

Teaching Excellence Case Study

Siteseeing: Enhancing students' professional networks through an Online International Learning (OIL) project

Practitioner: Heidi Saarinen, School of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts and Humanities ab6148@coventry.ac.uk

Course: BA Interior Architecture and Design

Student Level: Undergraduate (Level 4)



LINKS TO EDUCATION STRATEGY PILLARS

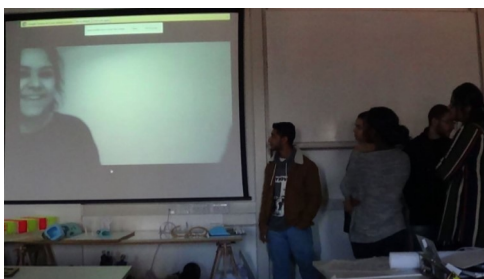
- Intercultural and international engagement
- Innovation and digital fluency
- Embedded employability

AIMS

To develop as professionals in the twenty-first century employment market, students on the BA Interior Architecture and Design course needed to gain experience of working with others in a **global environment**, interacting with peers from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, teaching staff were keen to increase their own visibility and profiles through facilitating this experience for their students.

ACTIONS

The course team set up an [Online International Learning \(OIL\)](#) partnership with a University in Groeningen, Netherlands. This was established via **colleagues' existing contacts** in the country, via industry and academia. Colleagues from both CU and the partner institution worked together to devise a brief that would benefit students from both universities. The students produced a group project folder (with drawings, ideas/development/group diary, models) alongside group presentations, which formed part of their assessment.



Students interacting online. Image: Heidi Saarinen.

The resulting 4 week project, "**siteseeing**", entailed students examining historical sites and their user groups in Coventry and Groeningen. Students at each institution worked in groups of five, and were required to **conduct online meetings** via Skype with their counterpart group from the collaborating university. Students also chose **additional online tools** (e.g. WhatsApp, facebook, or social media of their choice) to keep in touch with their international peers and build their professional networks.

IMPACT

- Students had to **manage their own projects**. This included timekeeping, keeping records of their of their online interactions, and arranging for each team members to undertake different tasks and work with specific peers from their counterpart group.
- Working with peers at an international level enabled students to develop professional skills and networks. Many students were pleasantly surprised to discover commonalities with their peers despite the different contexts they were working in, with many making friends as well as professional contacts.
- Following the success of this venture, the course team undertook a **further two OIL projects**, and are looking to do more in the future.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

- "This project made me realise the importance of working together with like minded people and designers in different parts of the world".
- "As we started the project, I was thinking about communicating with students in a different country where they speak another language. But this was not a problem at all. We learned a lot from each other".

TOP TIPS

- Working with established or new partners was a rewarding and **mutually beneficial experience**, for students and staff alike. Establishing trust was vital to the success of the project.
- No two OIL projects are the same, and they can be something of a venture into the unknown! Being prepared to **be flexible**, and open to new experiences, is crucial in order to maximise the chances of students success.
- The OIL project required **careful planning** (considering factors such as timetabling and time differences). They reported that it was a **refreshing** way to support student learning and their development as professionals..