

Connect Global US-MENA: Week One Report

Main Activities and Group Dynamics:

This week, participants started their first sessions of the Connect Program. Before the sessions begin, students completed the introductory activities that prepared them for their virtual exchange experience. Participants opened their first sessions with ice-breakers and activities during which they introduced themselves and their respective countries. Then, facilitators shared more information about the value of cross-cultural exchange and the role of participants in the dialogue process.

After the introductions, participants started discussions about their required readings. Based on the readings, some groups discussed the current global risks while others shared thoughts about how the current social challenges are perceived and dealt with. During the discussions, participants shared their opinions on the most critical global problems and explained whether they agree or disagree with the authors and why. After discussing the first set of required readings, some groups picked a topic of their choice and explored it on a deeper level.

Most facilitators rated their group dynamics as “good” while others had a slightly slower start. During the first sessions, it is normal for participants to be quiet and shy. Students will take time to get more familiar with each other and gain more ownership over the discussions. Despite the slow start, many facilitators reported that participants are curious about how their peers perceive the world. In the upcoming sessions, conversations are expected to run more smoothly and students will take the lead on the dialogue process.

Attendance and Technology:

This week, a large number of students were absent or did not attend their sessions fully. We would highly appreciate your support in reminding students to attend full sessions. We also recommend that students login a few minutes early to avoid technical issues that might affect their participation.

On the technical front, we faced a server issue that affected a few groups. While fixing the issue, students and facilitators were kept informed. At the end of the sessions, our technical team investigated the issue more thoroughly, looked into the affected server and implemented the necessary fixes yesterday.

Next week:

In week two, participants will start working on their final projects. Students will pick a program-related topic with their groupmates and will discuss it further with the community members they will identify by the end of the week. In addition to the final project preparations, participants will start their sessions with ice-breakers and will engage in free flowing discussions. During the second session, groups will dive deeper into the dialogue and will continue engaging in discussions about global and social issues. Participants will continue to build comfort and reinforce their confidence through listening and active participation.