



WORKGROUP #2  
GLOBAL SCHOLARS  
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

AUGUST 2021

# Virtual vs In-person

Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Exchange Programs

SUPERVISOR

Tom Karrel

FELLOWS

Alekhya Reddy | Rollins College

Emmanuel Howard | University Of Colorado Boulder

Godwin Albert Acquah | BridgeAfrica

Hawa Barry | Cornell University

Lauryn Vania Kurniawan | Hong Kong Baptist University

Matthew Willis | Rollins College

Sarah Annabel | BridgeAfrica

# Background

As the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a wave of office and school closures around the world, many organizations have had to adapt their activities to a virtual modality. The sheer volume of individuals suddenly thrust into virtual work or education programs has doubtlessly raised questions regarding the conduciveness of such programs to achieving key outcomes. However, it is important to observe that there is a substantial body of research on the effectiveness of virtual exchange programs, particularly within the context of higher education, which predates the pandemic. There have also been studies and evaluations done by foundations and programs such as the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange is a program designed to enhance academic and intercultural cooperation amongst the European Union and select neighboring states.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, cross-cultural exchange is defined as "dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas". However, it is important to note that cross-cultural exchange can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. Cultural exchange takes place through tourism (focused in the research by Thyne, Lawson and Todd), joint business ventures, higher education (DeLong et al, 2011), and military activities, not to mention the intergroup interactions which are common within multicultural societies. This makes it harder to form a fixed definition about what exactly cross-cultural exchange encases. Nevertheless, it is safe to mention that cross-cultural exchange refers to any activity that involves more than one culture.

# Target Group

In analyzing in-person vs virtual cross-cultural exchange, we need not compare the two because they are different aspects that offer different experiences; so they should not be treated as opposites (O'Dowd, 2021). Hybrid programs that combine both in-person and virtual tools are seemingly the best and most progressive way forward. However, hybrid programs need to consider the ratio in which they merge the two tools for cross-cultural exchange in a way that is best fit for the groups involved. There are various groups that can be involved in cross-cultural exchange and this affects how effectively virtual or in-person programs can be used. Countries of origin can affect the ability of participants to travel and engage in in-person activities. Travel restrictions, long wait-times to attain visas and other documentation hindrances may limit the access of people from certain countries to engage in in-person cross-cultural exchange programs.

## Geographical Units

Geographic units should also be considered when developing cross-cultural programs.

Participants in rural areas may not be able to access virtual programs as comfortably as participants in urban areas due to issues with; internet connectivity; or electricity to power devices. In-person vs virtual programs should be prioritized depending in the location of the participants to ensure all participants are able to sufficiently engage in the program.

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# ● Target Group ●

## Individual

Virtual platforms of cross-cultural exchange have presented new opportunities for individuals. Participants are able to go deeper into the content and explore a wide range of material in virtual programs. It has been noted however that this may present a heavier workload that may even cause participants to drop out of the program. So the program content should be sufficiently controlled with some material being made optional. Individuals may be faced with some limitations in virtual platforms. For example, individual collaborations may not occur as naturally as they would during in-person activities. In-person activities are more spontaneous and engaging. In-person cross-cultural exchange however may be expensive to individuals owing to travel and accommodation expenses.

## Groups

Different groups will call for different levels of combination of in-person vs virtual tools. Regarding age groups, maturity usually determines the ability to self-govern that is critical to the effectiveness of virtual cross-cultural exchange. Younger teen participants stand to learn more through observation and immersion hence their programs should lean more towards in-person activities; and more engaging activities over assignments when using virtual platforms. Young adults can be engaged on virtual platforms to familiarize with content and in-person activities to apply and enhance their knowledge.

# Purpose

- **The purpose of our research is to assess the effectiveness of cross cultural communication between in person and online settings.**
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- **Our research will help us evaluate the Pros and Cons of global classrooms and their impact on cultural exchange for young adults.**
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- **Our findings are being conducted through primary research in the form of interviews with community leaders and secondary research that is already compiled through various sources such as papers.**
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- **The research we acquire is to be presented to GLI's staff, board, and sponsors. We plan to provide ideas that help improve the future of cultural exchange programs within GLI and other Academic programs and institutions.**
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# Research Question

**Should mixed-mode (virtual and physical meetings) be implemented for engagement-related events in order to improve and complete the learning experience as well as accommodate those who may be incapable to travel?**

# Methods

## Primary Research:

- Interviews:
  - Jessica Hawkey (CALs Global Fellows Program Advisor)
  - Jorge Mendez of the Watson Institute (Boulder, CO)
- Questionnaire

## Secondary Research:

- Research Papers

# Jessica Hawkey - Interview

- Jessica Hawkey is the coordinator and head advisor of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Global Fellows Program at Cornell University.
- Our interview focused on addressing how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted cross-cultural exchange within the program.
- As the scholars program typically has its participants spend 7-8 weeks working with various organizations and partners in countries across 6 continents, the switch to a virtual setting has completely altered the original model of the program. After a postponement in 2020, last year's scholars, in addition to a new cohort, were restricted to solely remote work.
- The interview revealed that the cultural immersion aspect of the program was the most impacted due to the limitations imposed by entirely virtual interactions.
- Although fellows were able to communicate with their coworkers and supervisors via Zoom and get a sense of the cultural identity of their respective countries through those interactions, it was a far cry from the level of immersion that previous years had experienced. Other challenges faced by the fellows were maintaining a sense of work-life balance, mainly due to differing time zones, in addition to working for institutions who were still learning how to most effectively translate their work into a virtual format.
- However, despite these drawbacks, Jessica acknowledged that the introduction of the virtual/remote model also came with many positives. One of the main ones being accessibility; fellows were able to engage with organizations in countries that were previously unavailable. Partners found new and creative ways to introduce the cultural immersion element through virtual cooking lessons and language classes. Additionally, fellows learned new skills on adaptability and those conducting research found the virtual model to be incredibly beneficial and easily adaptable.
- Going forward as vaccinations lead us closer to the end of the global pandemic the Global Fellows Program will continue in 2022 with a hybrid model. This will allow both virtual and in-person cultural exchange, giving future fellows the choice to engage in whatever method feels the most accessible and beneficial to their individual needs and skillsets.



# Jorge Mendez - Interview

- Jorge Méndez is a Director of Programs for the Watson Institute, and coordinates its entrepreneurship accelerator based in Boulder, Colorado. Naturally, complications resulting from the pandemic have pushed this program onto video conferencing platforms. He appreciates that the move to virtual programming has opened up more opportunities for students who would otherwise be limited by cost, visa issues, or other concerns. He views the greater diversity of these programs as undoubtedly a positive aspect.
- At the same time, however, the adaptation to the pandemic brings with it the key assumption that traditional lectures do not hold students' attention nearly as well with a virtual configuration as with an in-person one.
- In the view of Méndez and his colleagues, a three-hour talk might have to be 'broken up' into a variety of small-group workshops and asynchronous activities. This would require a dedicated team in order to curate virtual materials in place of a single session with one or a few speakers.

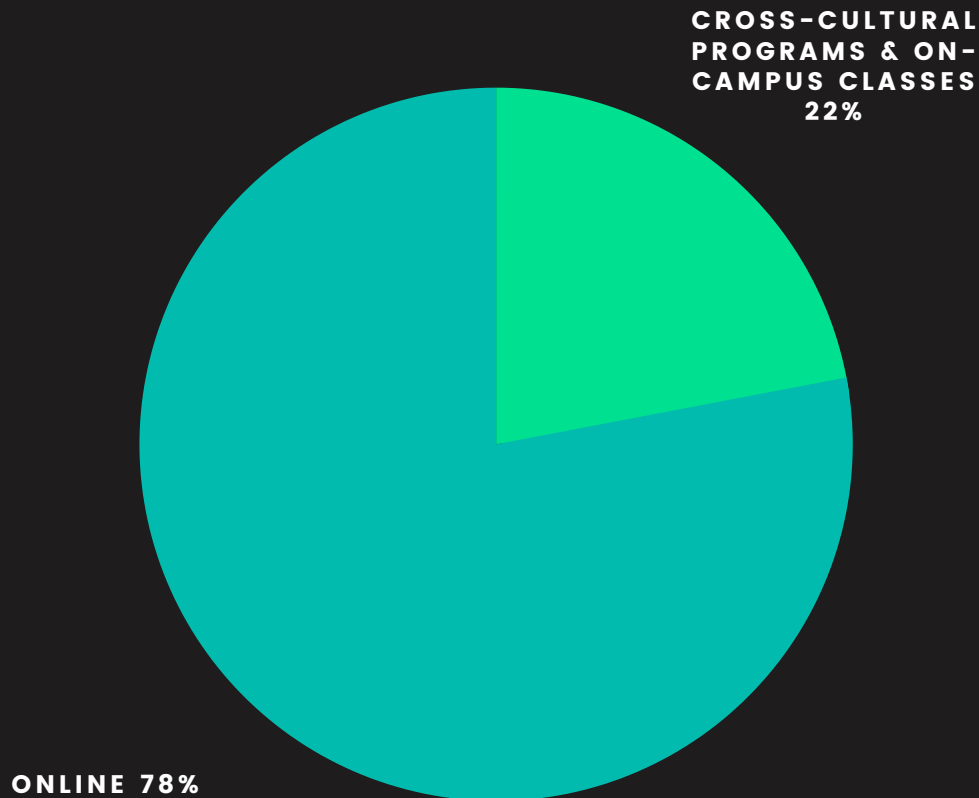
# Questionnaire

**Prompt questions and discussions were the most preferred methods of active engagement followed closely by having work groups. Other activities suggested were projects, readings, lectures, break-out sessions, and participant engagement .e.g. online polls during meetings.**

**The most appreciated aspects of virtual programs included; being able to participate while travelling, reaching new people without geographical constraints, participating at home, more time with family, flexibility, and general convenience.**

**The positives of in-person programs included; interacting with and being around people, giving physical presentations, being present without distractions, easier group communication, personal connection, and a sense of community.**

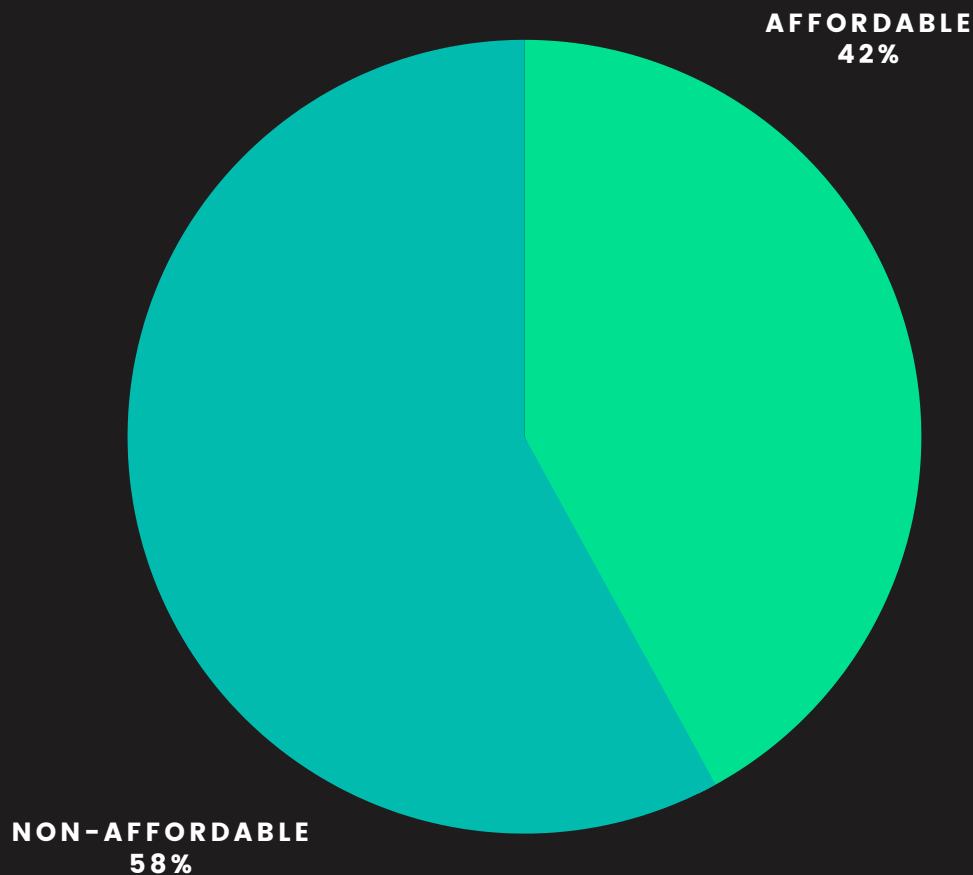
# Questionnaire Participants



**The mean age of the participants of the survey was 21 years.**

**Of the participants 78% have only taken part in online classes and 22% have also taken part in both cross-cultural programs and online campus classes.**

# Questionnaire Findings



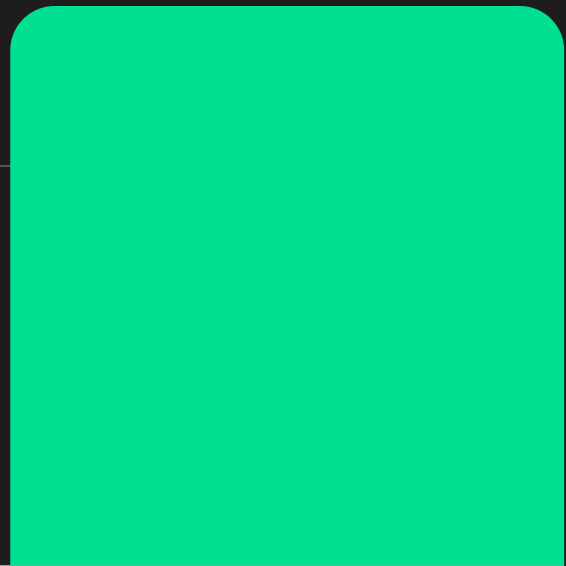
**While both virtual and in-person programs are fairly flexible to the respondents, virtual programs were marked a little more flexible than in person programs.**

# Participation during In-Person Programs

**VERY ACTIVE**  
**57**

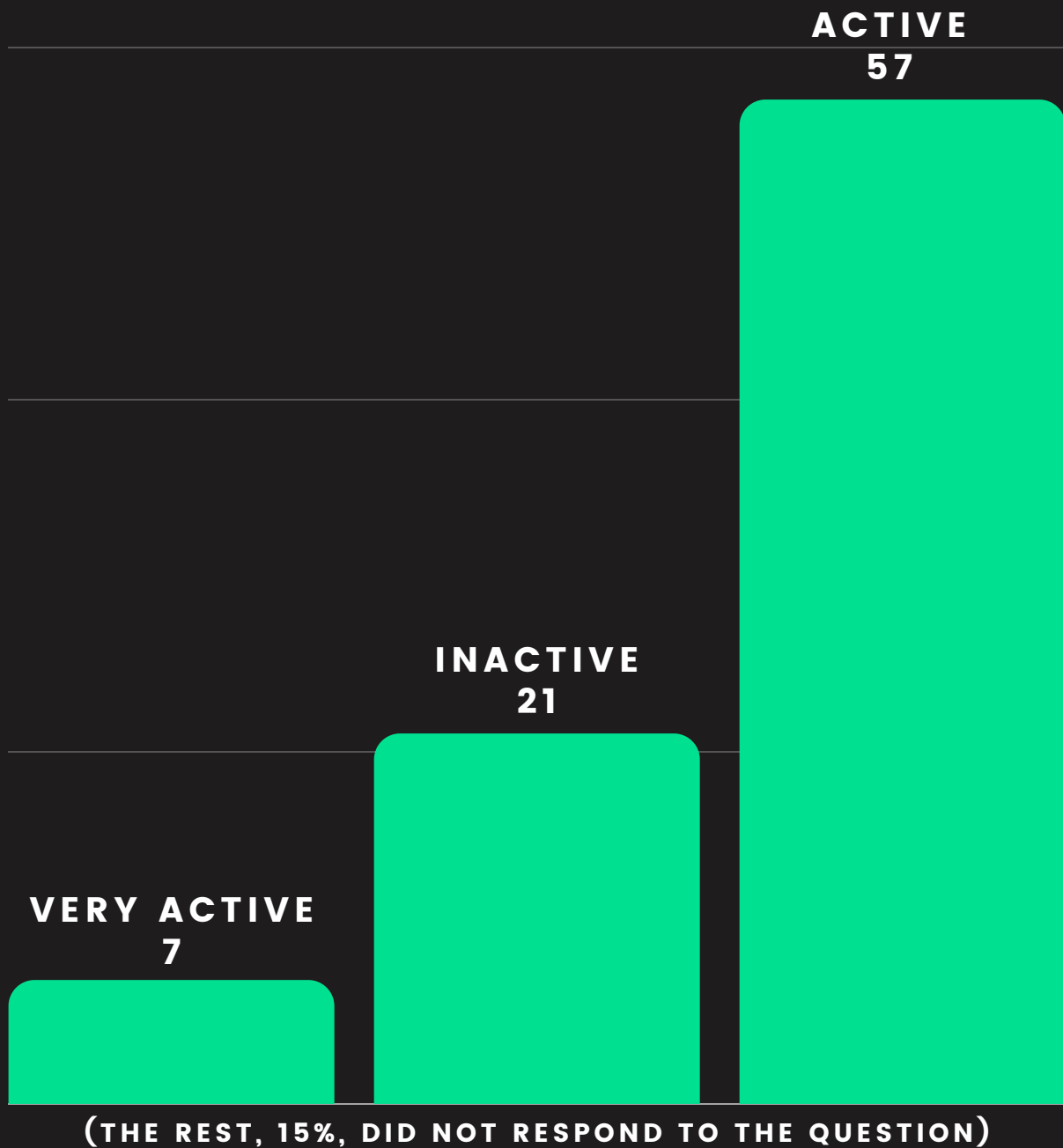


**ACTIVE**  
**28**



**(THE REST, 15%, DID NOT RESPOND TO THE QUESTION)**

# Participation during Virtual Programs



# Literature Review

- The past two decades have seen a wealth of research on the effectiveness of intercultural exchange programs in a higher education context. A strong intercultural competency - the ability to work in a group while comfortably navigating varying norms - is increasingly desired in professional settings, and so exchange programs are increasingly seen as necessary for universities to incorporate into their curricula (DeLong et al., 2011).
- The most effective intercultural exchange programs are goal- or problem-oriented, enhancing one's understanding of other cultures while facilitating the completion of specific tasks (Breslin, 2000). For example, DeLong's study focuses on a cooperative marketing design project between American and Korean students. Such projects allow students to learn about the cultural, political, and other nuances amongst each others' societies, while offering a chance to apply their acquired technical and cultural knowledge.
- Virtual programs have been proposed as a means of promoting these cultural competencies since even before the pandemic. Evaluations of the European Union's Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, for instance, have found that virtual modalities remain considerably effective for promoting cross-cultural curiosity and tolerance, as well as interest in foreign languages (Helm & van der Velden, 2019).

# Online/Virtual Results

## Cons:

the inability to read body language, video call fatigue, reduced participation of introverted team members, technical glitches, less accountability, difficulty communicating directly,

- Students learning at the mercy of poor internet connection and available technology
- at home distractions and noise can affect attention span
- digital skills vary from student to student and instructor to instructor
- IT infrastructure is better in wealthier universities

Even Harder to connect to students and understand their needs

- this gets harder the bigger the class

Decreased competition from peers and feeling of belonging

- more difficult to detect misconceptions

## Pros:

Online learning makes education more accessible

- More affordable, no commute, fits in schedule, less required prerequisites,
- Bigger classroom sizes, smaller classroom sizes

Easier Connection to foreign countries

- Language acquisition
- Cultural exchange

Technology has increased the role of gamification

- the application of gaming elements to improve engagement. play based learning is seen in language learning apps, and other educational games that assist in retention.



# In-Person Results

## Cons:

- **Location and socio-economic status can have a negative impact on a students ability to learn**
- **At university or private school level this becomes more of a barrier due to finances**
- **Lengthy and time consuming courses that could be watched at home**
- **Unfavorable learning style for introverts or uncomfortable for less confident students.**

## Pros:

- **Easier to understand the needs and concerns of students as well as connect with them.**
- **More interactive learning environment**
- **More In-depth interpersonal and intercultural communication**
- **Two way dialogue an effective learning method**
- **In person learning is especially important for language learning and cultural exchange**
- **Students feel a greater connection with their environment, peer and learning material during in person settings .**

# Discussion

## #1

From the questionnaire results it can be concluded that while virtual programs have provided benefits such as flexibility, in-person programs are the more widely preferred choice. To keep the benefits of the virtual programs for both organizers and students, a blended program is the best way forward. In the university students' demographic, a small portion of online programming blended with in-person activities can be pursued. To address participation challenges in virtual programs, more activities should be adopted to improve engagement.

## #2

The themes of accessibility and effectiveness of delivery were a major driver of the research.

Accessibility was found to vary across target groups. It was also noted that virtual programs are accessible to a wider range of participants- from the organizers' side. From the participants' side, virtual programs are very flexible and transcend costs and restrictions to travel.

The effectiveness of delivery falls largely on the part of organizers. They need to adopt new and creative ways of keeping students engaged and active during virtual programs .e.g. prompt discussions, breakout sessions and online polls. Pursuing mixed-mode learning should combine the positive aspects of both virtual and in-person programs.

## #3

The wide range of students who took part in the study may have biased results and not collected enough specific information on cross-cultural programs as opposed to general online studies. By narrowing the focus specifically to participants of cross-cultural programs, more accurate response can be recorded and better recommendations generated.

# Recommendations

The recommendation is that about a quarter of programs can be pursued online. E.g. as preparation before embarking on the physical part of the program.

For cross-cultural programs, this can be a look at theories, background readings, and skills that can then be put into action in the in-person portion of the program.

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