

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

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Volume 38, Issue 2, pp. 87-111

DOI: [10.36366/frontiers.v38i2.1180](https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v38i2.1180)

www.frontiersjournal.org



Virtual mobility between Mexico and the United States: Navigating differences, recognizing commonalities

Yessica Ivet Cienfuegos-Martínez¹, Carla Giaudrone²

Abstract

Although international student mobility provides valuable opportunities for personal, professional, and intercultural development, it remains an option accessible to only a limited number of students due to economic and cultural constraints. In response to this limitation, initiatives such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) have emerged to foster internationalization through virtual and collaborative pedagogical models. This article presents a practice-based, interdisciplinary and bilingual account of a COIL experience carried out between students from the United States and Mexico as part of the course Multicultural Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America. Over a six-week period, participants engaged in synchronous and asynchronous activities on a digital platform, combining theoretical reflection with the creation of audiovisual materials. The collaboration between the fields of literature and psychology presented methodological challenges that ultimately enhanced intercultural learning. The experience suggests that, despite geopolitical boundaries, students share similar concerns and values—particularly regarding gender and violence—and that disciplinary diversity can deepen both the critical and empathetic understanding of these issues.

Abstract in Spanish

Aunque la movilidad estudiantil ofrece experiencias valiosas de desarrollo personal, profesional e intercultural, continúa siendo una posibilidad limitada para la mayoría del estudiantado debido a factores económicos y culturales.

¹ UNIVERSITY OF GUANAJUATO, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

² RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY, CAMDEN, NJ, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Corresponding author: Yessica Ivet Cienfuegos-Martínez, yessik100m@gmail.com

Date of Acceptance: July 20th, 2026

Ante esta realidad, programas como el Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) promueven la internacionalización mediante el trabajo colaborativo virtual. Este estudio describe una experiencia interdisciplinaria y bilingüe entre estudiantes de Estados Unidos y México en torno al curso Multicultural Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America. Durante seis semanas, el estudiantado trabajó en una plataforma digital a través de actividades sincrónicas y asincrónicas, reflexiones teóricas y la producción de material audiovisual. La colaboración entre los campos de la literatura y la psicología implicó desafíos metodológicos que, no obstante, enriquecieron el aprendizaje intercultural. La experiencia evidenció que, pese a las fronteras geopolíticas, existen preocupaciones y valores compartidos —especialmente en torno al género y la violencia—, y que la diversidad disciplinaria puede fortalecer la comprensión crítica y empática de estos temas.

Keywords

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL); gender and sexuality; intercultural learning; interdisciplinarity; virtual mobility

Editorial note

This article is part of the Plurilingual Special Issue of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* on Voices from Latin America. The Spanish version of the article can be accessed [here](#).

1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has traditionally been associated with the physical mobility of students and faculty. However, in recent decades, pedagogical models have emerged that seek to expand access to intercultural experiences without requiring international travel. Among these, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has become a leading model of virtual exchange, enabling students and faculty from different institutions and countries to collaborate through digital platforms. Such initiatives help students develop intercultural, linguistic, and collaborative competencies while creating new opportunities for the internationalization of the curriculum.

This article presents a bilingual, interdisciplinary COIL experience involving students from the United States and Mexico and the United States focusing on issues of gender and sexuality in Latin America. The collaboration brought together students majoring in psychology and literary studies, who worked together during a six-week virtual exchange through synchronous and asynchronous activities. The project sought to foster intercultural dialogue,

promote critical analysis of gender representations, and develop communication skills in bilingual and transnational contexts.

It is important to note that this work is not presented as empirical research in the strict sense, but rather as a contribution based on pedagogical practice. It is a reflective and analytical account of a specific teaching experience, focused on the implementation of the COIL model in a particular context. Consequently, the reflections and conclusions presented here are based primarily on pedagogical observation, student feedback, and reflective teaching practice, rather than on a formal research methodology. This approach is consistent with the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), which seeks to share pedagogical strategies, lessons learned, and challenges arising from innovative educational practice.

Accordingly, the article provides a detailed account of the COIL experience, including the institutional contexts of the participating courses, student profiles, the digital platforms employed, the design of collaborative activities, and the final products created. This level of detail is intended to help instructors and institutions adapt similar virtual internationalization initiatives to their own interdisciplinary and bilingual contexts.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we present a contextual framework on international student mobility and the emergence of virtual internationalization initiatives such as COIL. We then discuss the pedagogical benefits of collaborative international learning, along with the role of gender studies and interdisciplinarity in this type of educational experience. The third section describes the implementation of the project, including the institutional call for participation, the formation of the teaching team, and course design. Next, we examine the pedagogical objectives, activities, and instructional modules, illustrating how collaborative learning unfolded throughout the exchange. Finally, we reflect on the principal outcomes and challenges of the experience, with particular attention to language, technology, interdisciplinarity, and institutional support for virtual internationalization.

2. Contextual framework

Student mobility exposes students to different cultures, customs, and worldviews while broadening the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological perspectives of their disciplines—perspectives that may not be available at their home institutions (Jiménez-López, 2025). Its impact extends beyond academic development, shaping the experiences of both the individuals and the institutions involved.

Entering university can itself be a challenging experience. Students are

suddenly immersed in environments where they interact with people from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, gender, and religious backgrounds—backgrounds that often differ from, or even challenge, what they previously regarded as normal or acceptable. According to Pierella (2024), these encounters transform the university into a “border zone” (*zona de frontera*) that fosters both individual and collective identity formation. Student mobility further intensifies this process by crossing not only territorial and cultural borders, but also what Pierella describes as “semiotic and idiomatic” (*semiótico e idiomático*) boundaries, particularly when students move between regions or countries with different languages. As a result, communication and social integration may become considerably more difficult.

Several additional factors can discourage students from pursuing mobility opportunities. These include separation from family, social exclusion upon arrival at the host institution, and financial hardship (Jiménez-López, 2025). Students facing economic precarity often have limited time for leisure or social interaction, particularly when they rely exclusively on scholarships and must work to finance their stay (Pierella, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded these challenges. As Cervantes Villagómez (2022) notes, international mobility declined sharply in early 2020, disrupting both in-person exchanges and opportunities for intercultural interaction.

Despite these challenges, globalization has prompted Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) to incorporate multicultural perspectives into their curricula while encouraging students to pursue learning opportunities beyond their home universities (Cervantes Villagómez, 2022; Moncada Cerón, 2011). In Mexico, according to the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), on average between 2016 and 2019, only 12% of HEIs reported that at least one Mexican student participated in international mobility. During the same period, only 4.5% on average hosted an international exchange student. Outgoing international mobility represented only 0.4% of total enrollment, while incoming mobility accounted for just 0.15%. Although less than half of the students opting for international mobility receive funding, such funding is more common than that provided to students applying for domestic mobility. Business and administration recorded the highest levels of both incoming and outgoing international mobility (Bustos-Aguirre et al., 2023).

For Mexican students, the primary destination for international mobility is Spain, as they cite cultural similarities, language proficiency, and the ability to travel within the European Union. The United States is, in terms of frequency, the third most popular destination for Mexican students seeking international mobility. Regarding permanent incoming mobility—that is, students entering with the goal of obtaining a degree at a Mexican HEI—a high

percentage come from the United States. Consequently, it is hypothesized that these may be students with dual citizenship (Bustos-Aguirre et al., 2023).

In the case of the United States, international mobility continues to represent a relatively low proportion of its total college enrollment. According to the *Open Doors Report* by the Institute of International Education, between 2016 and 2019, less than 2% of U.S. students participated in some form of academic experience abroad (Sanger & Baer, 2019). However, the country remains one of the top destinations for inbound mobility, alongside other English-speaking countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The total number of international students in HEIs—including those taking online courses from outside the country—fell by 16% in the fall of 2020 (Baer & Martel, 2020). Despite this temporary decline linked to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mason et al., 2023), the United States continues to account for nearly 17% of global student mobility and remains a leader in attracting international students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning became a necessity, as isolation led to changes in all forms of personal interaction, including the academic environment. Classes—and university life in general—were reduced to the creation of virtual classrooms, often with cameras turned off and little to no interaction among those participating in this new way of experiencing university life.

This “pedagogical shock,” as Charlot (2020 as cited in Pierella, 2024) refers to it, required new engagement strategies but also necessitated a different understanding of the university as an institution. The notion of territory changed, and while globalization had already emerged as a necessity, the possibility of interacting remotely transformed and blurred the boundaries between online and offline life. Virtuality, far from being foreign, became familiar, and at times, geographical boundaries became secondary, ceasing to be an obstacle to the exchange of knowledge and experiences (Carli, 2020).

At the same time, it became evident that access was not the same for everyone due to differences in the quality of electronic devices and internet access, family circumstances, and home infrastructure (Dussel, 2020). Thus, while some students were able to connect via their iPhone or work on their personal computer while using other devices, entire families had to share a single device to complete academic activities; they faced a lack of connectivity and even power outages in some regions, highlighting inequalities in access to knowledge (Pierella, 2023). As Pierella points out, “new boundaries were drawn between the inside and the outside, and new frontiers emerged between inclusion and exclusion regarding access to virtual education” (2024, p. 171). And as Cervantes Villagómez (2022) explains, COIL is a highly recommended alternative for student mobility, especially during a pandemic.

3. The COIL model: The internationalization and interculturality of collaborative learning

Among the various initiatives centered on virtual student exchanges, COIL, established in 2004 within the State University of New York (SUNY) system, is one of the most widely recognized. According to Cervantes Villagómez (2022), the program emerged in the early 2000s to provide international experiences for students in the United States who, for various reasons, were unable or unwilling to study abroad. To address this need, the program was designed to enable students to use technology to engage in collaborative, group-based learning with peers from other countries. In other words, the goal was not only to offer an international experience but also to promote a pedagogical innovation capable of benefiting large numbers of students without requiring them to leave either their home country or their home institution (Hackett et al., 2023).

This model, which soon established itself as an effective internationalization strategy, inspired institutions and organizations in other countries to develop similar programs tailored to their local contexts. Thus, the Mexican Association for International Education (AMPEI), in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, Banco Santander—through Santander Universities—and Fomento Educacional, A.C., promoted the implementation of the COIL model in Mexico (Cervantes Villagómez, 2022). Currently, the program has partners in various regions of the country, including Chihuahua, Veracruz, Nuevo León, and Guanajuato.

One of COIL's defining features is that it combines internationalization with collaborative learning as an innovative pedagogical strategy (Espinosa Cevallos & Saltos Zambrano, 2024). Rather than focusing solely on virtual mobility, the model is grounded in the premise that meaningful international learning emerges through sustained collaboration among students from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. The educational value of student mobility extends beyond academic achievement to include personal and professional growth (Jiménez-López, 2025), particularly in a globalized world where intercultural communication requires far more than language proficiency. It also involves understanding cultural practices, developing empathy, and building collaborative relationships that can endure long after the exchange has ended.

Previous research has identified numerous personal benefits associated with international mobility (Gómez López, 2020; Jiménez-López, 2025). These include greater independence, stronger personal identity, improved intercultural competence and language proficiency, enhanced problem-solving

abilities, and better time and financial management. Student mobility has also been linked to increased self-awareness, critical thinking, tolerance, and willingness to seek help when needed.

Collaborative learning responds to the need for pedagogical approaches that move beyond the passive transmission of concepts. This shift is particularly important when the goal is to cultivate empathy, intercultural sensitivity, and critical engagement with cultural diversity. Studies have shown that the collaborative use of digital technologies enhances communication skills, promotes autonomous learning (Espinosa Cevallos & Saltos Zambrano, 2024), and fosters empathy among individuals from different cultural contexts (García-Taibo et al., 2024).

Beyond individual learning outcomes, it is equally important to consider the institutional context in which internationalization takes place. Universities can either promote or hinder intercultural engagement depending on the resources and support they provide. As Pierella (2024) argues, institutional constraints frequently reinforce existing inequalities and limit opportunities for educational inclusion.

4. Gender, higher education, and interdisciplinarity: Contrasts and challenges

Although many scholars have argued that integrating a gender perspective into higher education is essential for comprehensive university education (Bonavitta & Maritano, 2024; Cervantes Villagómez, 2022), both gender mainstreaming and internationalization remain unevenly implemented across many Latin American universities. This is particularly evident in Mexico, where courses addressing gender are often offered as electives, while broader curricula rarely examine how identity formation, power relations, and violence are shaped by gender (Bonavitta & Maritano, 2024). In the field of psychology, topics such as gender and feminism are among the courses that students most frequently seek out during their national and international exchange programs (Jiménez-López, 2025).

The situation contrasts with that of the United States, where Women's and Gender Studies programs have been firmly established since the 1970s. These interdisciplinary programs integrate feminist, queer, and sexuality studies across the humanities and social sciences, making gender not merely an elective topic but a cross-cutting analytical framework (Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983; Ginsberg, 2008, p. 10). As a result, debates surrounding identity, power, and gender inequality have become an integral part of students' education, reinforcing an academic tradition that brings together teaching,

research, and activism to foster a critical understanding of contemporary society—even amid recent challenges to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) arising from both neo-fascist political agendas and neoliberal budget cuts (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2022).

A major challenge of interdisciplinary work relates to the methodological differences among the various disciplines that make up a given team. Each differs in the way knowledge is produced, integrated, and evaluated (Hoidn, 2018). Theoretical and methodological approaches can vary even within a single discipline. Within the social sciences, for example, there are clear methodological differences between psychology, political science, history, economics, and so on. Likewise, within the field of literary studies—one of the disciplines participating in the COIL experience analyzed in this study—a multiplicity of theoretical positions is evident, including, among others, the sociology of literature, the psychoanalytic reading of literary texts, socio-criticism, deconstructionism, feminism, and gender studies. These approaches form the theoretical core of the discipline and provide a wide variety of analytical methods.

5. Call for applications and implementation of the COIL program

In late 2020, Mexican institutions launched a call for applications inviting universities to participate in the COIL program. Applications were submitted through each institution's home university, which was responsible for paying the participation fee and completing the registration process. In the United States, the invitation originated from the university office responsible for global engagement and international programs, which invited instructors interested in developing collaborative intercultural learning experiences with partner institutions in Mexico. According to Cervantes Villagómez (2022), the first cohort included 124 instructors from 35 Mexican and 27 U.S. universities. Participants represented diverse academic backgrounds and areas of expertise. Some had previous experience with collaborative international projects, which facilitated the formation of teaching partnerships. For others, one of the first challenges was identifying an academic partner with shared research interests, methodological approaches, or theoretical perspectives.

Our collaboration began with an exchange of emails in which we explored the possibility of designing an interdisciplinary COIL experience focused on gender. From the outset, we sought to develop a collaborative learning plan that would integrate the complementary perspectives of psychology and literary studies. One of us is affiliated with the Department of

Psychology, while the other is affiliated with the Department of World Languages and Cultures and the Latin American and Latinx Studies Program. This combination of disciplinary perspectives allowed us to bring complementary theoretical and methodological approaches into a single educational experience.

Throughout the planning process, AMPEI provided continuous institutional support. This included assistance in identifying a teaching partner, faculty development workshops, mentoring during program implementation, and guidance in developing a syllabus that incorporated all the components required for collaborative learning (Cervantes Villagómez, 2022).

6. Multicultural perspectives on gender and sexuality in Latin America

To promote intercultural and collaborative learning about gender and sexuality among students in Mexico and the United States, we designed the COIL course Multicultural Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America. Its primary objectives were to:

- To encourage critical analysis of gender stereotypes and roles.
- To promote the use of technological platforms for self-directed learning.
- Facilitating intercultural communication among students from different academic backgrounds.

The course was conducted over a six-week period during the Spring 2022 semester (February–March). Students came from different academic backgrounds. In the United States, participants were undergraduate majors in Spanish and Latin American Studies enrolled in Gender and Sexuality in Spanish American *Modernismo*. In Mexico, participants were undergraduate psychology students enrolled in Gender Studies.

Gender and Sexuality in Spanish American *Modernismo* examines transgressive representations of gender and sexuality in literary works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The course explores socially transgressive figures such as the *femme fatale*, effeminate men, prostitutes, and women labeled as “hysterical.” Through the study of Spanish American *Modernismo* and its intersections with race, class, and nation, students examine how these cultural constructs shaped representations of the body, desire, and identity, and how their legacies continue to influence contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality. Designed for undergraduate majors in Spanish, the course is part of the program’s advanced curriculum. Although it

is taught entirely in Spanish, students enter the course with varying levels of language proficiency. Consequently, the course fosters an inclusive learning environment that integrates literary analysis with the continued development of advanced language skills, enabling students to deepen both their understanding of the movement's cultural and theoretical dimensions and their ability to communicate critically and effectively in Spanish.

In the Mexican institution where the COIL experience took place, Gender Studies is the only course on the subject offered within the Division of Health Sciences. The course examines how socialization processes and historical institutions reproduce gender inequality while analyzing the social and political implications of adopting a gender perspective grounded in feminist epistemologies. Topics include violence against women, gender as a category of analysis, the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, and sexual and reproductive rights. The course was introduced in 2014 as an elective in the Psychology curriculum through the sustained efforts of Dr. Gabriela Luna Lara, who successfully advocated for its inclusion (G. Lara, personal communication, Marzo 15, 2026).

Given the time difference between the two countries and the teaching schedules at the participating universities, one of the first challenges we faced was coordinating the synchronous sessions. At the time the course was planned, both institutions were delivering classes online because of COVID-19 restrictions. Each university relied on a different learning management system: Canvas in the United States and Microsoft Teams in Mexico. Because Canvas was the institutionally required platform for course delivery at the U.S. university, we chose to host the collaborative course within that environment. To enable participation by the Mexican students and instructor, we requested institutional access to the platform. The request was readily approved, and the U.S. institution also provided technical support throughout the implementation process.

The program combined synchronous and asynchronous activities delivered through Canvas and several complementary digital platforms, including Padlet, Zoom, and TikTok. Joint synchronous sessions involving all participants were held on only two occasions. The first, conducted via Zoom, introduced the project and gave students an opportunity to meet one another, while the second was devoted to the presentation of the final projects. Most synchronous interactions, however, took place in small groups of three or four students, who were required to submit screenshots documenting their meetings. Padlet played a particularly important role in facilitating interaction beyond the scheduled meetings. Because all participants could post comments, respond to one another, and build on their peers' ideas, the platform

encouraged spontaneous dialogue and sustained collaboration. This environment fostered fluid, creative, and accessible communication in both languages, strengthening collaborative knowledge construction and cultivating a sense of community within the virtual learning environment.

The course was organized into four thematic modules:

- Gender stereotypes, archetypes, and roles,
- Men and masculinities,
- Gender-based violence, and
- Feminism and feminist activism

This structure allowed integration of theoretical reflection with intercultural experiences and critical perspectives on gender and sexuality. Each module included research articles and theoretical readings, as well as videos and discussion prompts designed to encourage dialogue and collaborative reflection within each team.

7. Pedagogical design and implementation of the COIL experience

During the planning sessions, we established a series of specific objectives designed not only to strengthen students' academic learning but also to foster awareness of the common experiences shared across the two groups. We began from the premise that individual life trajectories are shaped by multiple forms of difference and that, although geographical contexts influence many aspects of people's lives, educational experiences seldom encourage students to reflect on what they have in common.

Our first objective was to encourage students to engage with, interpret, and discuss a range of cultural productions from both Latin America and the United States. Through this process, we hoped they would become more open to engaging with people and experiences from different cultural contexts while developing a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. We also encouraged students to reflect on their own identities by participating in an experience that was not only international but also interdisciplinary, with gender serving as its central analytical focus. More specifically, we sought to help students apply key concepts and theories from gender and sexuality studies to their everyday lives, critically examining their social, political, and cultural implications.

Grounded in the critical perspective that underpins gender studies, another objective was to help students recognize how different theoretical frameworks can generate multiple interpretations of the same text. A central

challenge of the course was to bring literary and psychological approaches into dialogue, encouraging students to integrate both perspectives through an interdisciplinary analysis of gender.

We also sought to help students develop professional collaboration skills by working collectively on a shared project—in this case, the production of a TikTok video—which required preliminary research and the creation of content suitable for public dissemination. By emphasizing collaborative work, we aimed to cultivate skills that extended beyond the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge. We also encouraged students to strengthen both their foreign language proficiency and their intercultural communication skills by spending approximately 30 minutes conversing in each language during every meeting. Because these conversations took place independently, without our supervision as the project's coordinating instructors, we cannot confirm that all groups consistently followed this format.

Finally, students were asked to share their intercultural experience by recording brief journal entries after each meeting with their peers. In these reflections, they documented the language skills they had practiced as well as the cultural topics and issues discussed during their conversations.

According to the COIL model, an intercultural learning experience should begin with an icebreaker activity, followed by at least three thematic intercultural modules, and conclude with a collaborative project that encourages students to reflect on their learning. Table 1 provides an overview of the weekly intercultural activities and their alignment with the pedagogical objectives of the COIL model.

TABLE (1)

COIL COMPONENTS COVERED IN EACH COURSE SESSION

COIL Component	Objective	Activity
Icebreaker	Presentation of the project and the student body. Formation of interdisciplinary and intercultural teams	Meet Your Partner
1. Intercultural Activity	Identify some stereotypes, archetypes, and gender roles in the United States and Mexico	Stereotypes, Archetypes, and Gender Roles
2. Intercultural Activity	Explain the social construction of masculinity, as well as its social and political implications	Men and Masculinities
3. Intercultural Activity	Discuss social representations of violence against women and the LGBTI community and their social and political implications	Gender Violence

4. Intercultural Activity	Examine non-dominant gender representations that challenge patriarchal hegemony.	Feminism and Feminist Activism
Final Collaborative Project	Create audiovisual material based on what was learned and reflected upon during the course.	TikTok Video

Note: Created by the authors based on the core components of the COIL model and adapted to the course Multicultural Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America.

8. Ethical considerations

Although participation in Multicultural Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality in Latin America contributed to the assessment of Gender and Sexuality in Spanish American *Modernismo* (United States) and Gender Studies (Mexico), its weight in the overall course grade was intentionally calibrated to encourage participation without affecting students' ability to successfully complete the course if they chose not to participate. Because the COIL experience was not a required component of either academic program, participation had to remain strictly voluntary, in accordance with the guidelines presented during the COIL faculty development workshops held in November and December 2021.

While some course materials produced through the platform were publicly accessible, measures were taken to protect participants' privacy. All examples included in this article preserve participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

9. Course development

As noted above, the first session was conducted synchronously via Zoom. We, the coordinating instructors, introduced ourselves and presented the project, which students had already been introduced to at the beginning of the semester (Image 1). Beyond getting acquainted, the primary objective was to encourage students to engage openly with peers from another country, with whom they would collaborate throughout the project.

Following the introductions, students were randomly assigned to teams, with the only requirement being that each team include an equal number of participants from the United States and Mexico. Team members then exchanged email addresses and phone numbers to facilitate communication throughout the course. During the "Meet Your Partner" activity, students brainstormed colloquial terms used to refer to the opposite sex in both English and Spanish (for example, *chick* and *zorrra* to refer to women). They then

discussed the meanings, cultural connotations, and gendered implications of these expressions.

IMAGE (1)

PRESENTATION OF THE COIL COURSE BY THE FACILITATORS



Overall, the first session successfully created a welcoming space for intercultural exchange, with students demonstrating both openness and active engagement. The introductory activities helped break the ice and establish initial connections among participants, fostering more fluid communication throughout the remainder of the project. As expected, however, the first meeting also revealed some of the challenges typical of initial encounters between people who had never met, including shyness and differences in communication styles. In addition, a power outage in one of the Mexican cities temporarily disrupted internet access for several students, delaying their participation and affecting the pace of the session. Nevertheless, the random and balanced composition of the teams encouraged collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds while promoting active listening and linguistic negotiation. The “Meet Your Partner” activity proved particularly valuable because it highlighted the culturally specific meanings and gendered connotations embedded in everyday language related to gender and sexuality.

The first intercultural activity, “Stereotypes, Archetypes, and Gender Roles,” was designed to achieve the following learning objectives:

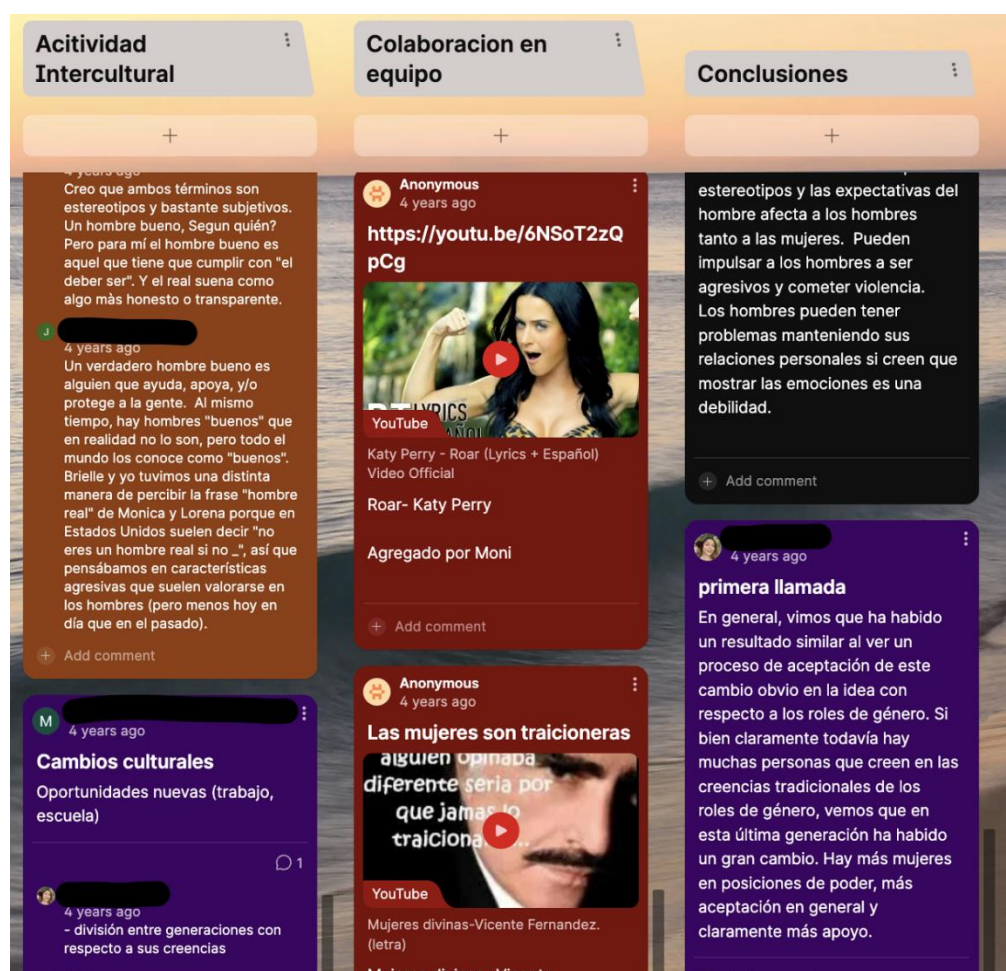
- understand the concepts of stereotypes, archetypes, and gender roles;
- examine stereotypical representations of men and women in U.S. and Mexican society;

- reflect on how these stereotypes have shaped students' own lives; and
- identify the ways in which these stereotypes contribute to gender inequality.

In this activity, students discussed the meanings associated with expressions such as “acting like a man” and “acting like a woman” in Mexico and the United States, while examining how these gendered expectations shape interpersonal relationships. They also explored how these ideas are reflected in expressions such as “dumb blonde,” “boys don’t cry,” and “behave like a lady,” among others. As part of their collaborative assignment, students researched and analyzed representations of gender in contemporary music from both countries. Each team selected at least one song from each country that reinforced traditional gender roles and another that challenged conventional gender norms, including “La mujer ideal” by Danza Invisible and Beyoncé’s “If I Were a Boy,” respectively.

IMAGE (2)

SCREENSHOT OF THE INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITY “STEREOTYPES, ARCHETYPES, AND GENDER ROLES” ON THE VIRTUAL PADLET WALL.



NOTE: IDENTIFYING INFORMATION HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM THE SCREENSHOTS TO PRESERVE PARTICIPANTS' ANONYMITY.

This activity was carried out through Padlet and generated a rich comparative discussion of gender stereotypes in Mexico and the United States. Students analyzed songs such as “Mujeres divinas” by Vicente Fernández and “Roar” by Katy Perry (Image 2), comparing traditional and contemporary representations of gender. Their analyses highlighted both the persistence of patriarchal models and the emergence of discourses that promote women’s autonomy.

For the literature students, the activity was further enriched by pairing these discussions with Rosario Castellanos’s (2003) collection of essays *Mujer que sabe latín* (Woman That Knows Latin), which challenges the social expectations and cultural misogyny directed toward women who pursue intellectual knowledge. Students also read Juana de Ibarbourou’s (1953) poem “Mujer” (Woman), which opens with the line, “If I were a man, what weariness of the moon, / of shadow and silence would I feel!” (p. 211). Together, these materials encouraged students to reflect critically on how both popular culture and literature have shaped—and continue to challenge—understandings of gender across different historical periods and sociocultural contexts.

The second intercultural activity, Men and Masculinities, invited students to examine different models of masculinity in Mexico and the United States. The learning objectives were to:

- explain how masculinities are socially constructed and shaped by their sociopolitical contexts;
- critically examine the ways in which hegemonic masculinity affects different dimensions of men’s lives; and
- analyze how intersecting identities—including race, class, sexuality, and disability—influence the construction and experience of masculinities.

The discussion was guided by the following questions:

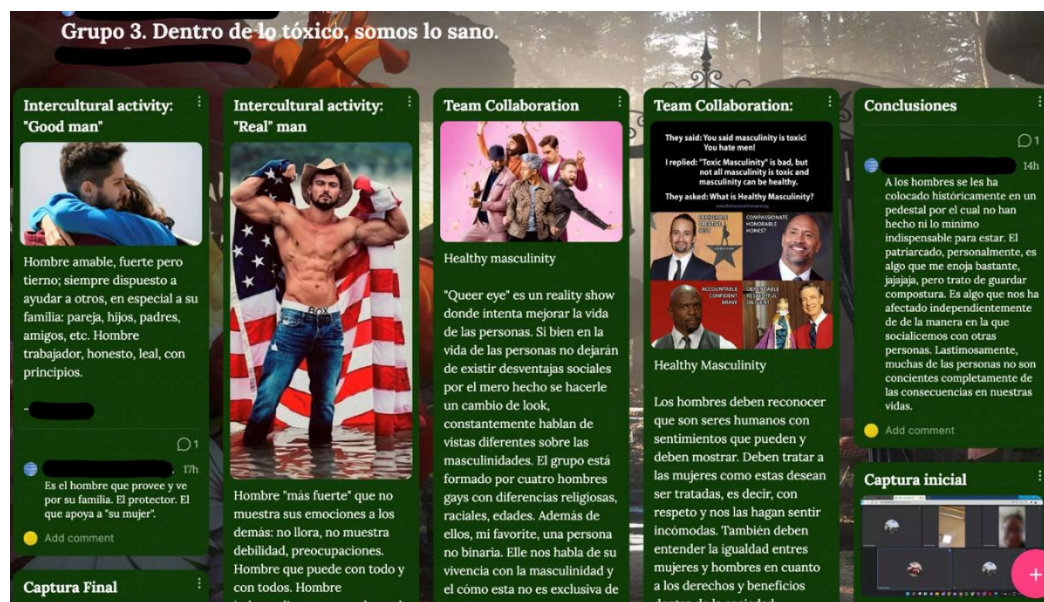
- How does the society in which you grew up shape your understanding of masculinity?
- What qualities or characteristics are men expected to have?
- What do you think about society’s expectations of masculinity?
- In your opinion, what does it mean to “be a man”? Why?

As an individual activity, students created a two-column chart. In the first column, they listed the characteristics associated with a “good man,” while in the second they identified the qualities that define a “real” or “true” man. After comparing and discussing their responses, they reflected on how these cultural messages about the ideal man shape the experiences of men and boys

and, in turn, affect the lives of women and girls. For the collaborative activity, students watched the trailer for the documentary *The Mask You Live In* (Newsom, 2015) and read Michael Kimmel's (1999) "La masculinidad y la reticencia al cambio." Both resources examine masculinity from a U.S. perspective. To provide a contrasting Latin American perspective, students also viewed a video produced by the Avon Foundation for Women (2019), which explores masculinities and gender relations in Argentina.

IMAGE (3)

SCREENSHOT SHOWING THE INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITY "MEN AND MASCULINITIES" ON THE PADLET VIRTUAL WALL.



The Padlet discussion centered on a critical analysis of hegemonic masculinity, understood as a model of power rooted in hierarchical relationships that normalize—and, in many cases, legitimize—the domination of women and of men who do not conform to traditional ideals of strength, authority, or emotional restraint. Students identified how these patterns are reproduced across cultural and media contexts and reflected on their impact on both personal relationships and broader social dynamics. The discussion also explored examples of healthy masculinities, characterized by empathy, vulnerability, respect, and gender equity. Contrasting these models encouraged students to question conventional ideals of virility and to recognize more inclusive ways of expressing masculinity that acknowledge the diversity of lived experiences and forms of emotional expression (Image 3).

The third intercultural activity, Gender Violence, focused on examining social representations of gender-based violence, including the myths, stereotypes, and cultural narratives that normalize or justify violence against women, femicide, homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Students were also encouraged to adopt an intersectional perspective to

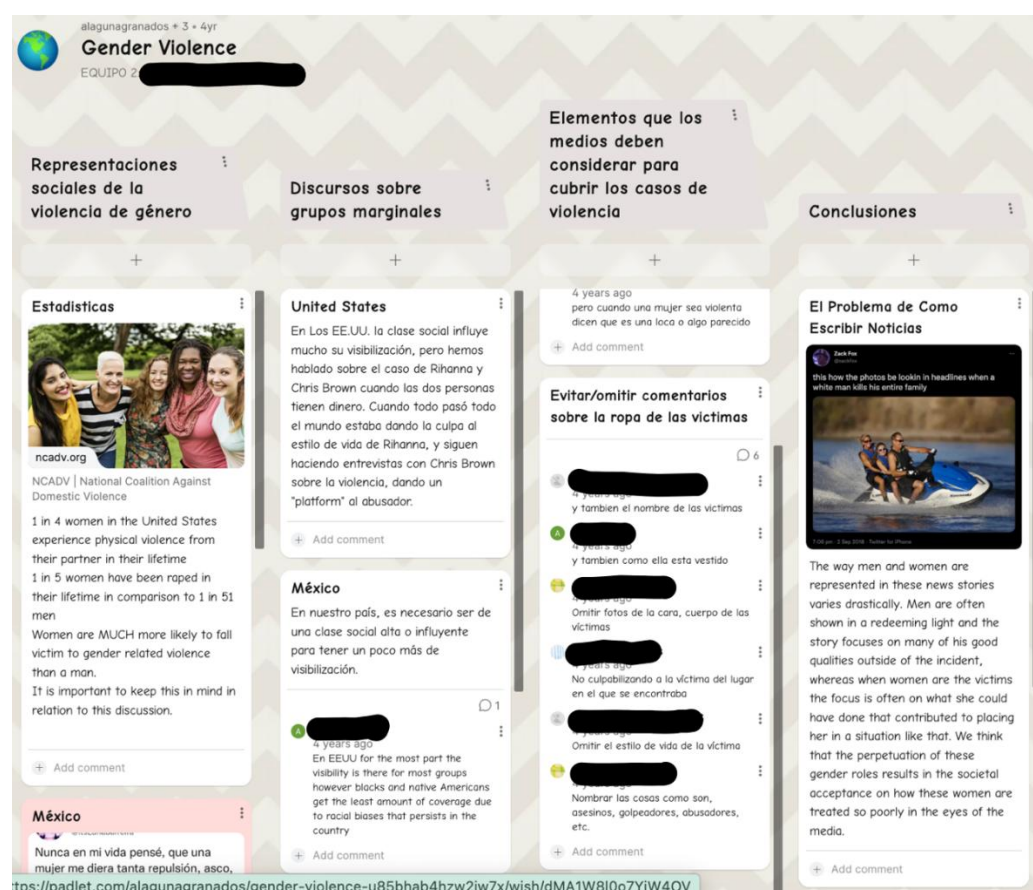
examine how these forms of violence intersect with categories such as social class, race, and ethnicity. The learning objectives were to:

- analyze the distinction between gender-based violence and violence against women;
- critically examine how the media represents and frames gender-based violence; and
- evaluate the role of the media in legitimizing gender-based violence.

As part of the collaborative activity, students reviewed and analyzed comments posted on social media in response to a news story about gender-based violence. They then developed alternative narratives that challenged misogynistic discourse and amplified the perspectives of marginalized groups.

IMAGE (4)

SCREENSHOT SHOWING THE INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITY “GENDER VIOLENCE” ON THE PADLET VIRTUAL WALL.



The analysis of news coverage and social media comments enabled students to recognize how media discourse can reinforce gender stereotypes and legitimize violence against women and members of LGBTQ+ communities. To deepen this discussion, students revisited Abril Violeta Zarco Iturbe's study "The Media and Their Role in the Construction of Gender-Based Violence" (2009), in which she analyzes the case of the "Cumbres Killer", the nickname

given to the perpetrator of the brutal murder of two children (Erik and María Fernanda, aged 7 and 3) on March 2, 2006, in the Cumbres neighborhood of Monterrey. Following Marian Meyers in *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (1996), students discussed how news coverage of cases of gender-based violence becomes part of the problem itself by reinforcing narratives that blame the victims.

For the students enrolled in the Latin American literature course, this discussion was further enriched through the case of Delmira Agustini (1886–1914), the Uruguayan modernist writer whose murder by her ex-husband received extensive coverage in the crime pages of the press. Examining these materials enabled students to draw parallels between historical and contemporary media representations while encouraging them to imagine alternative narratives grounded in empathy and support for marginalized communities.

The fourth intercultural activity, Feminism and Feminist Activism, introduced students to feminist movements in Mexico and the United States. They examined the relationship between the #MeToo movement in the United States and #MiPrimerAcoso, a Mexican feminist campaign against gender-based violence (Rayón, November 6, 2025). The learning objectives were to:

- examine non-dominant representations of gender that challenge patriarchal hegemony;
- analyze the importance of intersectional approaches in feminist activism and the diverse strategies activists use to promote social change; and
- explain how feminism and women's activism inspire individuals and communities to promote social change.

This activity encouraged students to recognize sexual harassment and sexual misconduct as forms of gender-based violence that have given rise to feminist movements such as #MeToo and #MiPrimerAcoso. It also invited them to reflect on the significance of these movements within their respective social and cultural contexts. As part of the collaborative activity, students created a Padlet timeline tracing the events that led to the emergence of #MeToo and #MiPrimerAcoso, explaining their historical significance and their continued relevance today (Image 5). The literary component of the module focused on the feminist manifestos of the Uruguayan anarchist writer Roberto de las Carreras (1873–1963), an early advocate of “free love” and women's emancipation.

IMAGE (5)

SCREENSHOT OF THE INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITY "FEMINISM AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM."



The final project consisted of three components completed by each team. First, students developed multiple-choice questions based on the topics covered in the weekly activities. These questions were compiled into a Kahoot quiz, which was used during the final synchronous session. Second, each team created a 60-second TikTok video on one of the themes explored throughout the COIL experience. Before the videos were published, we, the coordinating instructors, reviewed and approved their content. Finally, students wrote an individual reflection describing what they had learned, how they intended to apply that knowledge in the future, and how the COIL experience had transformed their understanding of the original course in which they were enrolled.

In addition to these activities, students completed a questionnaire about their experiences with the COIL program. Their responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the course, despite the initial concerns expressed by some participants, particularly the students from Mexico, for whom this was

their first COIL experience. Students highlighted the opportunity for intercultural learning, the chance to better understand themselves through dialogue, and their appreciation for those who organized the project. Many also reported that the experience broadened their cultural perspectives and encouraged them to reflect on social inequalities, recognizing the value of collaborative learning in fostering empathy and promoting social change.

Although coordinating schedules across institutions presented some challenges, collaborative work—particularly through digital platforms such as Padlet—helped students gain a deeper understanding of the course objectives and apply its concepts in practice. Overall, they described the experience as academically and personally enriching, emphasizing the opportunity for meaningful exchanges about gender, culture, and university life in different national contexts.

10. Conclusion

The following comments are grounded in a specific pedagogical experience and should therefore be understood as context-dependent rather than generalized. They are based on our teaching observations and students' feedback not on a formal empirical research design.

Implementing the COIL experience proved both challenging and highly rewarding for students and instructors alike. One of the most significant insights to emerge was that, despite differences in national and institutional contexts, many expressions of violence and resistance transcend national borders. Many students in Mexico were participating in a COIL exchange for the first time, and initially expressed concern about communicating in English. These concerns diminished during the first Zoom session, when they discovered that most of the students from the United States spoke Spanish fluently. Despite the scheduling challenges discussed above, students from both countries ultimately described the experience as highly positive. Responses to the final questionnaire indicated that intercultural communication and interaction were among the most highly valued aspects of the exchange. Students also expressed strong interest in future collaborations through COIL initiatives or other forms of academic mobility.

From an institutional perspective, we found that virtual international collaboration requires substantial coordination across multiple levels of the university. This work extends from securing approval for the use of digital platforms and managing cross-institutional access to coordinating administrative processes, aligning academic calendars, and recognizing shared learning activities. Successful implementation also depends on the active

support of international offices, program coordinators, and technical staff, who play a critical role in ensuring the project's operational viability as well as compliance with institutional policies on data protection and copyright.

Across the different modules, we designed activities that encouraged learning beyond the classroom inviting students to connect course concepts with their everyday lives. Discussions and critical reflections frequently extended beyond the COIL sessions and continued in subsequent class meetings at each institution. Students also reported that the experience deepened their understanding of the traditions, culture, and everyday realities of their international peers.

The linguistic dimension was one of the most significant aspects of this bilingual, transnational, and interdisciplinary experience. As noted earlier, not all of the students enrolled in the Mexican course had sufficient English proficiency to participate with complete confidence. This highlighted the need to provide greater linguistic support for students participating in international collaborative experiences.

The U.S. group, in contrast, reflected the diversity of the institution's student population, including English-speaking students, students of Latin American heritage, students from the Middle East, and Spanish-speaking Latin American students. This diversity fostered a rich multilingual and intercultural learning environment. On platforms such as Padlet, students were free to contribute in either English or Spanish, and most groups naturally alternated between the two languages. Rather than creating barriers, this bilingual interaction became a form of cultural negotiation and collaborative learning. Language functioned not as an obstacle but as a bridge connecting knowledge, lived experiences, and disciplinary perspectives.

The experience also demonstrated the value of bringing together perspectives from literary studies and psychology through a shared focus on gender. An understanding of the psychosocial processes involved in the construction of gender complemented the critical analysis of texts, discourses, and cultural representations. While literary studies offered a symbolic space for exploring historical and cultural narratives about the body, desire, and difference, psychology offered tools for examining the emotional and social processes that support those narratives. Together, these perspectives fostered a richer dialogue about how gender is constructed, represented, and experienced, demonstrating how theoretical reflection can deepen academic understanding while also informing students' everyday experiences.

Grounded in a specific pedagogical experience, this practice-based contribution examines the potential of virtual, interdisciplinary, and bilingual

internationalization initiatives. It demonstrates how these initiatives can create meaningful opportunities for intercultural learning, even within the constraints of short-term exchanges mediated through digital environments. It also offers practical insights for educators and institutions interested in exploring new pedagogical strategies. The goal is to foster intercultural dialogue, interdisciplinary and collaborative work, and critical reflection on socially relevant issues in transnational educational contexts.

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Author biography

Yessica Ivet Cienfuegos-Martínez is a professor and researcher in the Department of Psychology at the University of Guanajuato. She holds a diploma in Human Rights and Domestic Violence from the Institute for Legal Research at the Universidad Autónoma de Mexico and a certification in Collective Mental Health from 17, Instituto de Estudios Críticos. Her primary research focuses on femicidal violence, collective processes of resistance, and access to abortion in contexts of criminalization.

Carla Giaudrone is Associate Professor of Spanish at Rutgers University–Camden and Director of the Latin American and Latinx Studies Program. She was a co-founder of the Global Studies Program and has participated in collaborative exchange programs with universities in Argentina, Paraguay, and Mexico. Her teaching and research interests focus on environmental humanities, affect theory, gender and sexuality studies, and their intersections with Latin American literature and culture.