

Connect Global US-MENA: Week One Report

Main Activities and Group Dynamics:

Last week, participants started their first sessions of the Connect Program. Before the sessions begin, students completed the introductory activities that helped them prepare 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, students 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. Facilitators also reported that several groups discussed the Covid-19 virus as a major global issue. Participants shared how this health crisis is affecting their personal lives, the national decisions made in their respective countries and the role of the media in promoting safety precautions.

Most facilitators rated their group dynamics as “good” while others had a slightly slower start. Some agreed on principles that will shape their discussions throughout the programs. These suggested principles will allow group members to build comfort around each other and share their opinions and differences openly. In the upcoming sessions, students are expected to take time to get more familiar with each other and gain more ownership over the dialogue process.

Attendance and Technology:

Last 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, no major issues were reported. Because students are logging in from home, some students dealt with unstable internet. For other issues, our technical team was able to support before and during the session.

This 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.