

The Association of Commonwealth Universities Commonwealth Virtual Exchange Sharing from the participants



Pulling factors for joining the programme

- Able to connect with students from countries with diversified cultural and academic backgrounds. Also, I am interested in learning more about SDG goals and social entrepreneurship.
- The chance to cooperate with people from diverse backgrounds to work on SDG-related issues.

Difficulties encountered and ways to cope with them

- Time zone differences made it hard for the team to have meetings. I cope with it through adjusting my own time schedule and spare time for the meetings.
- We failed to come up with a business idea at the beginning, but one of our teammates suggested a feasible solution so that everyone could build on her idea and work together.
- Not only differences in time zones, English accents and working habits, but also finding a common ground and seeking innovative business models to solve social problems. We were able to handle these challenges and explore the future through intense communication.

Takeaway from the programme

- Importance of communication.
- Details of SDGs and how we can help as a group in various places.
- Global challenges, basic concept of social entrepreneurship, and how to work collaboratively with students in multiple professions.

I enjoyed...the most

- working on the Final Pitch, because I was able to interact with a lot of students overseas, and also my peers at CUHK physically.
- discussing with foreign students using English which enhanced my communication ability.
- working with others on creative projects.



Sharing from the facilitator Aikins Amoako ASIAMA

The Commonwealth Virtual Exchange (CVE) pilot which lasted for eight weeks was a great opportunity for undergraduate students to come together to work collaboratively on a project that is designed to enhance entrepreneurship and intercultural competencies. As a facilitator, my major responsibilities were to lead weekly discussion sessions among team members, assist students to successfully interact with each other at the virtual environment, monitor students' progress in relation to the course deliverables, assist students in completing the course's learning objectives, and to foster a collaborative environment where team members can work together toward achieving the specified goals.

The program in general was a huge success, but the milestone was not achieved without hurdles, especially since this was the maiden edition of the program.

The first significant challenge I faced as a facilitator was to find a suitable time slot for our weekly meetings. My group comprised students from three different time zones: Hong Kong (GMT +8), Australia (GMT +8), England (GMT+0), and India (GMT+5:30). Also, since students were from different schools and were offering different majors, we could not find any day within the week on which the students had free time for our weekly meeting. Hence, I needed to adjust, and with the concern of the team members, to meet on Saturdays from 19:00 – 20:00 (GMT +8).

Further, when we finally fixed the time, two students were not contributing to our discussions at the start of the program and the remaining students became alarmed and disturbed. The members were not sure if they needed to labor for others to freely enjoy at their expense. This uncertainty affected their productivity and efficiency. To solve this issue, I discussed with the representative of the CVE, and with numerous emails to the students involved and their representatives of their schools, we finally decided to drop them from the group and the program. This decision brought sanity and team spirit for the members to continue working hard.



Language was also a barrier to many of the students. English was the main medium of instructions, and this was not the 1st language for many of the students. Though each of the students could understand English, the main problem was the distinct accent of each member. It was difficult, at least at the initial stage, for group members to clearly understand each member when having discussions. To solve this, when a student does not hear well what other group mate said, I asked the student to type in the chat box. This was done with utmost respect, and I asked students not to belittle or laugh over anyone's accent. This created mutual respect among us.

Another challenge we faced was also the content of the program. Some of the students had never been taught about entrepreneurship and intercultural programs. Hence, it is a first experience for them, yet they needed to contribute to our weekly discussion. As a result, at the beginning of each meeting, and as a form of ice breaker, I asked group mates if there were concerns anyone, or a topic that is not clear to anyone, and would want us to discuss as a group. This helped everyone to help each other to be at par with others.

Another challenge was that not all the students were punctual in our meetings. Each person at least missed a session. Many excuses were given for such absenteeism. For this not to affect the group progress and discussion, we decided that in addition to our weekly meetings we would mostly discuss urgent matters on our WhatsApp group before we meet on Saturday evenings. This helped us to finish a lot of tasks.

In all these hurdles and finding solutions to them, the most enjoyable sections was the received support. The ACU-CVE team was always to respond. I enjoyed the contributions and suggestions from the Office of Academic Links, CUHK, and ACU. Their wisdom, support, and expertise of the overall program made us find simple solutions to insurmountable issues.

Also, I was overwhelmed by the different levels of thinking and how students understand concepts with respect to the cultural and ethnic background. Each student had a different perspective to the questions raised and topics discussed. Students used examples from their culture to analyze issues. Such submissions did not only lead to diverse opinions but also a way for other students to know and understand issues from different points of view, and to exchange culture and ideas with other colleagues. At the end of the program, the students and I admitted that there are many cultures and information we wouldn't have considered, even in our wildest dreams, and wouldn't have known. We become fond of each other's culture, and we believe we have also created an international network, which in the future may help us collaborate with each other, somehow.

