relations – participating students were able to engage in means of critical thinking that draw on both disciplinary commonalities and differences, enriching their learning experience and skills development. For instance, an IR student may introduce their team to a specific critical theoretical approach which influences the group's research and subsequent critical writing. Whereas a law student can show their team how to utilise primary legal sources and how to break down provisions to describe particular human rights.

In particular, critical thinking was promoted by encouraging students to think about how they would solve real-world problems which can be encountered in both international human rights law and international relations – where this is demonstrated to comprise an effective model of enquiry-based learning.[25] In achieving this, enquiry-based learning was considered especially important within the context of the outlined project as a means to encourage information literacy.[26] Students at all levels of study, reflected across our project teams,

---

[22] Henry J. Ruminski, William E. Hanks, 'Critical Thinking Lacks Definition and Uniform Evaluation Critera' (1995) 50(3) *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 4-11; Jennifer Wilson Mulnix, 'Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking' (2012) 44(5) *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 464-479; Tim Moore, 'Critical thinking: seven definitions in search of a concept' (2013) 38(4) *Studies in Higher Education* 506-522.
[23] Robert H. Ennis, 'Critical thinking assessment' (1993) 32(3) *Theory Into Practice* 179-186, 179.
[24] Tarsem Singh Cooner, 'Learning to Create Enquiry-based Blended Learning Designs: Resources to Develop Interdisciplinary Education' (2011) 30(3) *Social Work Journal* 312-330.
[25] Katja Brundiers and Arnim Wiek 'Educating students in Real-World Sustainability: Vision and Implementation' (2011) 36 *Innovative Higher Education* 107-124; Rachel Spronken-Smith, Rebecca Walker, Julie Batchelor, Billy O'Steen and Tom Angelo, 'Enablers and constraints to the use of inquiry-based learning in undergraduate education' (2011) 16(1) *Teaching in Higher Education* 15-28, 22.
[26] Hepworth (n 15) 3.

were encouraged to become familiar with relevant political and legal databases/resources for research and success in their projects. With this in mind, we do also acknowledge that enquiry-based learning in this context does require a commitment from students to engage in the process, be willing to develop their own ideas, to have both the commitment and confidence to implement the path they have chosen, and also to reflect on their own development through enquiry-based forms of learning.[27] Saying that, we still accept that enquiry-based learning is an effective means of promoting critical skills that will substantially benefit a student learner – and this was a core motivation of the pedagogical learning design.[28]

As well as these pedagogical skills and benefits to the learner, we additionally wanted our students to develop strong teamworking skills through the project – specifically abilities that account for intercultural differences in approach and required them to find solutions and learn from each other's unique perspectives and lived experiences. Particularly in relation to an academic project concerned with human rights and peacebuilding, the students from Royal Holloway were in a prime position to empathetically learn a significant deal from IPCS students who have lived experiences pertaining to the concerns recounted in the research for the project – not least where 'strategic empathy' is itself considered a powerful pedagogical tool.[29] Within this context, the project builds on a pedagogical recognition that international collaboration vastly improves learning of global and intercultural issues, as well as providing 'an educational experience that extends the boundaries of learning beyond the campus'.[30] Working with peers from a different country additionally builds trust, which in turn makes learning relationships with staff and peer learning more effective.[31] Students have also been given the opportunity to develop new professional relationships to carry forward into their careers in a similar way to

[27] Margaret Roberts, 'The challenge of enquiry-based learning' (2013) 38(2) *Teaching Geography* 50-52.
[28] Alastair Summerlee, Jacqueline Murray, 'The Impact of Enquiry-Based Learning on Academic Performance and Student Engagement' (2010) 40(2) *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 78-94.
[29] Michalinos Zembylas, 'Pedagogies of strategic empathy: navigating through the emotional complexities of anti-racism in higher education' (2012) 17(2) *Teaching in Higher Education* 113-125.
[30] Phil Klein, Michael Solem 'Evaluating the Impact of International Collaboration on Geography Learning' (2008) 32(2) *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 245-267, 245.
[31] Catherine Cronin, Thomas Cochrane, Averill Gordon, 'Nurturing global collaboration and networked learning in higher education' (2016) 24 *Research in Learning Technology* 1-14 http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v24.26497.

how studying abroad develops a range of important relationships for career development. Staff report that students have responded very positively to alternate cultural interpretations and ways of learning from their international peers, specifically to develop their own learning skillset and capacity. In terms of carrying out these aims, a positive of the effect of COVID on higher education is the normalisation of new methods of collaboration that facilitated this aim of international working and deep collaboration, such as online communication between the learner participants – whereas, in the past, exorbitant amounts of funding would have been needed for students to travel and collaborate internationally and where this could potentially disadvantage non-traditional students, such as those unable to travel.

What goes hand in hand with the international nature of the project is the students' shared social responsibility. When we asked students to detail their motivation for the project when applying, many spoke of being deeply interested and concerned about peace and human rights – and this is a factor we wished to emphasize in terms of the overall learning experience. Social responsibility deeply encourages students to wish to develop their learning skills to a higher level, promotes academic integrity in learning, promotes wider community cohesion, causes students to take seriously the perceptions of others, and boosts learning self-esteem.[32] Moreover, that 90% of students and campus professionals believe social responsibility should comprise an intrinsic aspect of the higher education learning experience.[33] Through this project, our students are genuinely motivated to work with students in the Horn of Africa to improve human rights protection and improve stakeholder understanding of these important issues – as such, they strive to learn more effectively to produce a very high standard of work, so that their content can be as helpful and impactful to others as possible (based on staff observation and student comments).

---

[32] Robert D. Reason, Andrew J. Ryder, Chad Kee, 'Higher Education's Role in Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility: A Review of Existing Literature' (2013) 164 *New Directions for Higher Education* 13-22, 18-20; Ingrid Fonseca, Jayson Bernate, Milthon Betancourt, Benjamín Barón, Juan Cobo, 'Developing Social Responsibility in University Students' (2019) Proceedings of ICETC 2019 215-218.

[33] Eric L. Dey, 'Civic Responsibility: What is the Campus Climate for Learning?' (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009) https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/core_commitments/civicresponsibilityreport.pdf.

As a final, overarching, concern there is the need within UK higher education to encourage graduate-level employment in response to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In the context of law graduates, it has been noted before that law schools need to turn their attention to the legal profession when deciding the direction in which to take their LLB programmes.[34] In response, some LLB programmes have had standalone skills-based modules for a number of years which teach skills such as advocacy and commercial awareness as well as, like Royal Holloway, clinical programmes for students to participate and develop transferrable skills.[35] Admittedly, law students do not all enter the legal profession – and, as with other degree programmes, a law clinic must develop transferable skills for a range of graduate employment options. Moreover, we specifically sought to develop an interdisciplinary project that would be inclusive of students from multiple degree programmes and go beyond a focus on the development of legal skills within a law clinic. With this in mind, we considered that students who are seeking graduate-level roles outside the legal profession will need good oral communication skills both for interviews, presentations and meetings in their future career.[36] Team working – explicitly within online environments and across different cultures – being able to explain complex concepts in an accessible manner, and the normalisation of supervisory relationships and formalisation of working process are also key. As such, the skills developed through this project are all experiences the students can transfer into a range of career pathways and which are now demonstrable on the part of the participants to future employers.

Best practices and reflection

This section concludes by sharing several reflections on how the project has contributed to the Legal Advice Centre as a whole, including future work with IPCS and considerations for others conducting similar projects. We reflect on the partnership with IPCS as well as our pedagogical practices in the project. By carrying out this project, the Legal Advice Centre stepped into the unknown

[34] Philip Roberts, 'Career development in the LLB' (2009) 43(3) *The Law Teacher* 297-309, 301.
[35] *Ibid*. 301-2; John Russell, 'Enhancing employability for LLB law graduates – initiatives with ILEX and Clinic at London South Bank University' (2011) 45(3) *The Law Teacher* 348-360, 350; Jenny Knox and Melanie Stone, 'Embedding employability skills for the legal professionals of the future' (2019) 53(1) *The Law Teacher* 90-101, 94.
[36] Juliet Turner, Alison Bone, Jeanette Ashton, 'Reasons why law students should have access to learning law through a skills-based approach' (2018) 52(1) *The Law Teacher* 1-16, 5.

by running an entirely online and distance-based project with a new partner organisation. In the past, an international project where students work across institutions on a global scale to fulfil the targets we set would have required an extreme amount of funding, administrative and institutional support, and logistical organisation. Instead, we were able to utilise existing infrastructure within the Legal Advice Centre and the Centre for International Security to provide a unique opportunity for our students at minimal cost, under the pressures of a pandemic.

The Legal Advice Centre aims to encourage student volunteers to give back to the community and address the needs that are often unmet. This project has internationalised the Legal Advice Centre's contributions to the delivery of free, accessible information for communities. The Legal Advice Centre is also a vehicle for study, and this project has allowed the students to put theory into a practical project that can be used by a variety of stakeholders. We also prioritised the opening up of Legal Advice Centre opportunities to non-law students. This is important both for relationships across the institution but also for the students to develop a range of skills and relationships with a diverse array of peers. Particularly for non-law students, multidisciplinary activities encourage students to step out of their comfort zone and explore new career avenues and engage with staff from different corners of the institution.

For employability in today's internationalised working environment it is crucial that students be able to explore methods of collaborative work in international environments that cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries. This project has sought to prepare graduates for roles where they must work in teams – not only within their organisation but also with partner organisations and other stakeholders. Cultivating effective and successful relationships is key in a globalised working environment and non-traditional Legal Advice Centre projects such as this, alongside engaging with other extracurricular activities as part of their studies, can prepare students for new and emerging working dynamics they will face upon graduation.

There are also benefits for staff by expanding the reach of the Legal Advice Centre's projects into multi- and interdisciplinary activities. Our team very strongly believes in the pedagogical concept that interdisciplinary co-teaching is itself 'a form of professional development' and reflective practice – whereby colleagues successfully learn from each other by maintaining a 'meaningful

dialogue'.[37] Projects such as this create a community between both the collaborating Departments within the institution and a gateway for new networks between researchers and practitioners at the partner institutions. Such new relationships have led to research collaboration between the project supervisors, mentorship, and the continued sharing of teaching practices. In addition to regular group meetings that achieved this active reflective dialogue and sustained relationships, we will now undertake a thorough project review with an external 'critical friend' to identify improvements for future iterations.

International partnerships must benefit both institutions and provide space for growth. Institutions in the Global North must be mindful of the power structures at play when forming partnerships with institutions in the Global South. The project with the Legal Advice Centre is just one element of a broader MoU with IPCS, but served as an excellent starting point for developing trust between collaborating staff. As a result of the MoU with IPCS, we have pursued external funding for research that would build the capacity of researchers at IPCS and will develop further educational and research projects to complement IPCS' strategic plan. One project supervisor has taught as a visiting professor at IPCS and another has facilitated discussions regarding joint educational programmes. Capacity-building consultancy has been provided by staff on IPCS's strategic planning particularly to lessen IPCS's reliance on overseas expertise for the running of its educational programmes to prioritise local knowledge in the long term. Projects such as this allow the partners to go further than only providing consultancy and instead provide personal development opportunities for students. As a result of the experience of working on a research project that is available to the public, students at IPCS may be encouraged to engage with further research that leads to a growth in locally available expertise.

Supervisors of similar projects need to similarly be conscious of the power dynamics between students from different cultural backgrounds when working together on projects. As explained above, the project leads remained aware of the need to ensure IPCS students were able to incorporate their cultural perspectives into the research and that all students were able to have an individual voice in the resulting website. For instance, all students had the

[37] Judith Haymore Sandholtz, 'Team Teaching as a Form of Professional Development' (2000) 27(3) *Teacher Education Quarterly* 39-54; Bill Perry, Timothy Stewart, 'Insights into effective partnership in interdisciplinary team teaching' (2005) 33 *System* 563-573, 572.

opportunity to produce an individual blog post which resulted in many students exploring areas of personal interest and offering unique insights based on their lived experiences and cultural perspectives.

When undertaking such projects, supervisors need to ensure the students work collaboratively and incorporate a balance of views for cultural sensitivity. When we received initial feedback on the website from local stakeholders it became clear that one of the webpages included content which could be perceived as culturally insensitive and inflammatory. The project leads, including the IPCS Director, worked with the student who authored the blog post to present a culturally aware point of view while being able retain their critique. In another situation, a student made remarks which were not supported by sources. Peer-review of materials prior to publication ensured the supervisors could work with the student to edit their contribution.

We also need to reflect on the student experience of the project. We improve by adopting the ethnographic approach recommended by Baker and Daumer – which uses anonymised transcripts of learning activities as the basis of reflective practice.[38] We also aim to develop future interdisciplinary team teaching with student evaluations in mind in order to create projects which are of the most relevance for student needs and will contribute to interdisciplinary skills. We asked students to reflect on the following questions,

1. Do you feel yourself and the other students had ownership of the project? If so, how did the experience differ from other activities you have undertaken during your studies?
2. To what extent do you feel the project allowed you to explore areas you were interested in and how do you feel this contributed to the learning experience?
3. Have you learnt any new skills as a result of the international collaboration between students based in the UK and Somaliland? If so, do you believe these skills will assist you in future working environments?

When asked whether the skills learnt and international collaboration could assist students in future working environments one student commented in their project evaluation form: "[b]eing able to overcome barriers of communication,

[38] W. Douglas Baker, Elisabeth Däumer, 'Designing interdisciplinary instruction: exploring disciplinary and conceptual differences as a resource' (2015) 10(1) *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 38-53.

differing ideology, and workload is definitely something necessary for successful international collaboration and was definitely a key part of producing this project. It pushes participants out of their comfort zone and into a more accommodating and collaborative mindset. It is important to recognise that these barriers are not burdensome but are great for personal and academic growth and resulted here in the sharing of great ideas to produce informative and accurate content using the lived experience of others." Several others commented on the usefulness of this experience for developing techniques for working with students internationally.

In response to question two, one student spoke of how "[b]eing able to choose from such a wide variety, meant that everyone could choose something of interest to them, which allowed for increased motivation and the creation of better work as good work and passion tend to go hand-in-hand." Another appreciated being able to work with the project leads on editing the materials and learning what considerations are needed for a public audience. We also asked students whether they felt they had ownership of the project and how the activity differed from other activities undertaken during their studies. One student explained how they "took on the responsibility of organising our team, selecting our own research areas, setting our own deadlines in line with the guided timings, and uploading this content. This differs from other research experiences as it has more freedom of choice and exploration of leadership and team dynamics as there are no assigned topics or roles." On the peacebuilding team a student from IPCS assumed leadership responsibilities which included liaising with team members and editing research. On the human rights team a student from Royal Holloway undertook these responsibilities and also undertook the majority of the work on uploading material to the website.

However, several students expressed concerns with one student summing up the shared concerns by stating "collaborative projects do require contributions from everyone involved and so teamwork skills and reliability are essential to the success of these projects." Despite signing agreements with the Legal Advice Centre committing to participating in the project, many students failed to engage for the entirety of the project and the Director of the Legal Advice Centre was required to contact non-engaging students on several occasions. Even where the Director stepped in, the workload of the project fell to a smaller number of students who engaged with the project very well. Those who wish to replicate such a collaboration will need to carefully consider the extent of supervision provided alongside the desire to give students ownership of the

process. Our team will be exploring different supervision models that allow us to track student contributions while allowing students to continue to assume responsibility and organise the teams.

With the website now live and freely available to the public, students having enjoyed being able to explore topics of their choice and have their work published, and collaboration continuing between both the project leads individually and the institutions, we consider the project to have been a success. Nevertheless, it is clear that future student-focused collaborations we undertake must have several other aspects built into the project design. For instance, project leads need to more rigorously and visibly ensure cultural sensitivity has been accounted for and those accessing the information should be able to easily see that the material has been produced by a diverse set of students. We also need to review engagement monitoring methods and supervision models that balance student ownership of the project with supervisory oversight that does not detract from the leadership and independence being shown by students. This should also include careful consideration given to students who we can see are assuming additional responsibilities that may have a detrimental effect on their studies more broadly. We hope this overview of our project encourages others to explore collaboration possibilities internationally that provide unique opportunities for students. We will be implementing the lessons learned in the course of this project as we explore future ideas for ways to continue to offer international opportunities for students at Royal Holloway and IPCS under the remit of our MoU.