

Combining the deep impact of cross-cultural exchange with the broad reach of new media technologies. Enabling young people to have meaningful cross-cultural experiences as part of their education.

What is Virtual Exchange?

Virtual exchanges are technology-enabled, sustained, people-to-people education programs. While new media technologies are often used for either superficial social interaction or intensely polarizing political display, virtual exchanges use the same technologies to build mutually affirming relationships and foster constructive and meaningful dialogue among youth. Employing a wide variety of platforms and educational pedagogy, virtual exchanges teach participants 21st century skills that prepare them to more effectively deal with difference and to collaborate and communicate across cultures, thereby enhancing global peace and prosperity.

While physical exchange programs, including study abroad, have long provided important educational experiences, those opportunities have only been accessible to a privileged few. The costs and logistical challenges of such programs prevent this model from reaching a broader set of students. Less than 2% of American college students study abroad, and those who study abroad often choose to study where there is less need for increased cultural understanding: 54% of Americans who study abroad go to Europe, while only 2% go to the Middle East. While Middle Eastern students who study abroad are likely to come to the United States, only 3% of higher education students in the Middle East study overseas.

By using low-cost, high-impact technology, virtual exchange makes it possible for every young person to access high-quality international and cross-cultural education, and it enables deep and meaningful exchange where it is most needed. Developed over the past 30 years based on experiences in educational exchange and study abroad, virtual exchange programs are providing opportunities for students ranging from kindergarten through college.

It is critical that we provide vastly more young adults with the skills they need to participate in the global economy, and, given the current economic climate, we must develop models that are less costly without sacrificing impact.

The Virtual Exchange Coalition has partnered with the Saxelab Social Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in order to establish evidence-based measures of educational impact. Currently, the Coalition and Saxelab are developing tools to measure the impact of virtual exchange programs. Following successful evaluation, these evidence-based measurement tools will be made freely available for adoption by organizations that run people-to-people education and exchange programs.

ACCESS

- **Less than 2%** of Americans enrolled in higher education study abroad each year.
- **Less than 2%** of students in most European countries study abroad.
- **Only 3%** of higher education students from the Middle East study overseas.

EQUITY

- **Only 11.7%** of American students who studied abroad in 2010-2011 were Black or Hispanic.
- **Only 0.2%** of students who were pursuing an Associate's degree in 2010-2011 studied abroad.

EXPERIENCE

- The most popular region for American students is Europe and the least popular regions are the Middle East and North Africa. **Only 2%** of American students go to the Middle East.
- **Only 4%** of the U.S. higher education population are international students.

The Virtual Exchange Coalition

In 2009, Soliya, Global Nomads Group, and iEARN-USA came together to form the Virtual Exchange Coalition with the goal of making it the norm for young people—of all socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds—to have meaningful cross-cultural interactions throughout the course of their K-12 and postsecondary education.

These founding organizations all leverage new media technologies to expand access to high-quality, deep social learning across cultures. Recognizing that there is a growing number of new entrants to this field, the Coalition's purpose is to foster a more supportive and generative ecosystem for such programming to develop, innovate and grow.



SOLIYA

Soliya integrates virtual exchange programming at higher education institutions across the U.S., Europe, and Muslim-majority countries worldwide. Since 2003, Soliya's flagship program, The Connect Program, has been implemented in over 100 universities in 27 countries. Many participants continue on to participate in Soliya's virtual exchange facilitation training.

In the spring of 2008, associate professor Michael Kimball brought the Soliya Connect Program to his students at the University of Northern Colorado, where there is a large number of first generation college students who "often come to college ill-equipped to recognize its potential to change their own lives, never mind the world," according to Dr. Kimball. For many of these students, studying abroad isn't even considered a possibility. But, since 2008, Soliya has already enabled 70

SOLIYA (CONT'D)

University of Northern Colorado students to engage with peers in places like Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and the Netherlands. “It gave us the opportunity to tear down the barriers that keep us from learning what is really going on. It was like dry footage. I loved talking to the people in my group every week. It gave me an experience and a life-long understanding,” said one of Kimball’s students.



GLOBAL NOMADS GROUP

Global Nomads Group (GNG) fosters dialogue and understanding among the world’s youth by engaging and empowering young people worldwide using media including interactive videoconferencing, webcasting, social networking, gaming, and participatory filmmaking. For over 15 years, GNG has conducted projects with 7th-12th grade students in more than 50 countries and has reached over one million young people. Innovative educators across the world integrate GNG’s programs into their classrooms to expand 21st century learning opportunities in their schools.

Through its youth virtual exchange programs, GNG helps schools and educators expand their classroom’s experiences, as seen in Randy Barrette’s rural classroom. Randy is a high school Spanish and World Cultures teacher at Menifee County High School in rural Kentucky. Through GNG’s Global Citizens in Action (GCA) program, Randy’s students connect with a peer classroom at the School of Leadership, Afghanistan in Kabul, via interactive videoconferences, an online platform, youth-led social activism projects, and follow a dynamic curriculum on cultural exchange, media literacy, and global citizenship. In an evaluation of GCA 2012-13, Randy said, “I have watched the power of this program in the past two years positively influence the paradigms of my students. We are a small, rural high school of 300 students, with limited access... I am hopeful that this year again a small group of students in my school will develop a similar worldview; one built on mutual understanding, increasing knowledge, and sincere empathy.”

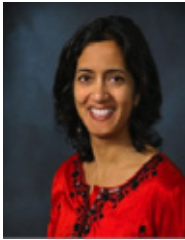


IEARN-USA

iEARN-USA: iEARN (International Education and Resource Network) provides K-12 educators with the digital and curricular tools to create and collaborate on meaningful global projects that enhance students' classroom learning, including their understanding of geography, history, language, and other cultures. Since its start in 1988, iEARN has grown into a network of over 50,000 educators and 30,000 schools and youth organizations in more than 140 countries.

In the United States, over 3,000 teachers are integrating iEARN's Common Core aligned curriculum and project plans into their classroom, and are leveraging interactive technologies to connect with other iEARN teachers and classes across the country and the world. For example, Deanne McBeath, a technology teacher for Village Charter School in Trenton, NJ, is teaching her students the fundamentals of technology through a project on world hunger. In any given class, her students can be found Skyping with a food transporter in North Carolina, chatting with peers in Nigeria, manipulating Excel spreadsheets that are keeping track of calories, or designing an animated video that will be used to educate their classmates on the state of global hunger. Through technology-integrated lesson plans, iEARN is helping teachers expand their students' cross-cultural understanding all while supporting standards-based learning.

Coalition Leadership



WAIDEHI GOKHALE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, [SOLIYA](#)

Waidehi joined Soliya in 2007 and has held various roles over the years including Program Management, Training and Partnerships & Development. Waidehi has 18 years of professional experience in the fields of psychology, international education and development.

Prior to joining Soliya, Waidehi worked as an International Projects Manager with War Child Canada with a globally diverse portfolio of programs all working with women and children who had been victims of armed conflict. Before that, Waidehi worked as a counselor on staff at High Schools in the Greater Boston area and as a Language Teacher in Singapore. Waidehi was born in India and grew up in Hong Kong.

She holds a BA in Literature and Philosophy from the University of York in the UK, a MA in Counseling Psychology from Boston College and a MALD from the Fletcher School at Tufts University with a concentration in Conflict Transformation & International Organizations.



CHRIS PLUTTE

CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, [GLOBAL NOMADS GROUP](#)

Chris has more than a decade of experience in media development and conflict resolution management. Chris rejoined Global Nomads Group (GNG) in 2010 as Executive Director, where he previously led the organization as one of the original founders. Prior to rejoining GNG, Chris opened and directed all of Search for Common Ground's programs in Rwanda and cross border initiatives in the Great Lakes Region.

During his time in Rwanda he introduced innovative programs for peace building using technology in the classroom and secured new funding for program growth and expansion. Chris frequently speaks on media, youth and conflict and has his work with GNG has been featured in outlets such as The Today Show, CNN, NPR, Education Week and Chronicles of Philanthropy.

Chris received his BA in International Communications from the American University of Paris. He is currently a Pahara Fellow at the Aspen Institute.



DR. EDWIN H. GRAGERT

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, [iEARN-USA](#)

Ed Gragert has four decades of experience in global education. He is Interim Director of iEARN-USA. He is also the Director of the Global Campaign for Education-US, an advocacy coalition of 80 organizations committed to securing a quality education for all young people worldwide.

Earlier, he served as the Executive Director of iEARN-USA, pioneering and expanding online collaborative learning among schools worldwide. He also served as Executive Director of ICYE-US, an international youth exchange program, and worked for the International Relations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Ed received a BA in Japanese political science from the University of Washington and an MA in Korean History and PhD in Japanese History from Columbia University. He has authored numerous articles on educational technology and teacher professional development and has a column on Huffington Post.



LISA JOBSON

CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER, [iEARN-USA](#)

Prior to joining iEARN in 1997, Lisa was a high school history teacher in Providence, Rhode Island, and then Mmabatho, South Africa. She has held numerous roles at iEARN-USA, including Assistant Director and Executive Director, before moving to the San Francisco Bay Area in 2013.

In addition to overseeing program and technology strategy, implementation, and new initiatives, she helped to launch and manage iEARN's Adobe Youth Voices partnership, a program of the Adobe Foundation.

Lisa grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee. She holds a BA from Brown University, and an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University, with a focus in International Policy Studies.

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Multi-Media Materials

VIDEOS

TEDXDeadSea, Shamil Idriss on Virtual Exchange:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkdQnKxDmFQ>

LinkTV Segment on Soliya Connect Program:

<http://vimeo.com/38328511>

Virtual Exchange at Georgetown University:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hZb_69yVt0&feature=youtu.be

Global Nomads Group on ABC, CNN:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHzTOPHkQEk>

PHOTOS

Soliya Fellows at the 2012 Soliya Summit in Jordan prepare to record interviews with their communities to share with the Soliya Network Community:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152027951307244>

Joelle participated in the Soliya Connect Program, a virtual exchange program that brings together students from around the world into an online platform where they can discuss current events, cultural affairs, and expand their worldview by interacting with their peers in foreign countries:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152027951312244>

Participants and professors at Menoufiya University in Egypt gather to learn about and discuss the Soliya Connect Program and meet Soliya's CEO, Shamil Idriss:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152027951357244>

Collaborative mural project designed and painted by Global Nomads Group students at their respective schools in Kabul, Afghanistan and Alexandria, VA:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/globalnomadsgroup/9888192366/in/set-72157635784510725>

PHOTOS (CONT'D)

A reunion of Global Nomads Group's Project Voice. 10 Years Later, Iraqi and US peers from historic videoconferences meet in person:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/globalnomadsgroup/9888299333/in/set-72157635784510725>

Hindi Language Study Exchange between USA and India. A partnership with the Edison School District in New Jersey to enhance its existing language programs to include Hindi as an option for students in the district. The partnership enabled NJ students and teachers to utilize iEARN's network and Collaboration Centre for language learning and cross-cultural exchange with native Hindi speakers in India:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/iearnusa/4626107057/in/set-72157624106207492>

Students Video Chat between New York and Karachi, Pakistan as part of iEARN YouthCaN project at the American Museum of Natural History:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/iearnusa/4626107425/in/set-72157624106207492>

Students from Dubai and New Jersey connect as part of the iEARN Finding Solutions to Hunger Project:

<http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org/images/trenton-dubai.jpg>

<http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org/images/dsc07042.jpg>