

Week 4 Report

What Other Groups Did & Group Dynamics

This past week, facilitators reported that groups are seeing a deeper level of exchange as students are more curious to learn about each other's viewpoints, and explore their differences constructively. Despite some technical difficulties, the majority of facilitators have reported good or excellent dynamics in their sessions, and that students are now more open to discussing controversial / emotionally charged topics, which is great to see. Most groups had the activities of "Cultural Exploration" and "Cultural Iceberg" that are a great in providing the necessary means to explore and learn about one another's cultures. Afterwards, groups continued their engagement with the second set of small-group discussions related to the final project, during which students continue exploring the global facet of an issue that exists in their respective communities in greater depth with one or two of their groupmates.

This activity was most often followed by free-flowing discussions based on the assigned readings on "Intercultural Communication". In some groups, students started defining culture according to their contexts and moved to stating differences based on their cultural aspects and backgrounds, such as their views on women rights. Students were then able to address differences directly and think of broader issues related to that such as stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. In other groups, these readings lead to discussions about the various challenges facing a cross cultural exchange, and both the principles and best practices of intercultural communication to better understand how they can improve and deepen the dialogue with people coming from a different culture than theirs.

Attendance & Technology Update

This past week there were little to no major technical issues that impacted groups, but we are seeing low levels of attendance due to spring / Easter break in some universities. While most groups had the critical mass necessary to engage in dynamic, fruitful discussions, there have been a few groups that have been negatively impacted by the attendance issues. We are working on addressing these issues by reaching out directly to students to ensure their engagement and attend their sessions regularly to fully benefit from their experience.

We would really appreciate your support in ensuring student attendance in their sessions: their attendance is crucial for their groups' dynamics and learning process, and we would be grateful if you could **please remind your students that their attendance and participation remain crucial to the group's dynamic and to making the most out of their Soliya experience.** If your students are on break next week, please encourage them to login remotely for their sessions, and contact our tech team if they anticipate any technical difficulties.

Next Week

Next week groups will likely begin either with "Life Stories" or "Sharing Circles". Sharing Circles is designed to promote active listening, empathy and relationship-building amongst group members. During the activity, students self-identify with one group or another and are able to "listen in" on in-group discussions to deepen their understanding of the other's perspective. During Life Stories, we ask students to share with each other the three events that shaped their views of the world. This activity has consistently been cited as one of the high points in students' end of semester feedback, and can lead to a wide variety of follow-up conversations ranging from discussions on how students' political views have been impacted by personal experiences, to explorations of the effect family members have on shaping students' perspectives.