

# MY FULBRIGHT AWARDS IN PURSUIT OF COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL)

MARIA CRISTINA MONTOYA

## ABSTRACT

The Fulbright mission supports quality education, fosters service and advocacy for all people's needs. The values of diversity and respect are at the core of Fulbright when providing opportunities for global mutual understanding. My Fulbright missions in Colombia focused on Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), promoting intentional and structured academic partnerships. COIL allows faculty and students to exercise critical thinking crossing-cultures and solving problems in an authentic communicative interaction, aligning with the Fulbright vision.

**Keywords:** online collaboration • interculturalism • Colombia



## THE GLOBAL EDUCATOR

The world has changed, and technology is a valuable tool in organizing youth across the globe. My participation in global education has been facilitating the use of technology in education to create academic/social networks to fight social injustice. Through my work, I help individuals become more respectful intercultural citizens of the world. In the past few years, the implementation of “COIL” (Collaborative Online International/Intercultural/Integrative/Interdisciplinary/Inclusive/Institutional Learning), with multiple “I”s, have become a very successful tool to foster the development of global intercultural competencies across institutions at all grade levels. It impacts students with limited international mobility experience, hence fostering equity in accessing global education. COIL facilitates faculty professional growth by creating course content that becomes enriched with the possibilities of collaboration with diverse others. My pedagogical work accomplished through two Fulbright missions (2019 and 2022) has allowed me to serve as a bridge for a global network to cross and connect education institutions. My concrete skill is to assist in the infusion of COIL into the curriculum of teaching partners, or trios, that connect their students to collaborate and learn from one other.

## FULBRIGHT MISSIONS: SCHOLAR 2018-2019 AND FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST 2022

My personal and professional lives were first transformed after my Fulbright Scholar mission (2018-2019), a process that continued through my Specialist experience in 2022. I was able to live through the struggles that all encounter in their journey to make a better world for themselves and their communities. My first mission focused on fostering COIL practices for Intercultural Maturity (acceptance, respect, and embracement). I was invited by “*Universidad del Valle*” (*UniValle*) in Cali, Colombia, after having implemented COIL in my courses since 2014. I expanded my academic contacts with my COIL partner institution, and I was fortunate to be selected to conduct a Fulbright Scholar award. My first mission “Intercultural Competence through COIL”, allowed me to form relationships and build bridges to contribute to communities becoming global productive and caring citizens. My main assignment was to teach a graduate seminar to eleven PK-12 teachers and college instructors in the use of new technologies in foreign language education, and to strategize in the dissemination of International/Intercultural pedagogical practices. One mission was not enough to accomplish the three stages required for the pedagogical plan proposed which included dissemination, faculty matching and training, and institutionalization. Therefore, I was invited a second time as a Fulbright Specialist to continue the work. The aim of the second Fulbright award was to promote and plan the implementation of the COIL module, seeking institutionalization of this practice. *UniValle* recognizes that institutionalizing COIL as an academic practice, would bring inclusivity in global education for all and specifically, bringing equity to underserved populations to access Quality Education (SDG #4). These are requirements mandated to *UniValle*, as a public higher education institution seeking government accreditation.

## COIL MODULE DESIGN ALIGNED WITH FULBRIGHT VALUES

I centered my Fulbright work using the COIL applied learning approach to assist students from Colombia and the US in becoming interculturally mature. COIL activities help students recognize differences. Meaningful negotiations occurring during their interactions make students aware of diverse perspectives in a safe, monitored academic environment. In a virtual classroom experience, learners are guided to understand multiple perspectives and lifestyles that are different from their own. In this process, they get out of their comfort zone by developing acceptance of others and not feeling threatened by their differences. Students are exposed and encouraged to think about the “Other,” the foreign element, and to respect, accept, and eventually become advocates for multiple perspectives, lifestyles, conditions, beliefs, and

issues experienced by others. This enhances their ability to foster social justice, seek peace, and use their educational institutions as channels for delivery and collaboration, which aligns with the Fulbright values of “Respect, Diversity, International Education and Mutual Understanding”.

Connecting students globally is about the relationships built and maintained, and COIL provides an opportunity to accomplish this task at a lower cost, engaging a larger number of students, and teaching content with a global perspective across the disciplines. Students involved assess their own understanding of cultural norms and expectations by comparing behaviors, values, and practices with the Other. Courses with a COIL component enhance the students’ view on diversity. They share stories through purposeful designed interactive prompts, and collaborative learning projects. The COIL designs by my graduate students at *UniValle* in 2019, proposed different modules, all addressing various grade levels (PK- college), social environments, languages, and contents. They include the following: *Flavors of the World*; *Interactive Tales*; *The Tale: The Little Kid who Lost his House--House/Home Vocabulary and Natural Disasters*; *My Village, My Likes and My Future*; *My New Amigo*; *Crossing Borders*; *The Wonderful Freedom: Tales about the Admiration of Power*; *Know the Other Face of Colombia*; *My City... My Bike*; and *Immigrants in Cali*. Languages involved in the designs were English, Japanese, Spanish, and French. I was able to accomplish this first intercultural experience for all participants through my Fulbright mission. Multiple institutional contacts were made after concluding the first mission and I felt ready to network and strengthen institutional collaborations, until Covid pandemic put us all on “stand by.” This period served COIL projects positively by preparing teachers with an understanding of applied technology to deliver content. Educators worldwide had to “solve a problem” and for its purpose, they needed to blend Technological Knowledge (TK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK) to expand their classroom instruction to the student’s homes. By the same token, administrators were urged to re-evaluate resources available and curricular planning to accommodate to the new worldwide circumstance.

In 2019, during my first Fulbright mission, one of the contacts I established was with the *Cerro Alto* School in Caldono, Cauca. One dedicated teacher from this rural school started to teach science during online learning using public radio broadcasts to reach students in remote rural areas. This strategy was shared with college students in New York who were pursuing their education career. In 2021, college students who are future educators connected with *Cerro Alto* through a COIL lesson. A synchronous meeting was planned between the bilingual college student/teachers and a group of high school students. At this meeting, we observed the influence of socio-economic, cultural differences, and the availability of technological tools for the students’ learning at each institution. Later, the *Cerro Alto* teacher requested continuous academic cooperation. In 2022, the educators involved obtained administrative support to propose a curricular assessment and

advisement project at *Cerro Alto*. A team of professors in pedagogy at SUNY Oneonta (NY) was invited to become the international audience, observing, and supporting the teachers at *Cerro Alto* while they engaged in a curricular self-reflection and actions moving forward.

At SUNY Oneonta, students who were taking the Spanish translation class participated as linguistic and cultural brokers between the two institutions while meeting an applied service-learning requirement. Other college students offered a tutoring program of math and English to 9th and 10th graders at *Cerro Alto*, which is currently developing. COIL partnerships are restricted by the age of the students collaborating. Since it is based on talks about common interests and knowledge, best practices dictate that COIL projects are developed with similar ages and grade levels. Consequently, college students were not partnered in a regular COIL module with the *Cerro Alto* high school students. A secondary school partner was needed to accomplish the COIL plan, and my former graduate student from *UniValle*, in 2019, now teaching at the Sioux school district in South Dakota in a Spanish immersion high school program (<https://www.sf.k12.sd.us/page/spanish-immersion-hs>), was invited to COIL with the *Cerro Alto* institution. This plan accomplished a triangulation of a COIL partnership between three public institutions: two secondary schools, one in Colombia and one in the US, and one university in New York. While the secondary schools conduct a COIL module allowing the teenagers from South Dakota to practice Spanish and acquire intercultural skills, their counterparts in *Cerro Alto* are individually tutored in English by the college student/teachers in New York. All student participants belong to public school systems, that include less privileged and diverse populations, allowing them to obtain quality education, seeking equity, fostering justice and peace in global collaboration. COIL becomes the channel for international, intercultural, interdisciplinary, and institutional cooperation. This is accomplished by the support of the Fulbright mission, which strengthens institutions worldwide that mutually serve.

### **BRIDGING THE US AND COLOMBIA**

Colombia has been the country of focus for my COIL work. I have become a “COIL matchmaker” and provided an opportunity for college professors, schoolteachers, and students K-12 to connect and learn from each other. As a result, I conducted my second Fulbright mission with a specific assignment to recruit, orient, match, and design international curriculum. As a Fulbright Specialist, in 2022, my commitment to continue the work in this region was solidified. I feel part of the institution abroad and responsible to continue guiding the infusion of internationalization in its curriculum through COIL practices. I will continue to advise and support the faculty COIL practitioners and trainers, collaborating to create a systematic registry of COIL experiences, and expanding COIL faculty matches between the United States and Colombia. Lastly, I would like to assist in the planning

of future “COIL Academies” worldwide and will seek Fulbright support to continue this endeavor. To accomplish all the above, the first concrete official institutional commitment has been a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by *UniValle* and SUNY-Oneonta, for a second term. It is my duty to keep exploring all the possibilities that this official linkage provides. It is my aim, after my two Fulbright missions in *UniValle*, to assist in the exploration of Memoranda of Agreements (MOA) that would allow students to travel in both directions and conduct studies for academic credit, research experiences, and service activities. The door is open now and my goal is to educate our students to think holistically and responsibly about seeking mutual understanding beyond the classroom experience.

### HOW MY FULBRIGHT WORK IMPACTED ME

My own COIL practice has led me to become interculturally mature (respectful and advocator of difference) yet educating others towards an action requires persuasive skills and the virtue of patience. For a university professor, it demands creativity in the teaching practice. I believe COIL is an invaluable pedagogical approach that connects through mutual experience and collaboration and promotes personal growth. Fulbright allowed me to use my practice to build a bridge to my country of origin. It empowered my capacity for action by recognizing a strength within me to connect people, cultures, lives, worlds. My Fulbright mission gave me the power to act, making a positive change from the space I know best- the classroom - I would implement educational policies at all grade levels where educators would have to find a way to include COIL to connect to another culture, locally, regionally or beyond national identities. I would embrace learning about the perspectives of other people, and the products, and practices within their respective communities.

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I am a believer that educational practices such as COIL are part of a solution to world issues. It has been a long process for me to be able to become interculturally conscious. I have used my experiences, my socialization, and some group dialogues to recognize my inner self, my biases, motives, and emotions that may affect my interaction with others. As I relate to other human beings, I see that humanity is far from being interculturally mature. There is “noise”, obstacles that limit us from accepting others. I am lucky to be one of the most educated persons among my family and friends. I am a person of color who was fortunate to have an opportunity that allowed me to influence others positively. However, education alone does not make me better than others around me. Being educated, in my case, gives me the

advantage of looking at issues from different perspectives and being able to reflect before I judge, or express bias towards a behavior, or condition, that I have not lived or understand. If I could aid the world, I would make every classroom include a COIL experience and build bridges through education that promotes the values of mutual understanding, leadership, global problem solving, and impact. I have bridged privileged communities in the US with rural indigenous communities in Colombia and Spanish heritage immigrant communities in the US with urban tourist economies in Colombia. Through my service-learning initiatives, I allow my students to service communities abroad. My current undergraduate students tutor Colombian children and adults in ESL while applying their intercultural competencies and Spanish language acquisition. Fulbright and COIL talk the common language of human life sustainability.

### VISION FOR THE FUTURE

I came out of my Fulbright experiences with tools to be an activist to advance sustainable human life on earth. My commitment for the future involves assisting in the expansion of COIL interdisciplinary education, networking among educators who would like to try COIL, discussing digital spaces and their impact on human behavior, teaching others about digital channels and tools, continue expanding at the primary and secondary school levels, disseminating regionally, nationally and internationally, and organizing more COIL Academies globally that prepare instructors to teach their students the necessary skills to be prepared for global careers. We have the technology to create COIL bridges. We simply need partners to show us the way across, through structured reflection on and acknowledgment of interculturalism. Fulbright has been a wide-open door and continues to be the foundation for the international/intercultural bridge I aim to build from the US to the world. COIL provides opportunities for cultural connections that traditional schooling cannot. It brings diversity, equity, and inclusion for all faculty and students and the Fulbright vision is the inspiration to accomplish it.

### NOTES

1. "SUNY COIL" Connect, Engage and Collaborate. State university of New York, Collaborative Online international Learning. <https://coil.suny.edu/>
2. R. Cullen, J. Kullman, and C.Wild, "Online collaborative learning on an ESL teacher education program." *ELT Journal* 67, no 4 (2013): October; <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cct032> 425-434.
3. "TPACK ORG" <http://matt-koehler.com/tpack2/tpack-explained/>



Students from the *Cerro Alto* Highschool COILing synchronously with students at SUNY-Oneonta

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**BIOGRAPHY**

Maria Cristina Montoya is a professor of Spanish and Bilingual Education at the State University of New York, at Oneonta. She received two Fulbright Awards, first as a Scholar (2018-2019) and later as a Specialist (2022) to Colombia. She can be contacted at [mc.montoya@oneonta.edu](mailto:mc.montoya@oneonta.edu)

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