

Stevens
Initiative



Get to know our

GLOBAL CHAMPIONS

Meet the 2024-25 leaders in education and exchange who will work hand-in-hand to convene, collaborate, and explore ways to scale virtual exchange and chart a course for the future.





ADEM OUMMEDOUR

FREELANCE BRAND DESIGNER

Adem Oummedour is a freelance brand designer, focused on marketing and content creation. In collaboration with creative agencies in Algeria, he has helped dozens of brands sound and look better. He was also awarded the Best Food and Packaging Design in the Algerian Creative Ads awards, in collaboration with Geometric Algeria. Adem took part in different exchange experiences such as the Algerian Youth Leadership Program in 2019, The Experiment Digital in 2020, and the Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship in 2022. These opportunities helped Adem understand how exchanges forge global leaders and better communicators who are able to make positive change.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

I am hoping to share a unique perspective about my exchange experiences and the Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship, specifically how it helped me improve my career as a creative. Everything I learned also helped me get accepted to pursue a master's degree in business communication at one of Europe's top business and economics universities.



AMAL EL HADDADI

ENGLISH TEACHER,
EXCHANGE LAB

Amal El Haddadi is a junior non-profit project coordinator and English teacher with a strong passion for youth empowerment and social change. Her experience spans teaching, dialogue facilitation, project design, management, cross-cultural collaboration, and stakeholder engagement. Since 2021, virtual exchange has become a substantial part of Amal's life. She participated in Soliya's Connect Program and Global Circles, LaGuardia Community College's Global Scholars Achieving Career Success, the 2022 Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship, and facilitated numerous cross-cultural dialogues. Amal received multiple trainings in intercultural communication and leadership skills, and led a virtual exchange project aimed at connecting and empowering youth across borders. These experiences deepened her commitment to fostering global understanding and inspiring the next generation of leaders.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

Virtual exchange is a powerful tool for breaking down barriers and fostering mutual understanding across cultures. In an increasingly interconnected world, it offers a unique platform for individuals to engage in meaningful dialogue, challenge stereotypes, reassess truths, and build lasting relationships. Empathy, tolerance, and collaboration are essential to address global challenges, and virtual exchange fosters all these and more. It's not just about sharing knowledge—it's about creating a global community where every voice is heard, and every perspective is valued. Virtual exchange has a tremendous potential to transform how we see the world, each other, and even ourselves, making it an invaluable resource for building a more inclusive and peaceful global society.



AMELIA J. DIETRICH, PH.D.

SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH
AND PUBLICATIONS,
THE FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD

Dr. Amelia Dietrich is senior director of Research and Publications at The Forum on Education Abroad and managing editor of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, leading original research and scholarly publishing on best practices and the impact of education abroad on students, institutions, and communities. She serves on the IIE Open Doors Study Abroad Working Group and the Advisory Board for the Center for Research on Abroad and International Student Engagement. As an educator, Dr. Dietrich has taught Spanish and linguistics and led students abroad to Spain and Sweden. She holds a Ph.D. from Penn State University and is a Certified Professional in Education Abroad.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

During the dark and weird time that was the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual exchange and partnership with the Stevens Initiative represented a bright spot for hope and creativity and innovation. While study abroad and travel were on hold, the internet kept us connected in personal, professional and academic settings. It's exciting to be able to move forward out of those challenging times and see how virtual exchange and education abroad can work together when travel is possible.



AMÉRICA ANAID AVALOS GALINDO

NATIONAL MANAGER OF EDUCATION AND FAMILY
PHILANTHROPY, COPPEL FOUNDATION

América Avalos supports business leaders and companies to define and implement impactful philanthropy through her role as the national manager of Education and Family Philanthropy at the Coppel Foundation. Managing over 95 social, cultural, and development projects across a broad spectrum, her main focus lies with education issues in Mexico and her hometown of Culiacan, Sinaloa: improving early child development and education standards and training the next generation of leaders.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

What inspired me to get involved with virtual exchange is the possibility of connecting people of different backgrounds and the fact that these connections play an important role in creating a more peaceful world. The best way of generating social capital is building bridges that connect people and teach how to engage in dialogue. Virtual exchange builds these bridges.



AMY GILLET

VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION,
THE WILLIAM DAVIDSON INSTITUTE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Amy Gillett is an educator at the William Davidson Institute, specializing in virtual exchange and entrepreneurship development programs. She has studied eight foreign languages, traveled to 37 countries, and loves working across cultures. Amy has played a key role in creating and running several virtual exchange programs, including M²GATE, Business & Culture, Starting a Business, and Team Building for Results. Additionally, she has written business case studies for WDI Case Publishing and contributes to NextBillion, a blog focused on social enterprise.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

I learned about virtual exchange thanks to a Stevens Initiative call for virtual exchange proposals. I was immediately intrigued! I love learning about other cultures, had been an AFS student in Belgium in high school and had done three study abroad programs in college. In my career, I was running educational programs exclusively in overseas markets. I loved the idea of linking people across cultures without the time and expense of travel. I could see that this method of learning would open up the world to a lot more people!

Around the time I first learned of virtual exchange, I had developed a learning management system and saw its potential for facilitating programs. I could also see how advancements in videoconferencing technology would make connections across cultures more accessible and effective.



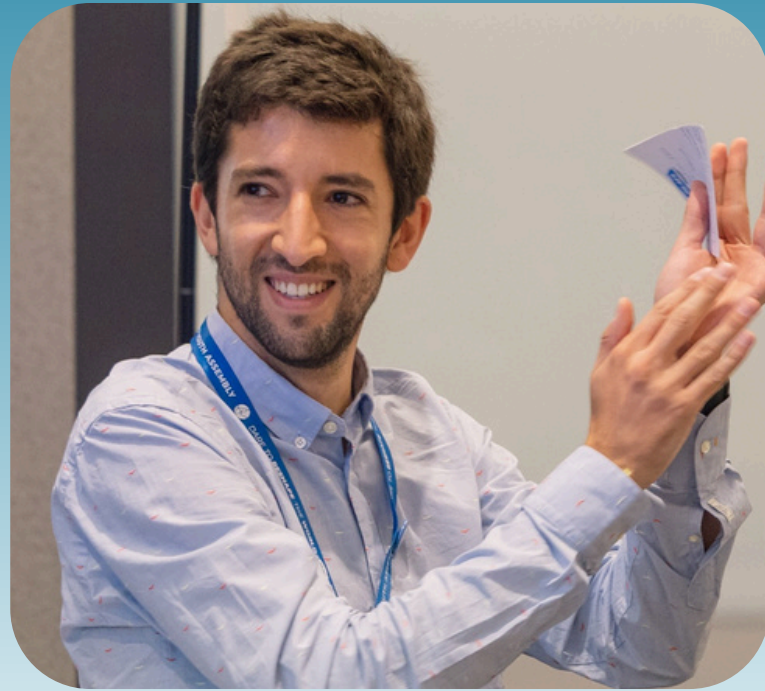
AMY SIT

STRATEGY AND DESIGN FELLOW, FRIDAY

Amy Sit is a designer and strategist who works to help mission-driven startups and organizations improve their programs, products, and organizational strategies. As a 2023 Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellow, Amy co-created a virtual exchange program that connected young people in Yemen, Iraq, and the U.S. through dialogue and vlogs. Currently, she co-leads the Young Eco-Stars Programme, a climate leadership and hybrid exchange program for young people in Nigeria, Indonesia, and the U.S., which received the 2024 Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund. She continues to facilitate cross-cultural dialogues for youth from Asia, Europe, MENA, and the U.S. through organizations like Soliya and Seeds of Peace.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

Virtual exchange offers a transformative opportunity to connect with people across the globe, allowing young people to engage with different perspectives and build empathy in ways that traditional interactions often can't. It's more than just a platform for connecting people on Zoom; it's a means of fostering global understanding and collaboration that can change perspectives, behaviors, and lives. I believe that in an increasingly divided world, virtual exchange creates safe spaces for people to share their lived experiences, challenge assumptions, and find common ground. By participating in these exchanges, we contribute to a more connected and compassionate global community, where differences are celebrated rather than feared.



ANDRÉS LANZA

GLOBAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, AFS INTERCULTURAL PROGRAMS

Andrés Lanza is a passionate advocate for global citizenship education and global competence. He holds a degree in peace and development work and is currently the coordinator of AFS' virtual exchange program, Global Up Americas, which aims to reach 3,000 students in 120 schools in Colombia, Mexico, and the U.S. He is also an intercultural learning specialist and a facilitator of several AFS programs. Andrés has 17 years of experience as volunteer and staff working in the global competence and intercultural exchange fields, and he believes in the power of virtual exchange as a powerful, inclusive, and accessible learning opportunity for young people.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?

What excites me most is being able to provide an opportunity that closes the gap between privileged and underrepresented communities, especially in the American continents. Supporting fellow U.S. Americans and Latin American educators and their students brings me a lot of joy and makes me feel fulfilled and excited about the future.



ANDY MINK

DIRECTOR OF RURAL INITIATIVES, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Andy Mink serves as the director of Rural Initiatives in the Office of the Under Secretary for Education. He leads efforts to establish partnerships and collaborations between the Smithsonian Institution and rural communities across the country. His educational career includes successful leadership roles at the National Humanities Center, the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and, most importantly, ten years teaching middle school. This wide-ranging set of professional experiences informs his deep commitment to community-based education. Currently, he is leading the Democracy in Dialogue Virtual Exchange Program that serves 180 communities across the nation.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

I have a strong interest in supporting the professional growth and efficacy of educators facilitating virtual exchange. During this process, teachers develop a stronger confidence in their own leadership roles in their schools and communities. Their practice is informed by the pedagogical design of virtual exchanges. Their overall satisfaction and engagement with their profession improves dramatically. I hope to represent the value and impact of virtual exchange on the professional educator. This impact multiplies the benefit far beyond the individual virtual exchange.



AYCA ARIYORUK

FELLOW, CENTER FOR AI AND DIGITAL POLICY

Ayca Ariyoruk is a fellow at the Center for AI and Digital Policy. Her career in technology began 10 years ago at Soliya, an international non-profit that was the first to image and deploy video conferencing as a social skill building technology. Soliya demonstrated that when we combine critical thinking with social and emotional awareness, technology becomes a powerful tool to teach skills, shift attitudes, influence behavior, foster communication across differences, and reduce ideological polarization. Ayca is an advocate for responsible, human centered technologies grounded in social sciences and innovative pedagogical approaches. In her early career, she led civil society campaigns advocating for international human rights. Her academic background is in political science and diplomacy. Her work has appeared in the New York Times, The Financial Times, BCC, Radio France, Toronto Star, and more.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?

Globalized technologies like artificial intelligence are pushing cross-cultural boundaries. At the same time, we are incentivized to limit our imagination and understanding of intelligence to narrowly defined skills, overlooking the full spectrum of human potential. The resulting learning losses and opportunity costs in education risk causing irreversible harm to society.

Virtual exchange as a unique, specialized ed-tech field, is perfectly fit to address these dual challenges. We must inform our educators about the opportunities AI offers — such as its potential for greater scale and for bridging the knowledge and skill gaps — as well as the risks, including the misuses of AI and erosion of cultural diversity. Most importantly, we need virtual exchange to keep a focus in education on the skills and attitudes associated with natural intelligence, which are not likely to be provided by traditional, profit driven educational avenues.



BRENDA IVONNE GARCIA PORTILLO

COORDINATOR OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE,
U.S. CONSULATE AT MONTERREY, MEXICO

Brenda García Portillo is coordinator of Education and Culture of the U.S. Consulate at Monterrey, Mexico, and does consulting in internationalization of higher education. Brenda has 24 years of experience in international education and 12 years of experience in virtual education. She designed the Intercultural Competence Training Program as well as internationalization at home activities, such as COIL at Universidad de Monterrey. She consults on topics related to intercultural competences and COIL in national and international forums. She is a co-founder member of the LatAm COIL Consortium and the current president. Brenda is also part of the steering committee of the IVEC conference, creator and coordinator of the Online Collaborative Learning Program of the Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean, and content developer and consultant for AMPEI's PIC-AMERICAS. In her tenure as COIL coordinator, she has managed to position UDEM among Mexican higher education institutions with the highest participation in COIL projects nationwide.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

I hope to contribute a unique perspective from my experience being a student with limited study abroad experiences and as a professional in international education for more than 20 years. Virtual exchange is not just a tool for international collaboration, but a transformative force for equity and accessibility in global education. My focus will be on leveraging virtual exchange to empower underrepresented communities, particularly in the Global South, by providing them with the intercultural competencies needed to thrive in a globalized world. I aim to advocate for more inclusive and sustainable internationalization practices that ensure no one is left behind in the pursuit of global engagement.



CAMILLE PARKINSON

TRAINING ASSOCIATE,
USAID - CONTRACTOR

Camille Parkinson currently serves as a training associate at USAID, where she supports a suite of courses related to conflict sensitivity and atrocity prevention. Camille contributes to curriculum development and manages logistics for successful program delivery. Before joining USAID as a contractor, she participated in the Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship, where she co-facilitated and co-founded the AMENA Vlogs project. This initiative connected youth from the U.S. and the Middle East through cross-cultural dialogue and creative media exchange, fostering meaningful relationships and understanding. Camille's introduction to virtual exchange began during her undergraduate studies at George Mason University, where she participated in Qisasna's Amideast. In this program, she produced two podcasts on social and cultural issues that impact both Yemeni and American society.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

As a Global Champion, I bring a background in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, combined with hands-on experience facilitating international exchanges. My focus is on how virtual exchange can be used as a tool for conflict prevention, promoting dialogue and mutual respect between communities. I hope to contribute strategies that leverage virtual platforms to engage youth, empower underrepresented voices, and promote sustainable peacebuilding efforts globally.



CAROLINE FAIRCLOTH

GLOBAL STUDIES SPECIALIST,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)

Formerly an elementary educator, **Caroline Faircloth** has transitioned into a dynamic role as DCPS's Global Studies Specialist. Caroline excels in fostering global awareness among students and educators. Her expertise includes connecting classrooms across the district with students worldwide through virtual exchanges. She holds a master's degree in incorporating international perspectives in education and is passionate about leveraging technology to create inclusive and engaging learning environments. Committed to lifelong learning, Caroline continues to inspire students and educators alike through innovative global education initiatives.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

I was inspired to get involved with virtual exchange to make the world feel smaller and more connected. By leveraging modern technology, virtual exchanges provide an accessible and affordable opportunity to introduce students to peers around the globe while allowing them to explore diverse cultures, recognize new perspectives, and build meaningful connections. Virtual exchange not only fosters a sense of global citizenship but also prepares students to thrive in an interconnected world. It's deeply fulfilling to see young minds broaden their horizons and develop empathy for people from different backgrounds.



CÉSAR GUTIERREZ

DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL ENHANCEMENT, ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL DE UNIVERSIDADES E INSTITUCIONES DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR (ANUIES); BOARD PRESIDENT, ASOCIACIÓN MEXICANA PARA LA EDUCACIÓN INTERNACIONAL (AMPEI)

César Eduardo Gutiérrez Jurado is the director of Institutional Enhancement at ANUIES and president of the AMPEI Directive Board. He led the successful expansion of the U.S.-Mexico Program for Curricular Internationalization (PIC US-MX), fostering cross-border collaboration among 289 professors from 90 institutions in North America. This initiative, supported by COIL methodology, enriched over 120 courses with international and intercultural content, benefiting more than 3,500 participants. César's expertise in higher education internationalization is backed by his academic roles and leadership in global education initiatives.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

Virtual exchange is incredibly valuable for fostering global, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning, which is vital for addressing shared challenges. While it may not have the same recognition as in-person exchange, it is our responsibility to demonstrate and highlight its benefits. Virtual exchange promotes diversity, inclusion, and the development of digital and multicultural competencies, all while facilitating meaningful dialogue between cultures. It's an essential tool for preparing individuals to thrive in a connected world and for creating more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities globally.



CHRIS DUBIA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MAPWORKS LEARNING

As Executive Director of MapWorks Learning, **Chris Dubia** has built dynamic virtual exchange programs that bring students and teachers together from 53 countries. For over 20 years, he has been passionate about connecting people through education. Chris thrives on creating rich learning experiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and developing strong partnerships to make a global impact.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

As a visual artist, educator, and seasoned practitioner in virtual exchange, I bring a unique perspective to the field. My experience in the classroom and as a school leader, combined with my artistic background, allows me to understand the complexities of learning and the potential of visual communication in fostering deeper engagement. I believe that by integrating creative and critical thinking into virtual exchange programs, we can empower all students to become effective problem-solvers and global citizens. Virtual exchange should be a staple in education, not a privilege for the few. My goal is to help shape a future where virtual exchange is accessible to everyone and is a platform for personal growth, cultural exchange, and collaborative learning.



DANIELLE CHAUSSÉE

SPANISH TEACHER AND GLOBAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM
COORDINATOR, OCONOMOWOC HIGH SCHOOL;
COORDINATOR, WISCONSIN SEAL OF BILITERACY

Danielle Chaussée has been a Spanish teacher at Oconomowoc High School in Wisconsin for more than 20 years. She was a 2017 TGC U.S. State Department fellow and was also Wisconsin's 2020-2021 Global Educator of the Year. She is passionate about inspiring action through collaboration with local and global colleagues and community partners to provide students with skills and opportunities to become globally competent agents of change. She co-designs virtual exchanges with a school in Atenas, Costa Rica and her students participated in the first cohort of Compañeros de Clase Globales through iEARN-USA.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

The importance of getting to know someone of a different culture, with different perspectives, or with someone who speaks a different language cannot be understated. In the past, we have connected our students to the world with travel. While travel provides amazing opportunities to experience the world, there are also obstacles. For example, travel is often cost prohibitive or students may not be able to participate due to time constraints.

Through virtual exchange, my students build their global competencies, such as practicing their second language and learning about other perspectives in a real world context, right in the classroom. Obstacles like cost and time constraints are no longer concerns. Also, with virtual exchange, students are able to have these interactions over a more sustained period of time.



GIANMARIO BESANA

ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR GLOBAL
ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE LEARNING,
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

GianMario Besana is the associate provost for global engagement and online learning at DePaul University in Chicago, IL, U.S. He led the creation of the Global Learning Experience (GLE) program, DePaul's signature virtual exchange-COIL initiative, and of the Global Conversations series, another approach to virtual exchange. The GLE program was recognized in 2019 with the POD Innovation award and in 2020 with a NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Spotlight Award for Campus Internationalization. GianMario has facilitated numerous workshops on institutional approaches to virtual exchange globally, and is one of the founders of the International Virtual Exchange Consortium.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?
Virtual exchange is an exciting combination of intercultural practices and technology. The technology component of the field has been moving quite quickly, with the widespread adoption of affordable, stable, and easy to access synchronous web-based video conferencing tools. I am now very excited to see what generative artificial intelligence (AI) can do for virtual exchange. I believe AI has the potential to enhance the experience of virtual exchange in various ways. In particular, I believe that AI has the ability to increase language equity in our discipline. While the field has seen amazing growth in projects conducted in Spanish and Portuguese, for example, English remains the dominant language of the field, with inherent inequities and added complexities. AI will expand access to virtual exchange reducing the relevance of language barriers.



HOLDEN GARRISON

BRANCH MANAGER TRAINEE,
MARINER FINANCE

Holden Garrison studied Global Affairs and Development at University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) where he competed multiple virtual and hybrid exchange programs, including UNCG's Business in Belgium program and IREX's Global Solutions Conversations. He graduated with university and international honors and went on to participate in the Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship program. He is currently working as a Branch Manager Trainee for Mariner Finance.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?
I'm excited about the prospect of continuing to reach a greater number of virtual exchange participants beyond the scope of university classrooms! Strength lies in diversity, so the more we're connected across broader walks of life, the stronger we'll be.



JENNIFER CHEN

DIRECTOR OF VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING, WORLD LEARNING

Jennifer Chen currently serves as director of virtual programming at World Learning. She is passionate about leveraging technology to equip learners with essential skills for the future. Before joining World Learning, she worked at Meta, where she developed and implemented the vision and strategy for the company's global education initiatives. She also designed mobile learning games at PBS KIDS and is a former high school history teacher.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?

I'm excited about the potential for virtual exchange to bridge opposing viewpoints. In a polarized climate where social media often amplifies divisions, virtual exchange offers a counterbalance by fostering meaningful conversations across differences. Through structured and facilitated brave spaces, participants learn to process information and focus on solving problems rather than creating hostility. They share perspectives shaped by their unique experiences, upbringings, and surroundings, revealing the subtle nuances in complex global issues. In a world with pronounced contrasts, it is these nuances and gray areas that can unlock common understanding, and perhaps even transform our shared future.



JODI RESCH BROWNELL

SPANISH TEACHER,
CRANDON HIGH SCHOOL

Jodi Resch Brownell is a high school Spanish teacher in Crandon, Wisconsin. Her experiences as a National Geographic Certified Educator and a Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellow inspired her to start the Global Scholars program at Crandon High School. Jodi works to bring global opportunities to rural students, most recently with a U.S. State Department-supported project, COIL Rural CommuniTIES, which promotes virtual exchange in K-16 rural institutions. She was named as Wisconsin's Rural Teacher and Global Educator of the Year in 2023. Jodi is also a National Geographic/Lindblad Expeditions Grosvenor Fellow. She is currently working with a Colombian partner for a virtual exchange in her classroom.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

I believe that I offer a unique perspective as a rural teacher. When I learned about virtual exchange, I saw it as the perfect way for rural students of all socioeconomic backgrounds to have a chance to make an international connection and feel more connected to the rest of the world. I also know from living in a rural community my whole life how many people from these areas are fearful of other cultures and countries. My mission is to use virtual exchange to change these attitudes, starting in childhood, so future generations in rural areas are less apprehensive about international travel and interacting with people of different cultures. Additionally, I think the rural perspective is important for other cultures to realize that American culture is more than just the big cities they see in the movies.



KRISTINA KATSOS

SENIOR INSTRUCTOR,
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

Kristina Katsos is a faculty member in the Department of International Studies at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Her work explores the integration of emerging technologies in education, innovative student engagement strategies centered around sustainability, and the critical intersections between energy and international relations. In recent years, Katsos has focused on advancing innovative instructional design and technology, with a strong commitment to fostering dynamic and immersive learning experiences, particularly through virtual exchange. She successfully led the two-year "Transformative Sustainability Project," a virtual exchange program that engaged nearly 1,500 students across four university campuses in the UAE and the U.S., in multidisciplinary collaborative courses involving 16 faculty members. Additionally, she has actively participated in several virtual exchange collaborations. Katsos also researches the impact of virtual exchange, particularly through COIL, and has co-authored a peer-reviewed paper on its influence on social capital.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?

I'm most excited about the limitless potential of virtual exchange to redefine global education. As technology continues to advance, the opportunities for deeper, more immersive cross-cultural collaborations are expanding rapidly. I'm thrilled by the prospect of connecting even more diverse student populations, allowing them to engage in meaningful, real-time exchanges that can spark innovation and foster a deeper understanding of global issues. The future of virtual exchange holds the promise of not only transforming how we learn but also how we connect and collaborate as a global community, creating a more inclusive and empathetic world.



KYLE KASTLER

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF
GLOBAL LEARNING ABROAD,
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Kyle Kastler directs the development and implementation of Education Abroad programs at the University of Maryland, College Park, working to provide pathways towards global opportunities for every Terp. Previously, Kyle contributed to the field of international education by working on in-person and virtual exchange programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and other funders. Kyle holds a Master of Education in international education policy from the University of Maryland, College Park. Kyle, originally from Kansas, is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, a Critical Language Scholarship Recipient, and holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish and political science from Missouri Southern State University.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

For my fellow international educators, I would share that virtual exchange is a great tool of equal value – it is not a “second best” and it is really time we started talking about it that way. There are a ton of students that will not study abroad for a variety of reasons – such as the expense, course requirements, or their own travel preferences! Virtual exchange can be a very impactful tool for global learning and isn't a threat to traditional mobility programs.



LORELEY GODFREY

STUDENT,
WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Loreley Godfrey is a rising sophomore at Wellesley College majoring in Economics. As a participant in Global Ties U.S.'s MENA-USA Empowering Resilient Girls Exchange, Loreley learned about cross-cultural mental health issues. She was inspired to pioneer legislation with her state senator that expanded mental health education for Granite State students. Loreley also participated in the 2023 Stevens Initiative Alumni Fellowship.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

I want the global community to know that virtual exchange is easy and fun! I've never laughed harder than sharing a joke over a Zoom screen with friends that are thousands of miles away. These relationships are pivotal in reducing stereotypes about different regions of the world.



M'HAMED EN-NOSSE

**DIRECTOR,
THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (IFTD)**

M'hamed En-Nosse is the director of the Youth for Sustainable Development Goals (YSDGs) Virtual Exchange Program and the IFTD in Morocco. He excels at fostering international collaboration among youth, promoting sustainable development, and creating impactful virtual learning environments. IFTD, a civil non-profit organization, offers training in education, development, and promotes civic engagement, tolerance, and coexistence. Through the YSDGs program, M'hamed connects students from Morocco, other MENA countries, and the U.S., focusing on civic engagement, language acquisition, and digital literacy to explore UN Sustainable Development Goals and build global citizenship skills.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

My inspiration to get involved with virtual exchange stems from a deep belief in the power of education and cross-cultural dialogue to drive positive change. Witnessing the transformative impact of connecting young minds from diverse backgrounds, I realized that virtual exchange programs could bridge gaps, foster mutual understanding, and empower youth to address global challenges collaboratively. The opportunity to create impactful learning environments and promote sustainable development initiatives further fueled my passion for this field.



NADERA ALBORNO

DEAN AND PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION,
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN DUBAI

Dr. Nadera Alborna, Dean of the School of Education at the American University in Dubai, has been recognized for her exceptional service in teaching and community outreach, rising to professor in 2023. A “compassionate researcher,” her work focuses on promoting access, equity, and justice in education by preparing teachers for inclusive and multicultural classrooms and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Her internationally acclaimed scholarship emphasizes teacher preparation, inclusion, and transformative learning through virtually connected classrooms with U.S. universities. Additionally, Dr. Alborna collaborates with local communities to support children with disabilities and advance their rights to education and employment.

What unique perspective do you hope to contribute as a Global Champion for virtual exchange?

As a Global Champion for virtual exchange, I bring the perspective of an educator deeply committed to experiential learning and cross-cultural collaboration. I am committed to advocating for innovative, equitable, and accessible virtual exchange opportunities that enhance global learning, empower marginalized voices, and inspire a new generation of globally-minded leaders to make a positive impact.



NADIA MAVRAKIS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CULTURINGUA

As a native Texan and Libyan-American with extensive global experience, **Nadia Mavrakis** brings the perspective of these worldviews to her role as CEO of Culturingua, a nonprofit in San Antonio, Texas, U.S., that elevates the people and heritage of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia. Culturingua has developed and implemented virtual exchange programs connecting approximately 600 middle school and high school students in San Antonio with high school students in the Arab world, including in Libya, Qatar, the Palestinian Territories, and Algeria. Nadia is a leader in K-12 virtual exchange and is a frequent speaker at conferences around the world about the importance of virtual exchange as a tool to democratize international education.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

I was inspired to get involved in virtual exchange because I personally benefited from international exchange as a college student when I studied abroad in Paris, France. I gained international friends who I still keep in touch with almost 20 years later, dramatically improved my French language skills, and learned so much about the culture and way of life. Later in the early years of my career, I worked on global business strategy projects with colleagues in Singapore, India, Scotland, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Through those experiences, I realized the importance of building cross-cultural collaboration and communication skills in our increasingly globalized world. I believe these types of experiences should be brought to more students and at a younger age. Virtual exchange provided that type of opportunity for students to build friendships with peers from around the world whilst building critical 21st century skills.



SALLY MUDIAMU

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT,
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Sally Mudiamu is the deputy senior international officer at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, U.S. She supports institutions and faculty in strategizing, accessing, and growing their global engagement as part of imagining and creating the future of higher education. Sally specializes in COIL virtual exchange as a future-facing pedagogy and institutional strategy for internationalizing the curriculum. She studies faculty and student engagement in COIL and has been involved with the Stevens Initiative since 2019.

What are you most excited about for the future of virtual exchange?

I am excited for the future of virtual exchange because it is poised for significant expansion, driven by increased accessibility, technological advancements, and integration into curricula. As technology like virtual reality and AI improves, virtual exchanges will become more immersive and inclusive, allowing broader global participation. These programs will be increasingly integrated into standard curricula, enhancing students' global competence and digital literacy. Collaborative partnerships between institutions and industry will provide real-world contexts, while the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of virtual exchanges will appeal to budget-conscious institutions. Ongoing research and supportive policies will further refine and promote these programs, making them a vital component of 21st-century education.



STEPHANIE DOSCHER

ASSISTANT VICE PROVOST FOR
CURRICULUM INTERNATIONALIZATION,
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Stephanie Doscher, Doctor of Education, is assistant vice provost for curriculum internationalization at the University of Minnesota. She is contributing editor and co-author of *The Guide to COIL Virtual Exchange* and co-author of *Making Global Learning Universal: Promoting Inclusion and Success for All Students*, both comprehensive handbooks for engaging all undergraduates in collaborative global problem solving with diverse others. Stephanie's recent writing includes "Curriculum Internationalization in the Digital Age," a chapter in *Digital Internationalization: Beyond Virtual Exchange*. She hosted the *Making Global Learning Universal Podcast* and serves on the advisory boards for AAC&U's Liberal Education and COIL Connect.

What message would you like to share with the global community about the value of virtual exchange?

Internationalization is a change leadership process that involves connecting institutions and communities with the world's knowledge exchange and production network. Leaders need every tool and strategy available to engage all our faculty, staff, and students in the process of internationalization—digital technologies and virtual exchange pedagogies are indispensable to our goal of facilitating global learning for all. I have experienced firsthand and witnessed the myriad ways in which purposefully designed virtual exchange facilitates real experiences, real creativity, real research, and real relationships. Virtual exchange is the newest, most exciting, and among the most powerful endeavors we can practice in the field of internationalization of higher education!



VERÓNICA RODRIGUEZ LUNA

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSIDAD VERACRUZANA; VICE PRESIDENT, LATIN AMERICAN COIL NETWORK

Verónica Rodríguez Luna holds a doctorate in education, a master's in teaching English as a foreign language and a bachelor's in English language. She has participated in the design of three blended learning courses for the Universidad Veracruzana (UV). Verónica belongs to the research group Autonomy in Learning and has published several articles and book chapters about the use of technology to enhance learning. She has also co-authored three books on autonomous learning. She leads the COIL and Virtual International Collaborations programs at the UV. Verónica is one of the founders, and current vice president of the LATAM COIL Network.

What inspired you to get involved with virtual exchange?

I have always been interested in learning about different cultures and meeting people from different parts of the world, and I have also liked languages since I was a child. I was amazed to realize that I could do all that through virtual exchange and, so I felt really motivated to get involved with it. Professionally, I recognized the increasing importance of global collaboration in our interconnected world. I strongly wish for all young learners worldwide to have the opportunity to engage in virtual exchange and develop cross-cultural communication and digital skills among other skills to create a better world.