

Connect Global US-MENA: Week 6 Report

Main Activities and Group Dynamics

This week, most groups opened the sessions with icebreakers. Then, they engaged in free-flowing conversations about one or two topics of their choice. Some groups chose to engage around the suggested topics such as stereotypes and cultural misunderstanding while others spontaneously delved into personal topics including the way social distancing is affecting their mental health.

After the discussions, participants took time to thoroughly reflect on the opinions they gathered in the second set of final project interviews. Most students split into smaller groups to share details on how they brought the voices of their respective communities into the dialogue and how the interviewees brought in a different perspective. Before they start the activity, facilitators highly encouraged participants to share constructive feedback with their peers on how perspectives can change from one country to another.

This week, most facilitators rated the groups as “good” or “excellent”. Facilitators are noticing a positive development in students’ communication and critical thinking skills. With the exception of some students who faced technical issues that affected their participation, most participants felt more comfortable sharing their opinions openly while maintaining a balance between honesty and respect.

Attendance and Technology

Around 85% of our students attended their sessions this week, and this is the highest rate of attendance we've seen so far this semester. Thank you for your help in following up with students. We are reaching out to the students who were absent individually to remind them to attend their sessions and provide support to those who need help, and we would appreciate your continued support in reminding them to attend the last two sessions of the Program.

On the technical front, a few groups on Tuesday’s last block of sessions were impacted by a server outage that lasted 15 minutes in most cases. A couple groups had a longer outage, and we're working with those groups separately to keep them on track. Our technical team provided immediate support to the impacted groups by calling all students who were dropped from their session and helping them come back in. Many facilitators reported that despite the issues, most affected groups were able to cover the important components of the session and maintain good dynamics, and we continue to work with them, too.

Next Week

In week 7, participants will keep leading free-flowing conversations about topics of their choice. Students are being encouraged to engage in constructive conversations about global and social challenges on a much deeper level. At this stage of the Program, participants are expected to keep full ownership of their discussions by driving the conversation themselves, asking one another questions, listening carefully to responses then, reflecting on how differences might affect their views.