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The Guide to COIL Virtual Exchange: Implementing, Growing, and Sustaining Collaborative Online International Learning

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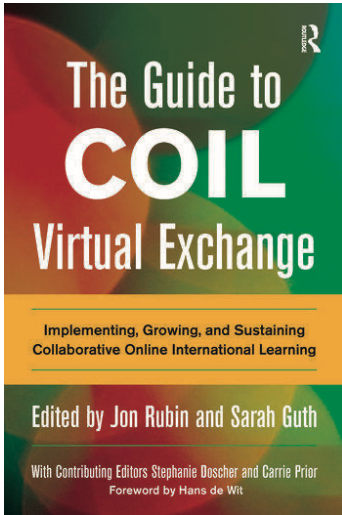
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ABSTRACT

Virtual Exchange (VE) is a rapidly growing approach to internationalizing the curriculum, offering college students the opportunity to have international experiences without studying abroad. This book contributes new insight to the field of virtual exchange by detailing strategies used for institutionalizing the project-based Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) VE model, which can greatly enhance the accessibility of internationalization efforts at higher education institutions worldwide. In collaboration with the COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange website, the book showcases perspectives from students, instructors, and institutional leadership, making it a valuable resource for understanding how different stakeholders may benefit from virtual exchange.

Keywords: curriculum internationalization, equity, higher education, high impact practice, online education

Virtual exchange (VE) is a high impact practice that has been used at higher education institutions around the world to help students expand their intercultural, language, digital, and other skills. This pedagogical practice of linking classrooms in different locations via technology has brought a new level of accessibility to the landscape of international education and became particularly popular when travel was restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Guide to COIL Virtual Exchange: Implementing, Growing, and Sustaining Collaborative Online International Learning*, an edited volume by Jon Rubin and Sarah Guth, comes at an opportune time for this budding field of research and practice.



The volume provides a comprehensive history of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), a model that is distinguished from other forms of VE due primarily to its project-based format that is “embedded in for-credit postsecondary-level academic courses” (p. 9). The book also contains detailed recommendations for introducing, institutionalizing, and enhancing a COIL initiative as part of a university’s internationalization strategy.

The volume is organized in six parts, with chapters that could easily be read as standalone pieces. The first part provides a theoretical grounding for the volume, while also clarifying some key misconceptions about COIL and VE in general, such as how this practice differs from and complements study abroad. The contributing authors make a compelling case for why institutions should incorporate COIL into their

internationalization efforts, legitimizing this often misunderstood practice as “a developmental process that must be carefully designed and facilitated in order for students to achieve cultural and disciplinary learning outcomes” (p. 48).

Parts two and three are grouped based on their intended audiences. Part two focuses on how to approach COIL from an institutional perspective, and part three addresses instructors’ perspectives on COIL. In part two, the authors masterfully explore ways that institutions can take advantage of their existing resources to support COIL, addressing and exemplifying a variety of institutional contexts (e.g., institutions with and without an international office) and providing specific strategies and resources for building up a COIL program. Part three then pushes the boundaries of the field’s existing practice and research with its focus on increasing COIL-related faculty support and professional development, as well as a chapter (17) that calls for engaging underrepresented students with COIL.

Part four contains examples for institutionalizing COIL at different types of higher education institutions, such as research universities and community colleges, spanning multiple continents. It also includes an overview of organizations that support COIL initiatives in Chapter 23, which provides a glimpse into the important role these institutions play in facilitating collaboration and access to resources. Part five provides abstracts for COIL project case studies written by student participants and instructors, with QR codes leading to the full pieces on the COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange website. For those who are new to COIL, it may be best to peruse this section of the book and the online case studies first, to obtain a more concrete understanding of how COIL can be implemented, before returning to read the strategies contained in the rest of the volume. In part six, the book concludes with potential future directions for the growth of COIL, which provides a visionary perspective on some pressing issues in the field.

This work compiles experts’ insights that address a critical gap in the scholarly and practitioner literatures on study abroad and VE: an exploration of how COIL has been and can be institutionalized at colleges and universities around the world. It also provides a unique historical snapshot of higher education institutions’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, encapsulated primarily in the boxes titled “COVID Sidebar,” which makes

these sections easy to focus on or skip over depending on the reader's intent. These COVID-19 sidebars may continue to be relevant when public health challenges or conflicts restrict international travel for faculty and students. Additionally, the book's relationship with COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange, a VE network website with information on the field that will be continuously updated, makes it an indispensable resource that will not become outdated.

This book is useful to anyone seeking a background on COIL and is particularly valuable to COIL champions, COIL coordinators, and institutional leadership looking to institutionalize and build capacity for COIL. While the latter would gain much from reading it cover to cover, others can easily select relevant chapters or read out of order according to their needs. Casual readers will find a wealth of concrete resources, such as sample charters for faculty to sign at the outset of a COIL project. Given the exponential growth of this field worldwide, there are many opportunities for future works to build off of the path that this book has begun to pave, such as a volume that examines the growing body of VE research being conducted worldwide. Another possibility would be to explore the VE field as a whole, encompassing more VE formats and histories originating outside the United States. Future volumes could also be written in languages other than English to reflect the international voices that make up this innovative field.

The Guide to COIL Virtual Exchange is a critical resource for the VE field, particularly as it will continue to point practitioners to the COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange website, where updated information on the state of the field, news items, and a list of engaged organizations are freely available. The diverse expert opinions and case studies spread throughout the volume will undoubtedly speak to questions arising at institutions of all types, at different stages of COIL initiative development. With a compelling theoretical foundation, this volume paints a clear picture of how COIL can and should be integrated into institutions' internationalization strategies. Hopefully this work is just the start of a rich body of literature that will feature the diverse project formats, practitioners, research findings, and most importantly, students, contributing to the thriving pedagogical practice that is virtual exchange.

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