Connecting Worlds and Perspectives: A Content-Analysis of COIL Design & Implementation

Allison Freed, Leticia de la Garza, Riva Brown, Valerie Couture, Anne Cowie, Evan Faidley, Adriian Gardner, Crystal Harris, Brittany Saviers, Sunjung Thao, Nathan White, and Amber Wilson
University of Central Arkansas

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): Definition & Purpose

More than 15 years ago, the State University of New York (SUNY) developed the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) concept as a way to internationalize higher education curricula and provide students with access to international experiences without leaving their home institution (SUNY COIL, n.d.). COIL is an approach connecting faculty and students from universities from different countries using online learning strategies to develop global and intercultural competencies and intercultural communication in an effort to encourage inclusion across the university curriculum (Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020). According to Rubin (2021), COIL is also a way for students and their faculty to learn about their disciplines through engagement with intercultural faculty.

This study was conducted with an interdisciplinary group of eleven faculty at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) with common interests in internationalization in higher education and global learning. We were a part of a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Academic Leadership (CETAL) reading and research group. As our group formed and through an initial analysis, we decided research in COIL was an excellent first step since recently, the university began an initiative to encourage more faculty to participate in COIL experiences with their students. The content analysis was conducted because we were curious about the current research literature on COIL, its impacts on student learning, its connection with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the research methods used to conduct the studies.

RQ1. To what extent does the academic literature on COIL reference/align to…	RQ2: How does COIL academic literature frame learning outcomes?
- Sustainable development goals - Student learning - Employability - Intercultural competence - Identity development - Best practices in teaching during COIL interactions	- Projects/Assignment - Global competence - Intercultural communication - Global learning - Intercultural competence - Multicultural competence-added while reading the literature when we determined that there was a distinction between intercultural and multicultural competence.

Content Analysis

Content Selection
- To answer the research questions, content was selected based on a Web of Science search of academic literature using "Collaborative Online International Learning" as keywords with 2015-present as the time frame.
- The search yielded 74 articles. Four were moved because they either were not written in English (1) or not about COIL (3).

Training Coders
- All researchers coded one article and discussed the coding experience and the initial codes. We determined that an emergent code of multicultural competence and a code definition sheet were needed.
- Two research group members created a coding definition sheet and shared it with the research team. The team read the coding sheet and made comments and suggestions. The suggestions were discussed and agreed upon. The coding sheet was used as we coded the data.
- The research group members were divided into five teams of two to three members and assigned two to three articles. While the articles were being coded, the small research teams met to deliberate around coding, attempting to come to a consensus. We re-convened with the research group, discussed the process, and were able to get questions answered.
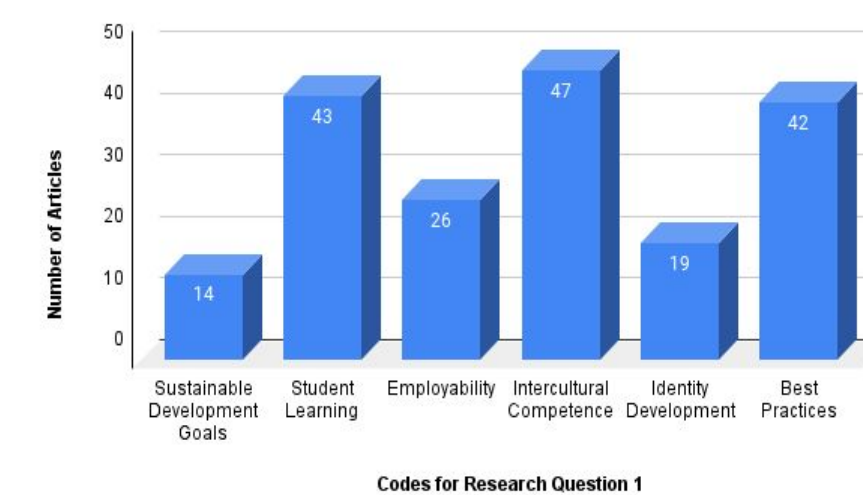
Coding
- The articles were split into five groups of 11-12 articles. Each group of articles was assigned to a pair or three research team members to code. Each group member coded the articles individually, then discussed discrepancies with their team members establishing inter-rater reliability.
- Coding took place over the course of eight weeks.

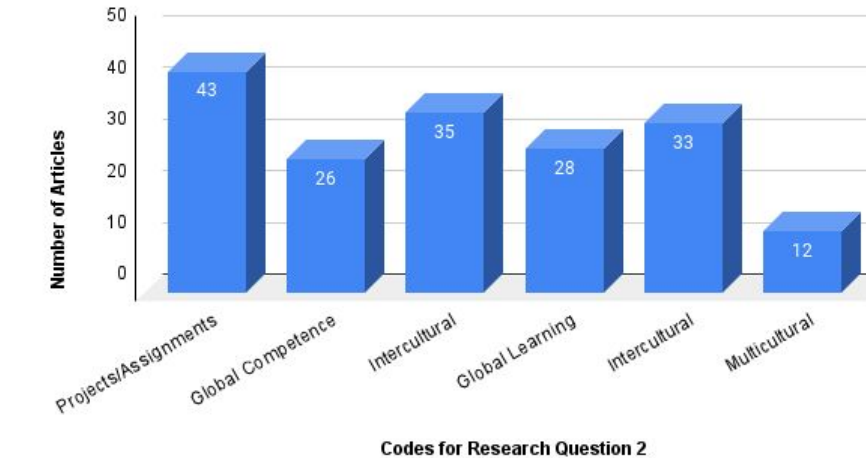
Content Analysis Study Timeline
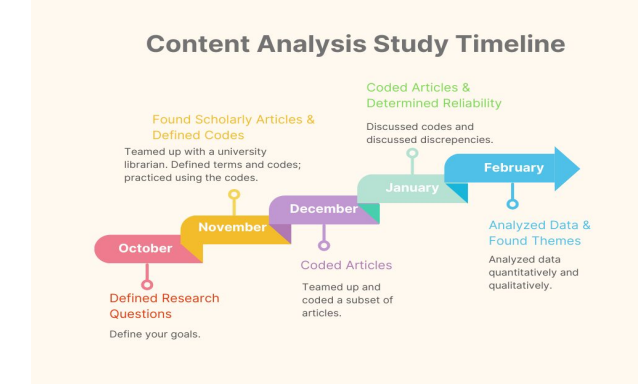
Preliminary Results

- Of the remaining 70 articles, 65 (93% were peer-reviewed) and two (3%) were book chapters. Conference proceedings, essays, and study protocols were one each (1.4%).
- We found 23 articles (32.9%) were mixed-methods, 22 articles (31.4%) were qualitative, 13 articles (18.6%) were quantitative, and 12 articles (17.1%) were not research.
- Sixty percent (42 of the 70 articles) of the literature was reviewed was at the undergraduate level.
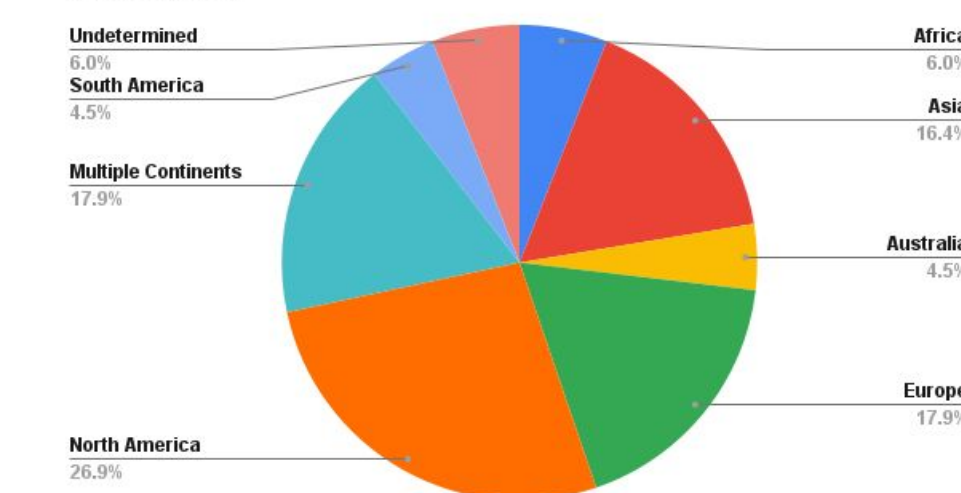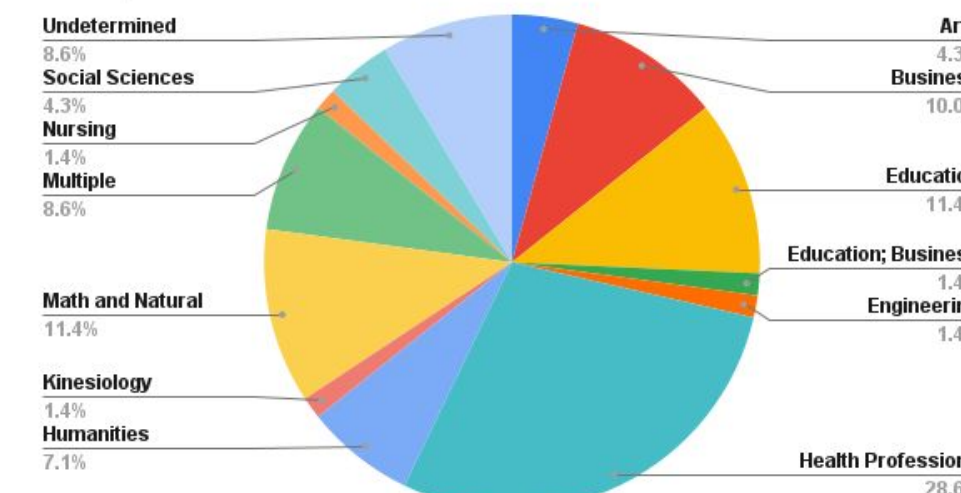

Research Question 1

Research Question 2

Continents

Disciplines

Discussion and Trends

Implications for Practice
- **Learner Audience:** Most of the COIL studies were conducted with undergraduate students and classes. There is an opportunity to open up these opportunities to graduate and professional students.
- **(Re)defining COIL Goals:** Most of the studies focused on intercultural competence, student learning, and teaching best practices, likely because COIL experiences are structured around short-term, student-centered learning (SUNY COIL, n.d.). We sensed that many studies focused on first-time or experiential COIL faculty exploring the viability of COIL as an effective teaching method.
- **Diversify Global Perspective:** A majority of COILs were either initiated by or partnered with the United States. Opportunities to include more than Western perspective on values, competencies, and discipline-specific content, as well as approach sustainable development goals to assess global quality of life and work.
- **Moving Beyond "One and Done":** Curricular capacity to build on, refine, and extend students' learning and faculty course projects: Encourage cross- and interdisciplinary collaborations with longer durations of projects, [a]synchronous interactions, and continued partnerships for future COIL and research opportunities.

Implications for Research
- **Deeper Qualitative Inquiry:** Build on extant COIL survey research with phenomenological, narrative, and virtual ethnographic [netnographic] inquiry (to get a richer perspective on the COIL phenomenon and students' lived experiences before, during, and after COIL).
- **Advancing Experimental and Quantitative Research:** Opportunity to conduct time-series research, repeat experiments, and cultivate future international, collaborative research between educators.

Next Steps

- Narrowing down the focus on specific areas or disciplines to conduct research
- Identifying disciplines where COIL has not been introduced and providing a simple step-by-step guideline or resource (books, articles, contact persons, etc.)
- Mentoring faculty members who want to try COIL projects in their courses.
- Writing up our findings in a publication
- Using what we learned to enact and take action at our university regarding COIL implementation and assessment

Limitations

- Working in a large research group made inter-rater reliability challenging.
- Working in a large group posed challenges for scheduling common times to meet and discuss the work.
- This was the first time that everyone in the group conducted a content analysis.
- We used only one database to generate the list of literature we reviewed.

References, Additional Data, & Coding Definitions
SCAN THE QR CODE

Contact: Dr. Allison Freed or Dr. Leticia de la Garza
afreed@uca.edu or ldelagarza@uca.edu