UArctic Thematic Network Proposal

COIL@UArctic

Thematic Network on Collaborative Online International Learning and Biodiversity Education across the Arctic Circle

Organising Bodies Thematic Network host organisation and partners

Lead Contact: Izzy Crawford, Robert Gordon University, Scotland
Vice-lead Contact: Elina Oksanen University of Eastern Finland, Finland
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What Is COIL and How Does It Work?

The proposed thematic network would help to promote and facilitate Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and biodiversity education across the Arctic region.

COIL or Collaborative Online International Learning is a sustained educational approach where groups or individual students from one institution collaborate with groups or individual students from another institution, in a different country and/or culture, on sustained and assessed projects or assignments, developed collaboratively by tutors from both partner institutions. The collaborative work takes place online, using freely available and commonly used communication technology, such as MS Teams, Zoom, etc. COIL projects can involve any topic, subject or discipline and are ofter inter-disciplinary in nature. Biodiversity is one example of how COIL pedagogy can be applied.

COIL, which is part of the growing field of Virtual Exchange, Telecollaboration, and Globally Networked Learning, was pioneered by the SUNY COIL Center more than 15 years ago with the vision of "a world free from implicit bias, where people engage across differences to fully connect with others", believing in "an educational environment that fosters shared values, mutual understanding, and critical digital literacy, and which promotes interaction across boundaries to develop leadership, collaborative problem solving and contextualized decision making" (SUNY, 2021). The COIL model uses free, online tools and removes the need for physical travel, conserving resources, and maximising participation for students and faculty.

This type of experiential learning promotes intercultural competence, as well as the attitudes and reflective behavioral skills that are vital for a globalized society and economy. Rapid technological advances in international trade, and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic, has had a profound effect on the way people work and communicate in a borderless, virtual environment. To remain competitive amid dynamic and global uncertainty, employers need graduates who have future-proofed skills such as ongoing knowledge acquisition, competency, creativity, confidence, flexibility, and resilience. The proposed COIL@UArctic thematic network would seek to develop these attributes with participants.

There is a growing body of international, practice-based, evidence that suggests that participants consider COIL to be a worthwhile, engaging experience that enhances transversal skill development and employability, promotes intercultural and digital competency, and provides a platform to address issues of common or global concern by engaging highly heterogenous, geographically, and demographically diverse groups. (Crawford, I. 2021; Deardorff, D. & Jones, E. 2012; International Virtual Exchange Conference, 2020; SUNY COIL Center. 2019).

Initial Topic for the COIL@UArctic Network

The University of Eastern Finland, the University of Helsinki, the University of Oulu, the University of Turku, and the University of Jyväskylä have launched a joint project to develop a nationwide Finnish Biodiversity Education initiative. It will explore further opportunities for multi-disciplinary collaboration, including e.g., geographical, social, and economic, as well as perspectives from Indigenous peoples. New research ideas will be developed and needs for biodiversity-related education will be identified. The Finnish Biodiversity Education initiative will be at the centre of the COIL@UArctic thematic network, helping to illustrate how COIL can be used to address important global issues and providing a ready-made platform for UArctic members to collaborate in this area.

Inclusion of Indigenous Issues

The Lead partner was approached for interview by a reporter from the Nunavut News who had heard about the proposal and thought it could be of potential benefit for Canadian Arctic Communities. To move forward with the proposal, we particularly welcome and seek participation from Indigenous UArctic members to join and plan together what kind of online education is needed, and to explore further opportunities for appropriate and desirable multi-disciplinary, online collaboration.

Benefits for UArctic Members

The COIL@UArctic thematic network will promote unique educational opportunities and higher academic collaboration, and the focus on biodiversity education through the Biodiversity.now COIL example has potential to provide knowledge for better lives and environments for all UArctic partners.

Sharing examples from the Finnish Biodiversity Education initiative to help illustrate what COIL@UArctic resources might look like and how they could function, would build on existing learning materials in Circumpolar Studies which provide knowledge, information and guidance about Arctic issues and the environment.

Webinar Workshops for UArctic Members advocating COIL as a recognised teaching and learning approach across UArctic would allow more people to harness and contribute to the growing body of knowledge, expertise, networks, and pedagogical advantages that COIL offers to faculty and students in the post-pandemic Higher Education context.

A dedicated COIL@UArctic Web Page on the UArctic website explaining what COIL is, what the benefits are, and how prospective partners can connect with each other would enable international partner institutions to identify and collaborate with UArctic faculty and students in a structured, streamlined, and measurable way.

A partner development area on the UArctic website, including project start-up guidelines; best practice examples and case studies; COIL teaching, learning and assessment resources; digital skills support; internal and external training opportunities; peer support; and access to global COIL networks, would enable participants to easily access the information and resources they need to design, deliver, and evaluate their own COIL and Biodiversity Education projects.

Collaboration with UArctic Laera Institute

A connection with UArctic Laera Institute has been made and a meeting will be held during the spring to ensure that there will be no overlaps, and that close collaboration between the COIL thematic network and the UArctic Laera Institute will produce mutual benefits.

Thematic Network Goals

Within the context of the Arctic dialogue, the network has four key aims:

1. To promote and enable wider engagement with COIL as part of a future-focussed, globally connected, virtual learning strategy.
2. To highlight the importance of biodiversity for the well-being of the planet as well as for sustainable development.
3. To enhance student employability within the Arctic region through the promotion of future-focussed, inter-disciplinary, transversal skill development using COIL.
4. To democratise student mobility and strengthen internationalisation at home through the expansion of COIL knowledge and opportunities across the Arctic region.

Planned Activities

In addition to enhancing employability, COIL has the potential to democratize mobility in remote areas and address issues of common concern such as biodiversity. Students who participate in COIL projects use real world scenarios and clients to learn how to research global issues. One of the most urgent is the rapid decline in biodiversity due to the unsustainable use of natural resources, climate change, the fragmentation of ecosystems, the spread of invasive species, the destruction of habitats, and other human activities.

Building on the recent experience of three UArctic members in Maine, Eastern Finland, and Scotland and following further collaboration with new partners (see partner list) planned activities include the co-creation of:

A COIL Toolkit, Training, and Resources

- Webinar Workshop for UArctic Members exploring COIL as a recognised teaching and learning approach across UArctic.

- Dedicated COIL Web Page on the UArctic website explaining what COIL is, what the benefits are, and how prospective partners can connect with each other.
- Dedicated Staff Development Area on the UArctic website including project start-up guidelines; best practice examples and case studies; COIL teaching, learning and assessment resources; digital skills support; internal and external training opportunities; peer support; and access to global COIL networks.

Examples of COIL

- Sharing examples from the Finnish Biodiversity Education initiative to help illustrate what COIL@UArctic resources might look like and how they could work. The Finnish example currently offers Biodiversity.now - a course which is a 2 ECTS MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) available every spring semester at the University of Eastern Finland. The six-module course can be studied independently or collaboratively as part of a COIL activity, where students in more than one institution work together using the Biodiversity.now resources to guide them. Previous biodiversity-knowledge is not required because the course starts with the basics. The course is multidisciplinary covering topics from forestry and agriculture to arts, indigenous peoples, economy, politics and media.

  The Open access link: https://digicampus.fi/course/view.php?id=3789

  The YouTube -videos are available here (they are included in the course and form a major part of the materials): https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGoV7yzGLvNchVRuADXxXMl2NHesfUlB0

  The UArctic learning resources catalogue currently contains examples from the MOOC: https://research.uarctic.org/resources/arctic-learning-resources/catalogue/details/?id=55068

Quality Control

Internationally recognised tools, processes, and examples of COIL will be used for the network. Participant evaluation of COIL projects is an established part of the pedagogy, and COIL@UArctic participants (faculty, students, and other partners) will be asked for feedback about their experience using the network and the associated tools. This will enable continuous enhancements to be made.

Published research by one of the host organisations involving a COIL project spanning four different countries, found that participants valued working in a multicultural team in a real scenario, finding solutions and solving problems; and they recognized meaningful changes in their own approach to other cultures (Swartz, Barbosa, Crawford, 2019).

Funding Support

All three institutions provided support for their representatives to travel and present their ideas for the network at the Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2022. Letters confirming ongoing support have been included with this proposal.

List of Partners

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Website Description and Image

COIL@UArctic is a future-focused, globally connected, virtual learning strategy for UArctic members and non-members with a focus on Biodiversity Education. COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) is designed to enhance graduate employability by promoting interdisciplinary, intercultural, and transversal skill development. It has the potential to democratize student mobility and strengthen international learning opportunities for students, faculty, and researchers using freely available online tools. COIL pedagogy enables issues of global concern to be explored through experiential, collaborative learning techniques.

COIL: Collaborative Online International Learning
An opportunity to build a COIL Network across the Arctic Circle

References

Crawford, I. (2021) "Employer Perspectives on Virtual Working: Essential Skills for the Globalised, Digital Workplace," in *Developments in Virtual Learning Environments and the Global Workplace* (S. Swartz, B. Barbosa, I. Crawford, and S. Luck eds.), Chp. 10, IGI Global, 2021.

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SUNY COIL Center (2023). Retrieved from: https://coil.suny.edu

Swartz, S., Barbosa, B., and Crawford I., (2020) "Building intercultural competence through virtual team collaboration across global classrooms," *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, vol. 83, no.7, pp. 57-79, 2020. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490619878834

Appendices

Letter of Support from Robert Gordon University

January 2023

Letter of Support for Izzy Crawford

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to confirm that Robert Gordon University is happy to support the COIL@UArctic proposal as a host organisation and leader of the COIL@UArctic thematic network should the proposal be accepted.

This commitment will include financing travel and network related activities and allocating working hours for the Robert Gordon University staff involved.

Yours sincerely,

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