

Bluefield State College Participates in Soliya Connect Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 27, 2014



Members of the Bluefield State College American National Government class (POSC 200) were provided the option this Spring 2014 semester with participating in an exciting international program offered by an organization called Soliya, with thirteen opting to be part of the initial Soliya Connect group here at BSC. Utilizing specialized communication software called Exchange 2.0, students from over 100 universities in 27 countries across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Europe, and North America participate in two-hour weekly discussion sessions addressing various cultural and political issues of the day. Readings on the various issues are provided, and the cross-cultural dialogue is structured to facilitate an honest exchange of views of students around the world. Students are put into groups of approximately eight to ten students from a diverse array of colleges and universities from around the world, with approximately half of each group composed of students from the Middle East and North Africa, and the software utilized enables each group member to visually see and communicate with all other group members simultaneously. Facilitators, who are Soliya alumni, provide some direction to group discussions, but it is the students who are key to the dynamics of the Connect Program.

Another highlight of the program is a video project which allows each student to act as a news editor for a major television station and put together a three to four minute news segment to be broadcast internationally utilizing archival footage from Soliya's vast archive of international news programming, about a hypothetical scenario based upon real events. This semester's fictitious issue was the following:

Last month, a film by an American director became viral on the internet. Since then, there has been a flurry of very passionate international responses. Protests have erupted in many countries as some people see the film as blasphemous towards Islam. Others defend the making of the film, citing freedom of speech. As anger escalates and violent acts occur, citizens and leaders from countries around the world have chimed in with divergent perspectives on the event.

Operating since 2003, Soliya utilizes what it calls Civil Media to empower the emerging community of young adults from around the world to amplify voices from civil society so as to catalyze constructive and respectful discourse across divisions about important sociopolitical issues.

Soliya is a partner of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, a project of the UN Secretary-General that aims "to reduce tensions across cultural divides that threaten to inflame existing political conflicts or trigger new ones."

Through its programs of international communication, Soliya hopes to replace the usual method of confrontation and coercion in international relations, in which the basic interest of others are not adequately met, and which are ultimately unjust and unsustainable, to a process of cooperation and compassion, in an effort to avoid an inevitable "clash of civilizations" requiring war, multiple deaths, and—just since the turn of the century—trillions of dollars. Soliya believes it is critical that we shift how societies approach their differences from thinking in terms of "*us or them*" to "*us and them*".

Soliya believes that it should become the norm in the 21st century for students to have a profound cross-cultural experience as part of their education, whether it is in person or online. It has thus partnered with a number of organizations, educational institutions, and other key partners to make this collaborative vision a reality.

For additional information, contact Colin S. Cavell, Ph.D. at ccavell@bluefieldstate.edu or 304-327-4034.