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Geography Students in Ohio, Kenya Probe Global Environmental Change

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Categories: News

Tags: Geography news, global, Thomas Smucker



Courtesy of Global COIL Initiative

Ohio University students Benjamin Bryan and William Bloomfield, at right, collaborate with Kenyatta University students Gentrax Gathoni and Margaret Maina, at left, on a project focused on global environmental change.

[From Ohio University News](#)

Geography students in Ohio and Kenya are learning skills of international collaboration to address pressing issues of global environmental change within different regional contexts.

Supported by OHIO's [Global COIL Initiative](#), students from Ohio University and [Kenyatta University](#) worked in small groups to identify regional drivers, impacts and responses to global change.

Understanding, mitigating, and adapting to global environmental change was the focus of a four-week program led by [Dr. Thomas Smucker](#), associate professor of Geography, and [Dr. Joy Obando](#), associate professor of geography at Kenyatta University. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) allows faculty to create learning environments where their students come together virtually to collaborate on course assignments in order to broaden and deepen their understanding of course subjects and the interconnectedness of the global community.

“This collaboration is only the latest in a 40-year history of faculty and graduate student exchanges between OHIO and Kenyatta University to support research and teaching. COIL builds on this relationship by providing undergraduate students an opportunity to build cross-cultural literacy, develop essential research skills, and master digital tools that are increasingly common to all kinds of collaborative work, whether in academic research, policy, or the private sector,” the professors said.

“COILed’ Activities and Collaboration

Working in small groups, each consisting of a mix of KU and OHIO members, students undertook a series of “COILed” activities, including ice-breaker activities, lectures, team meetings, and collaboration using Google Drive and WhatsApp to develop project findings.

Through these activities, students developed a comparative analysis of the challenges facing two arid regions—the Southwest USA and Northern Kenya—in contributing toward global efforts to reduce human impacts.

Students drew on resources that enabled them to identify how regional economies, cultural patterns, resource use, and policy pertaining to the environment could inform regional “downscaling” of global goals.

Among the ice-breaker activities was for each student to interview an “elder”—someone born before the first Earth Day in 1970—about their understanding of the challenges of global environmental change. A comparison of responses from Kenyan and U.S. elders revealed important cultural and economic differences in how people perceive and are impacted by environmental change.

OHIO and KU students were enthusiastic about the experience, despite the fact that it was cut short as a result of the shift to remote learning at OHIO and the closing of campus at KU. Obando and Smucker are currently working to enhance this activity for the 2020-21 academic year.

Despite challenges experienced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this inaugural COIL offering in the Geography Department paves the way for future collaboration among students and faculty, expanding opportunities for engagement between OHIO and partner institutions worldwide.

[Learn more about the GCI](#) or email COILOhio@ohio.edu.