



**EXCERPT FROM PROFESSOR MATERIALS**



## Connect Program

### Online Dialogue Weekly Overview

Week 1: <i>Online Dialogue Sessions Begin (Introductions)</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To introduce students to each other and to the facilitators, and to develop a positive group rapport</li> <li>• To introduce the idea of dialogue and the students' role in making it successful</li> <li>• To enable students to develop comfort in the online medium</li> <li>• To provide students with a sense of ownership over the group process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to group members, the online dialogue process, and the Connect Program</li> <li>• What is dialogue, how does it differ from debate, or discussions? Why is it important to learn to engage with difference?</li> <li>• What is your role in dialogue, and how can you contribute to making it successful?</li> <li>• Student Proposals: students begin thinking about, and identifying topics they want to discuss in the dialogue sessions.</li> </ul>

Week 2: <i>Global and Social Challenges</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To allow students to explore their individual identities, and engage with issues of identity development in the context of intercultural dialogue</li> <li>• To begin to build an understanding of alternate perspectives and the sources of those perspectives</li> <li>• To discuss the first set of required readings in which students are presented with expert views and global trends on what constitute the most pressing global risks and social challenges to provide a broad perspective on the topic and spark discussions on issues that are important to them.</li> <li>• To identify major issues that will be discussed over the course of the semester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Introduction to Identity and Culture:</b> Students participate in activities that enable them to explore identity issues and share cultural information.</li> <li>• What do you think are the most pressing global and social challenges in the world today? What are the most pressing issues in your country / community? How do those two sets of challenges compare?</li> <li>• How and why do different countries and regions perceive global and social challenges differently? What do you think of the issues your peers raised that were different from your own?</li> <li>• How have your identity and experiences affected your understanding of and perspective on these issues?</li> <li>• <b>Readings:</b> Which of the global risks explored in the articles that you read this week did you agree with most? Which did you disagree with? Why? What do you think are the most important global and social challenges?</li> </ul>
<i>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</i>	
<p><b>Required Readings</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion this week will be based on readings for “Global and Social Challenges”</p>	



Week 3: <b>Group Selected Topic</b>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To allow the group to more deeply explore one or two of the issues that they identified as a global or social challenge</li> <li>• To explore the learning component activity on listening, and examine how it impacts dialogue</li> <li>• To empower students to engage with one another more fluidly, and ask and answer each other's questions around the topics of discussion</li> <li>• To encourage differences to emerge and begin exploring the underlying emotions, assumptions and experiences that lead to these positions</li> </ul>	<p><i>* Details about optional discussion topics are listed below the calendar.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning Component:</b> Listening Students examine the importance of listening, and work on developing their active listening skills in an activity that also promotes empathy and relationship-building amongst groupmates.</li> </ul>
<b>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</b>	
<b>Final Project Discussions</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students have their first small group discussion with their final project partners during their group session	

Week 4: <b>Intercultural Communication</b>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss the second set of required readings, which allow students to explore various facets of intercultural communication through theoretical perspectives and practical approaches</li> <li>• To have students reflect on their communication skills and examine how issues of intercultural communication impact the dialogue process</li> <li>• To continue to build students' comfort and ability to take leadership in the medium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning Component:</b> Intercultural Communication Students explore intercultural communication by examining concepts such as the definition of culture and ethnocentrism vs. cultural relativism, exploring the challenges that prevent effective communication across cultures, and brainstorming ways to address such challenges.</li> <li>• How do you define "culture"? What are the main elements that make up a culture?</li> <li>• Is cultural sensitivity important? How do you engage with cultural differences? What are the best ways to address such differences?</li> <li>• What are the main barriers to effective cross-cultural communication, and how do they impact intercultural communication and relations? What are some ways to address these challenges?</li> <li>• <b>Readings:</b> Which of the authors that you read this week did you agree with most? Which did you disagree with? Why?</li> </ul>
<b>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</b>	
<b>Required Readings &amp; Final Project Discussions</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion this week will be based on readings for "Intercultural Communication"	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students have their second small group discussion with their final project partners during their group session	



Week 5: <i>Life Stories</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To give group members a chance to know each other on a deeper, more personal level</li> <li>• To help groups members recognize how different personal experiences can lead to different worldviews</li> <li>• To encourage group members to understand the perspective of the other side by re-thinking their experience and frame of reference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What experiences in your life have been most important in terms of making you the person that you are today?</li> <li>• How have your life experiences affected your worldview and your political perspective?</li> </ul>
<i>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</i>	
<b>Final Project Discussions</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students meet their final project group partners to discuss research findings outside the group session	

Week 6: <i>Group Selected Topic</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To allow the group to more deeply explore one or two of the issues that they identified as a global or social challenge</li> <li>• To explore the learning component activity on critical awareness, and examine how their values, norms and assumptions impact the dialogue process</li> <li>• To encourage students to drive the conversation, asking one another questions and listening carefully to responses</li> <li>• To more deeply explore differences and challenge students to re-examine where their positions come from</li> </ul>	<p><i>* Details about optional discussion topics are listed below the calendar.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning Component:</b> Critical Awareness Students reflect on their own perspectives to gain greater awareness of the assumptions and values underlying their views, discuss the best ways to understand and engage with perspectives different from their own, and think critically about how they address differences and conflict.</li> </ul>

Week 7: <i>Group Selected Topic</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage a thought-provoking conversation about the global and social challenges that students feel are most important</li> <li>• To enable students to better understand one another's perspectives, and the elements that led to the development of these perspectives</li> <li>• To further enable an honest, open group dynamic in which students can address differences and build understanding</li> </ul>	<p><i>* Details about optional discussion topics are listed below the calendar.</i></p>
<i>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</i>	
<b>Final Project</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students should complete and submit their final project (joint recommendations paper + individual reflection paper) to Soliya and to their professor	



Week 8: <i>Youth Empowerment &amp; Working for Change</i>	
Objectives	Online Activity & Discussion Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage participants to develop ideas about ways that they might effect change, and to feel increasingly motivated and empowered to work for this change</li> <li>• To end the group on a positive note, with participants feeling that they and others learned through the dialogue process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recognitions Activity:</b> Students take the time to recognize what they learned from their peers over the course of the semester.</li> <li>• <b>Working for Change:</b> Group members formulate ideas as to what they can do individually and as a group to address the global and social challenges they have explored over the semester at both the local, community level and the global scale.</li> </ul>
<i>Assignments &amp; Deadlines:</i>	
<p><b>Student Evaluations Completed</b></p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students complete online evaluations of the program	
<p><b>Professor Evaluations Completed</b></p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professors complete online evaluations of the program	

### \*Optional Topics

For Weeks 3, 6 and 7 of the program students are encouraged to discuss an issue or issues of their choice, relevant to the global and social challenges they identified as most important early on in the semester. As indicated above, we really want this to be an active learning process for students, so their leadership in selecting topics is important. As such, we ask you to encourage them to think proactively about what they want to discuss. Topics that students have frequently raised in past semesters include, but are not limited to:

- Culture and stereotypes
- Immigration / integration
- The role of religion in students' lives and societies
- Gender roles
- Environment and natural resources
- Media
- Inequality





**EXCERPT FROM STUDENT MATERIALS**



## STUDENT INFORMATION PACKET

*This document is intended to provide an overview of the Connect Program and to answer some frequently asked questions. We at Soliya are very excited to work with you this semester. If you have any questions or need any further information, please feel free to e-mail [students@soliya.net](mailto:students@soliya.net)*

### **Description of the Program:**

Soliya's Connect Program is a unique cross-cultural education program that enables college students from around the world to collaboratively explore and engage one another on what they find to be the most pressing global and social challenges, with the aim of improving intercultural awareness and understanding.



Students and facilitators participating in the Connect Program “meet” via Soliya’s web-based videoconferencing application. This application allows for rich and intimate discussion, despite the distances separating participants.

Student participants in this semester’s Connect Program will congregate into groups consisting of approximately ten students each. Students will be drawn from 30+ post-secondary institutions including the University of Padova in Italy, the American Language Centers in Morocco, Sebha University and Misurata University in Libya, British Council in Egypt, University of Jordan and Yarmouk University in Jordan, Lebanese International University in Lebanon, Istanbul Sehir University in Turkey, Forman Christian College in Pakistan, Bluefield State College in West Virginia, Endicott College in Massachusetts, Northwestern Michigan College, and Western Kentucky University.

Each student group will “meet” for real-time discussion once a week for two hours via Soliya’s customized online, video-conferencing application. To join their group meetings, participants need simply turn on their webcam and headset and log on to a designated website at their weekly meeting time. The medium is remarkably intimate: participants can see one another’s facial expressions, hear tone of voice, and even share a joke. Participants are also able to communicate with their fellow students when they are offline.

Each student has access to the Soliya weblog where he/ she can continue discussions or post messages to other users. Students can also send each other personal messages on the Soliya website, and have access to our online “Social Rooms” where they can meet with other users outside of session times. Students participating in the Connect Program will engage in one main project with the assistance of one or two expert facilitators:



**Soliya Final Project** - Throughout the Connect Program, you will be given the opportunity to work more closely with 2-3 other members of your group, and explore an issue that exists in your communities. You will be asked to research the challenges around the issue, engage with different perspectives, examine how the issue is presented in the media, and think collaboratively on ways the problem can be alleviated in your communities. You will then be asked to write a joint recommendations paper outlining ways to address the issue. You will also write an individual reflection paper on the issue you explored, and the process of working with your group.

Details on the Final Project can be found in the Student Assignments document.

[Student Commitments for the Fall Semester:](#)

- Prior to the commencement of the Connect Program students will participate in a brief online orientation.
- Throughout the duration of the program students will spend 2 hours per week “meeting” online with their small group. Periodically there will be short articles to read, in preparation for these discussions.
- Students will write a joint paper and a reflection paper for their final project.
- Students will complete a brief post-program evaluation about their experience.

Students need not have a computer science or media background, but basic proficiency with computers and good English communication skills are required.

**Weekly Discussion Topics:**

Topics that may be addressed by your group will include:

- Identity, culture and stereotypes
- Global and social challenges
- Values and social norms
- Intercultural communication
- Life experiences and worldview
- Youth empowerment

In addition, group facilitators will work with students to identify additional topics that they feel are important to discuss.

**Students will Gain:**

- A great introduction to the critical current issues impacting their societies and the larger global community, and exposure to a multiplicity of perspectives.
- A chance to meet your peers around the world, share your opinions and hear their ideas about critical issues, and the build strong contacts with future leaders.
- The opportunity to gain and / or improve upon key 21st century skills such as leadership, analytical thinking, engaging across differences constructively, and collaborative problem-solving.
- After successfully completing the program, students will receive their certificate from Soliya, verifying their participation in the Connect Program.







**EXCERPT FROM FACILITATOR MATERIALS**



## ***Prologue: Engaging with Difference through Dialogue – Addressing Global & Social Challenges***

While many of the challenges in today's world are shared, ways of addressing them and levels of placed importance may vary greatly. The Soliya Connect Program, provides participants the opportunity to explore and engage one another around what they find to be the most pressing Global & social challenges.

As East-West identities will continue to play a role in discussions, they should not be the only focus. Facilitators are encouraged to transcend these categories and help students reflect on which part of their identity is playing a role at different times, why this is, and how this impacts the prospect for successful working relationships and effects social change within and between societies.

How participants approach dialogue is equally important to the Program. Greater emphasis should be placed on equipping students with the tools for effective intercultural communication and collaboration. It is our hope that this will serve to increase self-awareness, lead to greater empathy, understanding and more constructive communication. It is not enough to enable discussion about the topics themselves but to go below the surface opinions to elicit and inspire self-awareness so that significant impact can be made.

We've designed the Online Curriculum to assist you in working with this framework – ***Engaging with Difference through Dialogue – Addressing Global & Social Challenges***. You will find an overview on the lay out below. Included are discussion guides (topics), activities and required readings.

Feel free to contact us at [qc@soliya.net](mailto:qc@soliya.net) should you have any questions.



## Overview of the Online Curriculum

The curriculum consists of 4 key areas: [Introduction to facilitated dialogue](#); [Communication & Skill Building activities](#); [suggested topic discussion guides](#) and [Technical guide](#) for working with the platform.

This section will provide a brief overview of the contents and how to use this manual. We provide hyperlinks where specific activities are referenced, for your convenience.

### **PART I: Introduction to Facilitated Dialogue – Key Points to Remember**

- Good Discussion
  - Key Points to Facilitating Good Discussion
- Using Conflict Resolution Tools to Promote Good Discussion
- Meta-Discussions – Discuss the Importance of a Group’s Understanding of Dialogue and How They Approach It
- Facilitator Role in Good Discussion: How to Prepare for the Connect Program

### **PART II: Activities and Tools – The Activities and Discussion Topics in this Manual are divided into Three Main Sections:**

- Introductory Activities;
- Activities Advancing Group Process;
- Activities Advancing Connect Program Goals
- Communication/Skill Building Activities

### **PART III: Discussion Guides – Discussion Guides Focus Around Popular Topics**

### **PART V: Technical Guide**

This section contains information on how to incorporate the technology into your sessions.

- How to load a poll
- How to send participants to breakout rooms



## Overall Goals of the Program

### Cross-Cultural Communication and Collaboration Skills

- Develop participants' cross-cultural communication skills and ability to engage in constructive dialogue across difference.
- Enable participants to recognize the necessity of engaging constructively with alternative perspectives to craft sustainable solutions to shared problems.
- Develop the ability to represent one's points of view and provide space for hearing the points of view of multiple and diverse parties in a productive discussion process.

### Empathy: Relationship Building, Appreciating & Respecting Others

- Encourage participants to approach dialogue and differences with a genuine curiosity and an intention for understanding.
- Allow participants to acknowledge each other's emotions and humanity, by connecting with others' experiences and feelings.
- Enhance participants' ability to appreciate and respect, even if not agreeing with, diverse perspectives, and recognizing these diverse views are a result of a thought process that is highly affected by social norms, biases, emotions and experiences, just as one's own views.
- Provide participants with the opportunity and encourage them to develop positive relationships with one another, relationships of mutual respect and understanding.

### Critical Thinking

- Develop the ability to think more critically and complexly about issues relevant to engaging with difference.
- Encourage all participants to have the opportunity to genuinely re-examine and analyze pre-existing opinions and beliefs in a space in which transformation and reconsideration of existing views is possible.

### Awareness

- Allow participants to gain understanding of the perspective/narrative of *others* in the group – not only the positions taken or the opinions expressed, but specifically the underlying emotions, assumptions, values, biases, social norms and experiences that shape these positions.
- Help participants develop a clearer understanding of their *own* perspective, and develop an awareness of the emotions, assumptions, values, biases, social norms as well as one's personal relationship with the issues.
- Allow participants to explore how their identity impacts the way they view and approach the world, and how they communicate with those with different perspectives.

### Activation

- Develop a long-term interest in cross-cultural communication and engagement with different perspectives, values and cultures.
- By the end of the program, participants have the ideas, skills, tools, and opportunities to engage constructively across difference.
- Participants feel responsible to engage with difference cooperatively



