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Fostering Global Interactions? An Experiment in Teaching World History across National Boundaries[1]

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The central challenge of a renewed world history at the end of the twentieth century is to narrate the world's pasts in an age of globality. It is this condition of globality that facilitates the revival of world history and establishes a point of departure in the "actually existing" world of the late twentieth century ...[2] 1

- Michael Geyer and Charles Bright

Over ten years ago, Geyer and Bright predicted that globalization would facilitate the revival of world history. Despite this prediction, the teaching and learning of world history in the twenty-first century has still not become truly globalized. If we live in a truly global age, shouldn't we also teach world history in a global pedagogical context? Our international experiment between Macquarie University and Northeastern University arose from such a question, and also from two significant tensions that have arisen in recent years between the theory and practice of teaching world history. 2

The first tension relates to the teaching of world history from within a curriculum paradigm which remains tied to the notion of separate 'nations.' Indeed, even though world historians commonly seek to situate human being in contexts that transcend the nation-state, much of the world history curriculum is stitched together under the rubric of national interests. The second tension is the question of the cross-cultural experiences that equip students to be global citizens. While we teach the ethos and philosophy of global interactions, our day-to-day teaching practices remain anchored in one locality. In other words, while world history courses advocate mobility, flexibility, and the ability to reach beyond borders, students generally remain in a single class in one city in one particular country. Moreover, we teach world history within a specific cultural context bound by specific cultural practices such as the language of instruction. Thus the problem remains: how do we facilitate the transfer of academic and cultural skills from one culture to another, emulating the very contacts and interactions of world history pedagogy? 3

This article charts the recent initiative of Patrick Manning at Northeastern University in Boston and Adrian Carton at Macquarie University in Sydney to address this problem by providing an international framework for the teaching of world history across national boundaries. By taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by an electronic learning forum, students from parallel world history courses from Boston and Sydney joined an 'Atlantic World History' international tutorial in March and April 2005. What did we learn from this global initiative and what did our experience tell us about the pursuit of internationalizing world history teaching and learning? Did we replace national interests with a 4

global approach to world history pedagogy? Does international internet learning create global citizens through equitable access or does it create greater disadvantage through the global commodification of education itself?

Creating an International Framework

One of the main issues that we wished to address by conducting the international tutorial was the question of the relevance and the portability of world history unit contents. How transferable are our world history courses across national boundaries? Since English is the medium of instruction for world history in both the United States and Australia, one would expect a fair degree of portability. By allowing both Australian and American course content to be set in international play in a controlled electronic environment, both can be tested and enhanced according to cross-cultural applicability. We envisaged that a "virtual forum" of American and Australian students would facilitate the internationalization of the unit content through mutual feedback and cross-fertilization between identical reading material and responses to facilitator questions. We theorized that an international framework might illuminate diverse responses to the same world history texts depending upon the cultural location of the students involved, and that it might lead to new cross-cultural understandings of the material through listening to alternative and divergent opinions and interpretations. 5

For teaching material dealing with the Atlantic world, this seemed particularly interesting. Atlantic world history courses have a long genealogy in the United States due to their "home-grown" status as regional histories of cultural exchange and interaction where the U.S. is positioned in a broader global paradigm. Hence, this area of world history teaching has straddled both the national curriculum and the need for studies that place America in a wider world. However, this sense of familiarity cannot be extended to Australia. The teaching of the Atlantic world in Australia is a relatively recent phenomenon, with no sense of physical or cultural proximity involved and, indeed, few "overlaps" with national interests or studies of Australia's place in its own region. 6

Hence, one can assume that studies of the Atlantic world in the U.S. and in Australia serve different ends and have been grounded in different pedagogical frameworks. While in the U.S. studies of the Atlantic world emerged from a re-evaluation and broadening of the national history paradigm, in Australia such studies are interwoven in the broader emergence and popularity of world and global histories *per se*. What happens when these two perspectives meet? Even if identical scholarly books and articles are used, are they read in the same way and with the same sets of cultural assumptions and investments? 7

Related to this desire to test the international portability of world history curriculum was our desire to encourage our respective sets of students to tackle the world history syllabus not only from the perspective as "Americans" or as "Australians" but also from the "bird's-eye" perspective of perceiving themselves as world historians.[3] While world history students in their respective countries must learn the skills that enable them to compete and thrive in a local environment, there also remains a need to prepare our students with transnational skills that equip them with the necessary competencies to be citizens of the world. Hence, the creation of an international learning environment which facilitates the transfer of general skills in reading, writing, and the comprehension of historical processes on a global scale is the first step towards providing the framework for training in cross-cultural understanding. 8

Due to the sheer physical distance of Australia from the main centers of world history pedagogy in Europe and the U.S., physical exchanges with foreign countries have been the traditional modes by which Australian students acquire these cross-cultural skills. Exchange agreements and travel 9

opportunities to other centers where world history is taught enable Australian students to feel as if they are a part of the global pedagogical scene. However, due to the relative expense of air travel, the highly competitive entry criteria for student exchange programs, and the time needed for the proper planning and execution of overseas travel, the tyranny of distance often hinders the full participation of Australian students in global learning initiatives. While international world history programs seem well-placed to respond to the contemporary demands of creating the environment needed for the internationalization of general skills, only a few world history students are given the opportunity to study abroad on exchange programs. Even then, the cost is high. Thus there remains a real urgency to make the internationalization of world history teaching and learning both accessible and more economically feasible.

The Globalization of Education: Democratization versus Disadvantage

In theory, online units of study promote information exchange and mutual support amongst students and enable skills to be updated and transferred to vocational settings. In countries such as Australia, sympathetic commentators on the viability of online learning say that it addresses educational disadvantage by widening educational opportunities to a broader and more diverse body of students while simultaneously addressing social isolation due to the sheer scale of physical distances.[4] In the United States, online distance education courses have multiplied significantly in recent years with campuses making significant advances in the area of e-learning strategies to increase student numbers and reach students in rural areas.[5] Likewise, in Australia, the promotion of external units of study to students who work during the day or who live in remote areas has resulted in the growth and sustainability of the Open Universities Australia (OUA) network.[6] The University of Southern Queensland has pioneered the use of online learning as a means to offer courses to students living in remote areas of the Australian outback.[7] 10

Spain's Salamanca University, the University of Porto in Portugal, and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands have all been noted in the literature for their borderless e-learning environments that maximize the transfer of resources through unit content portability.[8] However, the specific teaching and learning needs of world history require students to think and act in a global context due to the cross-cultural nature of the subject material, while current e-learning solutions often remain linked to local and national contexts. In this sense, the internet allows for the seamless delivery of information and seems to be well-placed (in theory) to offer world history teaching solutions in an environment that addresses the equity issues of international student exchange. It also provides a context for testing the portability and flexibility of world history programs. So we may ask: does the internet indeed provide the environment for cross-cultural learning without national limits?[9] 11

While this essay argues that technological advances in borderless electronic learning have facilitated new opportunities for world history learning across national boundaries, we nevertheless question both the logic and the promise of equitable delivery that are assumed in the "democratization" argument. On the one hand, the internet creates an international framework for the cross-cultural transfer of general skills and, hence, heralds an exciting new phase in the potential internationalization of world history curricula.[10] As John Field argues, "as borders open up across the globe to traffic of almost every kind, so distance open learning flows increasingly across national frontiers."[11] Robin Mason from the Open University in the U.K. goes further with his celebratory view: 12

At its most visionary, the ideal of global education is one of a movement away from the bounded 13

classroom, seen as a haven from the world, to a dynamic synergy of teachers, computer-mediated instructional devices and students collaborating to create a window on the world.[12]

14 On the other hand, the promise that world history can be taught in a global utopia that widens international participation and enhances equity is contingent upon the premise that the historical move from localized and nationalized centers of learning to the "global virtual university"[13] is a good one and is, indeed, historically inevitable.[14]

15 There are cognitive, educational and social arguments for caution to be displayed in the *laissez-faire* argument that the globalization of world history curricula based on American, European or Australian models will somehow widen participation and erase disadvantage. In his book, *Digital Diploma Mills*, for example, David Noble provides a sharp critique of the intention of online learning programs which are interwoven into the logic of the expansion of global capital where the unrestrained commodification of education for the pursuit of profit looms large. While online learning and teaching courses have multiplied across the world, as previously noted, they have done so in tandem with the privatization and corporatization of higher education *per se*. College campuses have often emphasized the "democratization" of education in order to justify the increase in online learning programs when their real intention is to tap into a lucrative international education market and reduce overall labor costs.[15] The casualization of online teaching, questions concerning quality control, and the overall lack of standards has led Noble to draw parallels between these new learning "innovations" in the twenty-first century to the mechanization processes that accompanied the first phase of industrial capitalism in the West.[16]

16 The question of equity is a very important one. Do all of the world's college students have access to the internet in order to engage in a "global" learning environment? Do we want world history to become the "internationalized" preserve of the privileged? The challenges faced by students in the developing world as well as the question of the feasibility of internet classrooms for the socially and economically disadvantaged are very real in a global society where the gulf between the "information rich" and the "information poor" is widening at an ever-increasing rate. In this sense, the enthusiastic embrace of the "global virtual university" and "democratization" has serious socio-economic and socio-political implications.

17 In terms of the content and structure of our experiment, we were also aware that the obvious re-inscription of standardized approaches to world history learning and the fact that the mode of instruction and feedback is in English, meant that an "international dialogue" between the U.S. and Australia hardly constituted a "global interaction" in the broadest sense of that term.[17] From a cognitive point of view, the move to these standardized interpretations of world history that can be applied to courses in Sydney, San Diego or Southampton could very well undermine the pursuit to provide cognitive recognition of cultural and linguistic difference. In social terms, the homogenization of world history teaching could lead either to the weakening of studies of cultural specificity and local perspectives or, indeed, to the erasure of the important role of a national perspective on education in postcolonial contexts where there is a real urgency to shake off imperial legacies.[18]

18 While the above problems are very real, we nevertheless maintain that the internet can provide an effective environment for conducting innovative cross-cultural teaching methods in world history that require us to think beyond the old binary of "national" versus "global" and to engage in a significant pedagogical network which brings local communities of world history students from different parts of the globe into dialogue with one another. This may lead, as Mason suggests, to a relativist

comprehension of world history approaches that are not static or unitary, but multiple, contested and based on how one sees the world at a given place, time and context depending on where one is standing.[19] Indeed, living with twenty-first century technology requires students to think and act in terms of both national and transnational identities. Furthermore, through a process of cross-cultural contact and interaction, online environments have the potential to create international spaces where the subject content will be interpreted in fresh and innovative ways.[20]

Cross-Cultural Dialogues: Benefits and Limitations

19 We began the planning for our international tutorial in August 2004 with the submission of a grant proposal titled "Fostering Global Interactions: Learning World History in a Borderless Electronic Age." The proposal was successfully awarded a Teaching and Development Grant in that year from Macquarie University. To implement the proposal, we decided to choose a block of five weeks in our parallel world history courses for an international experiment in cross-teaching that would be concerned with five identical topics in the area of Atlantic history. These weekly topics were called: (1) 1492 And All That: The Notion of "Discovery"; (2) Indigenous Cultures in the Americas; (3) Encounters and Conquests; (4) Pre-Colonial African Cultures and the Slave Trade; and (5) African-American Interactions. The topics were held during the same weeks in Boston and Sydney (March 7-April 8 2005) to coincide with the end of the winter teaching semester in the U.S. and the beginning of the new academic year in Australia. Following those five weeks, students had several weeks to give us their feedback on the idea of an international tutorial and to finish discussing issues that concerned them while participating in the initiative.

20 An existing online module designed to facilitate discussions amongst external students was built for the unit HIST299/399 at Macquarie which was accessed from the following URL: http://online.mq.edu.au/pub/HIST299/. Five separate folders were established with separate access requirements so that a sample of ten students from HIST110 at Northeastern and ten students from HIST299/399 at Macquarie could log-in to a discrete area of the online forum to form an inter-cultural and transnational class that would answer identical facilitator questions and consult identical reading materials. Thus, although the "international tutorial" was conducted concurrently with the Macquarie version of HIST299/399, domestic students in Australia could not access the international tutorial and, likewise, overseas guests logging on from Boston were not given access to the domestic version of the course. This was to create a unique and dedicated international electronic environment where the cross-cultural teaching initiative could occur without outside interruptions, to enable facilitators to give more thought to the processes of group dialogue and cohesion, and to monitor the ways in which the world history syllabus was being interpreted and analyzed.

21 The course conveners in Boston and Sydney facilitated the discussions together in the first week as an "ice-breaker" and then took the lead in alternate weeks. Julia Miller, a PhD candidate in world history at Macquarie University, acted as the "international tutorial facilitator" to stimulate discussion and to create a friendly dialogue between the two groups of American and Australian students. Miller was herself an external undergraduate student at Macquarie University who completed her degree off-campus through participating in on-line learning modules of this kind. As a student herself in an electronic learning environment, she had first-hand experience of the particular challenges of student-facilitator and student-student communication and could provide valuable assistance to the facilitators both in Boston and Sydney. On Mondays Boston-time (to coincide with Tuesdays in Sydney) some questions in relation to the week's theme and tutorial readings were posted to the discussion forum, and

students logged in to respond and contribute to the discussion. Normally, the week's discussions ended on Fridays Boston-time (to coincide with Saturdays in Sydney). Both the facilitators and the international tutor went on-line frequently to gauge student responses, to reply to students, to add comments or suggestions for further reading or, most importantly, to moderate discussions between American and Australian students.

22 Perhaps the most significant outcome that we felt emerged from the international tutorial was the ability for wide and inclusive social interaction. At the most basic level, all participants in the International Tutorial interacted as "equals" in a virtual classroom where both social and cultural distances were bridged. The students ranged from eighteen-year-old first-year students to middle-aged students who had families and held degrees, from students living in remote areas of Australia to those living in inner urban Boston, from students who had traveled extensively to overseas countries to students for whom this was their first ever "international" experience. All read and responded to the same materials and engaged with the facilitator in regard to the same questions.

23 Remarkably, in the course of the five weeks no visible hierarchy emerged among the students, and the electronic discussion forum provided an arena where students from various social and cultural backgrounds living in two distant locations could engage in an in international and cross-cultural dialogue.

24 Nonetheless, conditions for the two groups of participants were somewhat different, and the conveners had to make adjustments for these differences. The International Tutorial came at the end of the semester for Northeastern students, and at the beginning of the semester for Macquarie students. While the Macquarie students were history majors in their second or subsequent year of studying history, Northeastern students were not history majors, and many were taking their first college history course. Another important difference was that those participating from Northeastern were physically in class and were involved as internally enrolled students, whereas the majority of those participating from Macquarie were external students who were not physically present on campus and for whom on-line discussions were a routine part of their dialogue with the University.

25 The time difference between Sydney and Boston (Sydney's time is usually 14 hours later than Boston's) is not conducive to "real time" dialogue: the best times for posting were 6 pm — 8 pm Boston time which correlated to 10 am — 12 pm Sydney the next day. Yet these issues aside, we discovered that once students had "broken the ice" with one another they gave particularly innovative and constructive responses to the material based on approaching the themes of the Atlantic world history course by using cross-cultural comparison. The first week dealt with the notion of "discovery" and the place of Columbus and 1492 in the historiography of the "New World." It sought to allow students to face both the philosophical and historiographical assumptions inherent in a global perspective which privileges European explorations while accepting that this was an extraordinarily important moment in world history. We spent a fair amount of time addressing these assumptions from two perspectives: the first was in relation to indigenous reactions to "discovery" through cross-cultural dialogue and symbolic exchange, while the second was in relation to the early modern notions of the English term "*discoverie*" and its place in the European imagination. Both sets of students were able to comprehend the changing role of Europe from its former position on the western fringes of Afro-Eurasia to a position where the opening of the Atlantic passage caused a spatial paradigm shift of extraordinary proportions.

26 On the whole, American participants found this to be familiar ground and were able to offer nuanced and grounded views on the meaning and significance of the first European encounters in the Americas largely due to the place of Columbus as a foundational mythic figure in the American national imagination. Students in Boston pointed out that there remained a disjunction between myth and

reality: between the role of Columbus in the making of the American national narrative and the fact that the Columbus voyage is actually part of a story about Caribbean encounters which has colored subsequent historical representations. Australian students were able to learn from these views, but also offered some valuable insights based on a sense of critical distance from the U.S-centrism of much discussion on Columbus. This discussion thread was particularly interesting. Drawing from the cultural role of European explorers who "discovered" Australia in the making of a nationalist ethos, students in Sydney contrasted experience of Aboriginal peoples to the American experience.

27 When the class read Columbus' diaries, both sets of students were able to look into the universe of the Taino people and make sympathetic and imaginative portrayals of their "world view" without resorting to sentimentalism. This was a shared attribute in both American and Australian discussions. However, there were noticeable differences of opinion in regard to Mancall's comments that the indigenous peoples of the Americas should not be perceived as mere victims but should instead be perceived as historical agents facing specific circumstances. While both sets of students rejected the idea of a passive indigenous "other," there was considerable resistance to the idea of "mutual discovery" within a "cultural encounters" paradigm from students who stressed that, regardless of the motives of the Europeans, the ensuing massacre and devastation should not be diluted. This was termed the "invasion versus discovery" debate by one American student. Nevertheless, there was also some attempt to get into the mind-set of the symbolic universe of Europeans who were not equipped to deal with cultural difference. As one Australian student remarked poignantly, "were the ensuing tragedies the result of deliberate intent or horrible misunderstandings?"

28 Where American and Australian students converged was in their understanding of Eurocentric presuppositions and the idea of "discovery" not as a single act but as a series of events that were anchored in a wider world context. The ability to trace the Spanish explorations to the cultural effects of the "Reconquista" in Spain, to the broader global context of the Islamic control of the spice trade, and as an extension of the earlier conquest of the Canary Islands, shifted the discussions to a wider lens but still retained distinctive features depending on the national origin of the participant. While American students felt that they were able to relate this story to the narrative of their own national past, Australian students perceived it to be part of a broader and interconnected set of events.

29 In the discussions on the indigenous responses to European conquest in the Caribbean and North America in the second week, American students seemed to be at a distinct advantage in terms of their knowledge of indigenous cultures and patterns of settlement. For Australian students, this was possibly their first ever glimpse into the indigenous cultures of the Caribbean and the Americas and one 'Sydneysider' commented that she "had no idea that the Native Americans had so many diverse and co-operative societies interacting in such a civilized manner." In the case of cross-cultural insights into the indigenous experience, both American and Australian students employed local and national reference points in order to render more sensitive appraisals of the effects of European incursions on indigenous lifeways. For example, one American participant posted a lengthy commentary on the current state of indigenous health, education, and life expectancy on Native American reservations which Australian students found revealing and instructive while students in Sydney employed their own knowledge of the Aboriginal experience in Australia as a contrast. This became known as the "reservations today" discussion thread. Likewise, the parallel experiences of European colonization and British imperial expansion were also discussed in relation to localized American and Australian landscapes. Students were able to discuss mutual points of reference in regard to the shared histories of colonization and indigenous dispossession, gaining an appreciation for culturally specific and alternative historical trajectories by which to make global connections.

Both sets of students shared an insight into the destructiveness of European incursions but they also tended to acknowledge the ways in which indigenous peoples in the Americas have been romanticized in conventional histories. Moving beyond the paradigm of the innocent and pristine native wilderness, as Julia Miller has termed it in her teaching, enables us to view indigenous lifeways in a more realistic light, especially in terms of pre-European environmental degradation. 30

While there were mutual frames of reference by which both American and Australian students were able to understand European-indigenous encounters in the Atlantic world from their own localized historical experiences of settler colonialism, the same could not be said of the African experience. The slave trade and African interactions are vital components of the American national narrative, but these themes are distant to the story of Australian interactions with a world in which Africa remains largely absent. This difference was translated into the amount of cultural knowledge that each group of students possessed regarding the part played by the slave trade in the shaping of a new global economy and the Africanization of the Americas. For the students in Boston, the subjects of the Middle Passage, the Charter Generation, the créolization of Africans, and the historical genealogy of slavery in Africa were somewhat familiar. But these were new and exciting fields of exposure for Australian students who had little or no experience with African migration and cultural interaction. The discussion thread on this topic revealed that American students were reading the material through their own "localized" interpretations of the place of slavery in the Americas. 31

Despite the fact that the African-American experience was quite remote for Australian students, this was arguably the most popular topic for Sydney participants in the International Tutorial. The popularity of contemporary African-American popular culture forms (dance, music, and film, for example) amongst young Australians may account for such enthusiasm, but it was also very obvious that there were broader and more serious concerns for this interest. Pat Manning's questions for this week on "captivity" and the human dimensions of slavery were popular on both sides of the world since they urged students to engage with themes of universal suffering that transcend cultural differences: "Were the young captives afraid? Angry? Depressed?" 32

In this context, discussions of the slave narratives of Phyllis Wheatley, Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano turned into a dialogue on the universality of the human condition and the relationship between slavery and European modernity. Likewise, all students found the "Atlantic creole" thesis of Ira Berlin an interesting way to discuss the identities of a previous wave of Africans who were already culturally transformed through contacts and interactions with European merchants and missionaries.21 33

The other broad topic that stimulated much interest amongst both groups of students was the question of inter-racial marriage and inter-racial sexuality in the Americas in relation to the status of Africans in racial hierarchies. From this, both American and Australian students were able to reflect on the nature and power structure of their own racially hybridized societies. The question of gender also figured prominently, and students were very much aware that much of the literature on the Atlantic world and African slavery has largely been written from a male perspective. Terms such as "African culture" and "African slave" were historiographically deconstructed from the point of view of the African woman. As a result, the role of African women as transmitters of cultural identity within the domestic sphere, and their role as nurturers and protectors of white children on plantations, resulted in some very insightful interpretations which will shape future versions of the syllabus. 34

While English as a medium of instruction was a definite advantage for such an international collaboration between the U.S. and Australia, there were anomalies in vernacular expression that we did not envisage. In some ways, this interrupted the flow of a discussion thread when students from one side of the world misinterpreted the expressions used by students from the opposite group. Australian 35

slang, for instance, or the tendency to be more casual when expressing ideas were difficult attributes for American students to adjust to. We also encountered a subtle complication in forms of address online or "the formality issue," as we came to call it. In the U.S., students tend to address faculty members by title ("Professor Manning"), while Australian students often address faculty members by their given name ("Adrian"). In addition, Northeastern students were in their early twenties, while Macquarie students were, on average, in their thirties. Northeastern students, uncomfortable with addressing their sixtyish convener as "Patrick" online, left some of their comments unaddressed or unattributed; some Macquarie students picked up the hint and shifted from "Patrick" to "Professor Manning." We never addressed the question explicitly online, but in one week Adrian took the Northeastern students and Patrick took the Macquarie students, to address the situation and this seemed to work well in getting students to feel that they could forge a more equitable relationship with their online teacher.

Student Responses

Our evaluation of this experience took the form of our own exchange and discussion, plus a comprehensive 25-question student survey which was prepared in collaboration with the Centre for Professional Development (CPD) at Macquarie. Before circulation to students the questionnaire went through a rigorous ethics clearance process at Macquarie before any feedback could be published, since the research was employing human participation.[22] Nine of twenty students responded, eight from Macquarie.[23] Of the nine students responding, eight were female, and five were over 35 years old. The Macquarie students were external, living not only in the Sydney area but also throughout Australia. Over half the students had experienced online learning. Asked about the web site, students were quite content with its functionality, but some wanted additional clarity in the timing of assignments. 36

What did students get out of an international tutorial such as this? They agreed generally that they did get important ideas from the tutorial, and they remarked that the questions from conveners helped them develop their own ideas. Students responded that the most important of these ideas, in ascending order, concerned cross-cultural interactions, the history of ideas and historiography, historical specificity, and issues surrounding global patterns. One Australian student remarked, "it is refreshing to get a global perspective on a period of history that is generally recognized from a Eurocentric point of view." Another submitted this pertinent reflection: "what I have enjoyed about this unit is the challenge that it has set to existing analysis. Rather than accepting that the history of the U.S. is one and the same as the history of the Atlantic world, we have used a cross-cultural analysis. We have looked at Atlantic history from the point of view of indigenous peoples, not just the impact on them, but *their* impact on Europeans and Africans." The respondents agreed that learning with students from another country helped them as world history students, and especially that it helped them appreciate alternative cultural viewpoints. As one American student remarked, "it was interesting to hear the opinions of the Australian students. Just the knowledge that they were non-American made me more interested in the tutorial." In a likewise manner, one Australian respondent said that the International Tutorial "helped me to appreciate different perspectives on 'American history' depending on how close you were to the subject matter." 37

The shared readings were seen as useful, and the discussions definitely stimulated further interest in the reading material. Almost all agreed that cross-cultural discussion helped them think about patterns in world history. In the words of one Australian student, "learning in a global environment with fellow students from a different University and culture helped me as world history student." Students felt comfortable communicating with the facilitators, but not all felt they could communicate clearly with 38

students from the corresponding overseas group. This may have been due to the inability to translate colloquialisms and speech tone in written discussions but this, in itself, forced some students to stand back and reflect on some of their own unconscious cultural constructions. As one Australian student remarked wryly, "just the act of forcing myself to remember that our colleagues may not understand some of our 'Australianisms' made me more aware of cultural constructions."

Some participants reported that they were most likely to send a posting in response to a question or challenge from other students; others said they were most likely to send a posting to express their own strong feelings or in response to the readings. They said they were least likely to send a posting to very general statements, or when several others had already spoken up. Participants were asked whether discussion on each topic should be confined to one week, or allowed to continue. A majority favored confining discussion to a single week, but a substantial minority wanted each discussion to continue into a second week, especially as they sometimes fell behind. 39

Students were asked to suggest improvements. Suggestions included teaming up students for some purposes, either as U.S.-Australian pairs or as pairs in each country. Asked what they gained from the experience, students were generally positive. One commented: "it is important to connect globally in our studies—not just for the challenge to cultural paradigms, but as very real reminders of the value and diversity of opinion." One participant noted feeling disappointment when the tutorial came to an end. A Macquarie student responded to one question with an observation that we found insightful: "Northeastern students were more focused on North America whereas because it was all new to Macquarie students we were more flexible in that what we learnt and focused on related to both North America and South America." 40

Implications and Conclusions

In 1988, it appeared that the future had arrived when Tufts University and Moscow State University offered a joint course where students at both universities heard the same lectures, were assigned the same reading, and engaged in joint class discussions via a transnational television link.[24] There was a pedagogical buzz in the air in regard to the potential relationship of technology and college instruction where a brave new world of global learning was about to be ushered in. Indeed, as Parker Rossman comments, it was assumed that the era of the "global classroom" had arrived.[25] Twenty-eight years later, we know that this promise of a global teaching future was not only premature but faces vexed issues in relation to quality, social access, the corporatization of higher learning, and the complicities between online teaching and globalization. Moreover, even with the reality of teaching online units across national boundaries through the internet, the question remains about how "global" this initiative really is. 41

World historians commonly espouse an idealistic philosophy of global interaction which is not always possible in practice. In the International Tutorial, we experienced the outcome of a balanced cross-cultural interaction where local, national, and global perspectives were often in a field of contestation. The broader implications of this experiment for world history instruction are not yet clear. It does appear that the internet has facilitated a new kind of learning and teaching environment which remains both local and national but is still connected to a wider pedagogical context. The online discussions and types of cultural exchanges created through the International Tutorial fostered a virtual learning network where the "local" met the "global," even though the real talk remained very much anchored to national perspectives.[26] By its very nature, world history teaching and learning programs seem well-placed to take advantage of this new "glocal" environment which equips students with cross-cultural 42

skills through their dialogue on world history issues while enabling facilitators to manage group learning processes through their own national perspectives.

43 Certain individuals blossomed during the course of the tutorial, improving in both their use of the electronic technology and in the level of their discussion. Generally, of course, students do not undergo rapid transformations in very short periods, but both teachers and students can tell when students are motivated and inspired by the material and finding pleasure in that pursuit. We believe that students approached the reading material in a constructive and critical manner, and that their interest came not only from their personal interpretation of the readings or even from their consultation with an instructor from a different country, but also from the opportunity to connect at an international level with students from another continent. As one Australian student remarked, "it is important to connect globally in our studies — not just for the challenge to cultural paradigms, but as very real reminder of the value and diversity of opinion. It is also important to make personal global connections in the academic world." Having said this, however, the conveners on both sides of the world did not feel that the international engagement was truly "global" or that it led to greater "democratization" in world history teaching and learning as the protagonists of the "virtual global university" would have us believe.

44 Despite this hesitation, we did feel that course content was portable across national boundaries, and that it is worth repeating a revised version of the International Tutorial in 2006.[27] The 2006 version will possibly include Wimba voice software (Voice Boards and Voice E-Mail) so that students in Boston and Sydney may be able to "hear" each other as if they were having a telephone conversation. We also expect to adjust the readings to emphasize global patterns as well as the regional specifics of Atlantic encounters. Of particular note will be the emphasis on the place of the Atlantic world from Asian perspectives by turning the gaze away from Europe to consider the ways in which China and the Philippines were pivotal players in the new global economy that linked Afro-Eurasia to the Americas. The role of the silver trade and the formation of an economic world system will also be emphasized to counterbalance the theme of cultural interactions. There will also be more emphasis on widening and interrogating the "Atlantic paradigm" from the Pacific perspective, bringing in Polynesian interactions through Easter Island and Hawai'i and looking at the ways in which linguistic and ecological exchange forged very different interactions to the story of European exceptionalism.

45 We will also look for devices to emphasize reflective discussion or cumulative exercises. We will look for a way to adopt the suggestion that we pair up individual students for one or two exercises: these "binational" pairings would put students into closer contact with one another, and ought to spark further discussion. Active participation in discussion by the two conveners remains a priority and we were gratified by the students' expressions of pleasure with our questions and discussion. Another issue we have discussed is the time zone difference. Would it be more effective to offer a three-hour block at a certain period in the day that would be mutually convenient for students in both the U.S. and Australia? While "real time" interaction is probably impossible, there may be ways of making it more enticing for students to participate if they were to receive quick responses to their queries and an electronic forum that allowed for a "chat room" type of exchange.

46 To be sure, on-line world history teaching across national boundaries through this type of virtual interaction has some viable and exciting outcomes which can be adapted and built upon by practitioners in the field. Whether to do so, however, at the expense of commodifying world history learning in an era where the "virtual classroom" is under greater scrutiny as a multinational commercial enterprise rather than as a global pedagogical tool is the more urgent question at hand. Geyer and Bright's prognosis that world history needs to be anchored in the "actually existing" world of the contemporary age sounds good enough in terms of fostering transnational interactions of the kind fostered in this

experiment. However, the issues of cultural homogenization and the corporatization of higher education learning, and where world history programs should fit into this new virtual order, needs more sustained debate from practitioners in the field. Without careful consideration of the historical and economic context of late capitalism and its relationship to new online teaching collaborations, the project of globalization itself could risk being glorified in clearly unintentional ways. Geyer and Bright rightly predicted that "the central challenge of a renewed world history at the end of the twentieth century is to narrate the world's pasts in an age of globality," but it seems that the new challenge for the twenty-first century is to find a way of fostering global interactions in our world history teaching while retaining a commitment to fostering educational standards, widening social access, and observing cross-cultural ethics.

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[2] Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," in Ross E. Dunn, ed., *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 565-566.

[3] See John R. McNeil and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye View of World History* (New York: WW Norton and Co., 2003).

[4] See Jeanne McConachie and Patrick Alan Danaher, eds., "Strategic Enterprises Down Under: Engaging Drivers of Change in Australian Universities' Open and Distance Learning Provision," special edition of *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 6:1 (2005). http://www.irrodl.org/content/v6.1/index.html.

[5] See American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC) at http://www.adec.edu/.

[6] "Units" of study at Macquarie University correspond to "courses" in the United States—a term of instruction for a certain number of "credits" (or sometimes "units" in the U.S.) toward a degree. "External units" in Australia are taken off campus.

[7] See James C. Taylor and Peter Swannell, USQ: An E-University for an E-World," *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 2:1 (July 2001): http://www.irrodl.org/content/v2.1/index.html.

[8] "Measuring Success in E-Learning: The Academic Perspective." Whitepaper: An Assessment of Seventeen E-Learning Initiatives in Education, Sun Microsystems, article # 11489, volume 09, issue 2. See http://www.sun.com/products-n-solutions/whitepapers/pdf/measuring_success.pdf.

[9] See S. Alexander and D. Blight, "Internationalisation of Education through the Virtual University," in Graham Hart and John Mason, eds., *Symposium Proceedings and Case Studies: The Virtual University?* (University of Melbourne, 1996), 102.

[10] For a set of networked and linked approaches to researching world history, see Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History* (London: Palgrave, 2003), 276-282.

[11] John Field, "Globalisation, Consumption and the Learning Business," in *Distance Education* 16:2 (1995), 270.

[12] Robin Mason, *Globalising Education: Trends and Applications* (London: Routledge, 1998), 6.

[13] John Tiffin and Lalita Rajasingham, *The Global Virtual University* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[14] See Gerard Delanty, "The University and Modernity: A History of the Present", in Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, eds., *The Virtual University? Knowledge, Markets and Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31-48.

[15] See David F. Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 9.

[16] *Ibid.*, 5. See also David F. Noble, "Technology and the Commodification of Higher Education", in *Monthly Review* 53:10 (2002).

[17] On the other hand, the globalization of education through the provision of online flexible delivery programs on the internet is not exclusively a feature of an English-speaking or Western perspective. An innovative example is the Distance Education program of the Tamil University at Thanjavur, India. Calling itself "Tamil Virtual University," it is designed to provide online learning solutions for the world-wide Tamil diaspora. See http://www.tamilvu.org/coresite/html/cwintrodu.htm.

[18] The importance of a national agenda shaping education curriculum in countries such as India and Algeria, for instance, is intimately associated with the need to address an imperial past in a postcolonial framework.

[19] The view that "world history" needs to be re-considered with respect to cultural location and historiographical specificity is considered in Marnie Hughes-Warrington, ed., *World Histories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

[20] See Mihai I. Spariosu, *Global Intelligence and Human Development: Towards an Ecology of Global Learning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 8-9, 68-71, 104-105.

[21] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

[22] Permission to use student responses for research purposes was granted by the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research), College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Macquarie University on 29 June 2005. Reference: HE27MAY2005-R04147.

[23] Though the International Tutorial ended in April, the questionnaire was circulated in July, because of the time required for design and especially for ethics clearance. By this time Northeastern students were away from school on summer vacation. This provides a reminder of the additional complexities that come with collaboration among institutions with different calendars.

[24] See Jay Chrepta, "Creating the Planet-Wide Classroom," *Tufts Criterion*, no. 15, Spring-Summer 1988.

[25] Parker Rossman, *The Emerging Worldwide Electronic University: Information Age Global Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 2.

[26] See Linda Harasim, *Online Education: Perspectives on a New Environment* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

[27] A second International Tutorial did in fact take place in March and April of 2006, though it met after this article was composed. The authors have concluded that the experience of the 2006 session largely confirmed the results described here.
