



Collaborative Journalism Project: Learning Hard and Soft Skills

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Abstract

This survey examined the perceptions of 85 undergraduate students at two U.S. universities on opposite coasts who participated in a semester-long collaborative reporting project. Pre- and post-surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions were administered at the beginning and end of the semester. These determined that students received adequate instruction about the project, wanted more deadlines and additional class time to work on their stories, valued faculty feedback over peers' feedback, and had fewer unanswered questions than expected. However, students did not find the collaborative experience to be more engaging than working on their own and said the project did not provide as much practical, hands-on learning as traditional classroom instruction. Quantitative data captured students' frustrations with collaborative group work and managing a three-hour time difference but also suggest that a collaborative reporting project has potential for improving hard and soft skills, in addition to providing a glimpse of professional journalism work.

Introduction

Depending on the story, reporters either research and write stories on their own or in collaboration with other journalists from their publication or other media outlets (Dailey et. al, 2010). In journalism school, it is common for college students to work on written assignments individually, working only with other students if producing a complex story for their student media outlet. Yet, collaboration is an important skill for student journalists to learn and practice in order to be ready for the 21st century workplace (Kovach

& Rosenstiel, 2014). Hence, two professors teaching at public universities on opposite sides of the country designed a collaborative reporting project for their beginning-level journalism students. The mission was simple: Students attending universities on the West Coast and in the Mid-Atlantic region would work together in bi-coastal teams to each research and write their own 1,000-word news-feature story.

The exploratory project, conducted with three cohorts during three semesters, inherently posed a myriad of challenges for both the students and the

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professors, who relied on technology to communicate. While honing the hard skills of journalistic researching, reporting, and writing was the main purpose of the assignment, soft skills were also put to the test as students experienced collaboration frustration, exacerbated by a three-hour time difference. In the end, every single team—consisting of students from both universities—delivered a news-feature story addressing a significant social issue such as immigration, health care, climate change, or gun control. The stories, which were the first bylined stories for most of the students, were posted on a blogging platform that they could then show to potential internship or job employers. Instead of writing for their professor, the students were writing for the world.

The purpose of this study, conducted in Spring 2017, Fall 2017, and Fall 2018, was to examine perceptions of bi-coastal journalism students collaborating on a news-feature story.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literary analysis is to explore collaborative learning in higher education and its relationship to socio-constructivist theory, learning/engagement, professional practice, and soft skills set within the framework of a research study on students participating in a collaborative journalism project. The project required students to collaborate using social media posts, text messages, email, and group apps to facilitate sharing and understanding of the social issues that dominated the 2016 presidential campaign and its aftermath.

Theoretical Background: Learning in groups has been a mainstay of education for decades, having its roots in Lev Vygotsky's (1978) research and theory in the socio-constructivist approach to cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) posited that cognition comes through social interaction, believing that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." Moreover, Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) postulates that there is a difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what a learner can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner (Sharma et. al, 2015, McLeod, 2014).

While Vygotsky's socio-constructivist approach to collaborative learning initially focused on interactions between instructor and learner or between learner and other learners in traditional classroom settings, today collaborative learning may occur across time and loca-

tion due to advances in communications technology (So & Brush, 2008). Online education researchers have recognized an increase in interest in collaborative learning approaches that may be explained by two factors: computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social constructivism (So & Brush, 2008).

Regarding CMC, researchers So and Brush (2008) determined that CMC tools have played a significant role in assisting group learning processes among members who may live in different geographical areas and have different learning styles. However, the researchers cautioned that while the use of digital communications technologies and social media platforms may bridge the communications gap, it is important to employ pedagogically sound strategies to overcome the psychological gap among collaborative learners (So & Brush, 2008). Furthermore, the researchers noted that while learners may be assigned to work together on group projects, this does not necessarily mean that they will work collaboratively (So & Brush, 2008). In collaborative projects, learners often default to a task-specialization approach where tasks are divided among group members, resulting in fewer opportunities to develop mutual engagement, knowledge and skills exchange, and interpersonal communications skills (Kitchen & McDougall, 1998).

Concerning social constructivism, So and Brush (2008) have found that the socio-constructivist view has transformed online learning from merely a way of transmitting content knowledge to a means of enhanced collaborative learning that aims for the acquisition of higher learning skills. When designed and applied appropriately in online learning settings, researchers have found that collaborative learning can provide students with positive opportunities to experience multiple perspectives of other learners from different backgrounds, opportunities that may help them to improve their critical thinking skills through the processes of judging, valuing, supporting, or opposing different viewpoints (Hakkarainen, Lipponen, & Jarvela, 2002; Stacey, 1999).

Learning/Engagement: Student collaborative projects have more advantages to improve student learning than more traditional classroom-based instruction (Kapp, 2009). Collaborative learning activities can result in enhanced intrinsic motivation, strengthened persistence to overcome adversity, and improved transferability of knowledge and skills acquired by students participating in a collaborative learning experience (Kapp, 2009). However, disadvantages to

collaborative learning include one of the more commonly reported behaviors known as “free-riding,” in which one or more members of the group do not contribute fully to the group but instead depend on the work of others to accomplish the task (Brooks & Ammons, 2003; Joyce, 1999; Dyer, 1995). Another barrier to positive learning/engagement is “hijacking,” a situation in which one member of the team takes complete control of the collaborative project and aggressively dictates the activities of other students in the group while discouraging their participation in any form of decision making (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003).

Professional Practices: Researchers have found that students’ communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and capacity to work as effective members of teams are attributes that develop and improve among students who engage in collaborative learning activities; all of these are attributes highly valued by future employers (Thomas & Busby, 2003). One of the purposes of higher education is to prepare graduates to take their place in a professional setting (Yasin et al., 2000). A major challenge for higher education is to identify and develop effective methods of student learning, such as collaborative learning experiences, that encourage a transition from dependence in learning to independence in learning, with the goal of producing self-confident, creative, autonomous, and adaptive individuals (Yasin et al., 2000). Researchers have posited that this will result in “win-win” outcomes for both businesses and higher education (Yasin et al., 2000).

Soft Skills: Many things can go wrong during a collaborative learning project (Van den Bossche et al., 2006), even in instances where careful attention has been paid to its pedagogical design (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). Copious research on the cognitive and motivational challenges associated with collaborative learning has been conducted in recent years (Naykki et al., 2014). Likewise, socio-emotional challenges have emerged as an area of inquiry, focused on interpersonal dynamics, different work styles, dysfunctional communication, or lack of communication, all of which may doom collaborative learning (Barron, 2003). Socio-emotional conflict is defined as an interaction that involves frustration and personality clashes within a group, a situation that negatively affects group cohesion, commitment, satisfaction, and performance (Naykki et al., 2014). Socio-emotional conflict is characterized by interaction behaviors such

as overruling or undermining others’ opinions and expertise or through actions in which some group members’ expertise is emphasized at the expense of others’ (Chiu & Khoo, 2003; Rogat & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2011; Salomon & Globerson, 1989). For students participating in collaborative learning projects, it is critical to experience feelings of connectedness and belonging to ensure successful learning outcomes (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000; Kitchen & McDougall, 1998; Harasim, 1993). “Getting to know you” activities at the start of a project, such as online introductory posts, discussion boards, or ice-breaker activities, can build camaraderie and trust (So & Brush, 2008) and improve students’ interpersonal communication, teamwork, and time management skills.

Based on this literature review, this study develops the following research questions:

RQ1: What are students’ general perceptions about participating in a collaborative project with students at a university nearly 3,000 miles away?

RQ2: Is there any difference between the students’ expectations at the beginning of the collaborative reporting project and their fulfillment at the end of the project?

Methodology

This study employed a pre- and post-survey as the research method to answer research questions. The questionnaires were approved by institutional research ethics committees at both campuses before data collection started.

Participants: Students enrolled in a beginning news writing class at a West Coast public university and at a Mid-Atlantic public university were invited to participate in the study. All 91 students read the informed consent and were invited to participate in the survey and eventually 93.41% of them (n=85) agreed to volunteer, signed the consent, and finished both the pre-survey and post-survey. In Spring 2017 there were 20 respondents at the university on the West Coast and 11 at the university in the Mid-Atlantic; in Fall 2017, the survey was administered to 20 West Coast students and six Mid-Atlantic students; and in Fall 2018, there were 19 respondents at the university on the West Coast and nine Mid-Atlantic students. No incentives were given for completing the surveys.

Students were asked a variety of Likert-scale questions in the pre-survey, including whether they

thought the collaborative project would be more engaging than reporting and writing a lengthy story on their own, whether they thought it would provide more practical, hands-on learning than traditional classroom instruction, and whether they expected to be more motivated to learn journalism principles and practices. They were also asked several open-ended questions to elicit qualitative results, including perceived advantages and disadvantages of the collaborative project. The post-survey asked them to reflect on their experiences, such as whether they were overwhelmed by producing a 1,000-word article and communicating with a long-distance teammate, whether they had unanswered questions that hindered them from making deadline, and whether they would have preferred not having specific deadlines. The open-ended questions asked in the pre-survey were repeated in the post-survey, which also asked about suggestions for improvement.

A three-digit random number, obtained from an online number generator, was assigned to each survey; surveys were randomly distributed to students. Students reported only their survey numbers to designated classmates, who shared the master list with faculty after semester grades were recorded. The pre- and post-surveys were kept with an office assistant on each researcher's campus until analysis was conducted. Students were informed that faculty would not see any survey responses until course grades were recorded to assure that responses would not influence course grades.

Instrument and survey administration: A pre-survey developed by the researchers, with five-point Likert-scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) and open-ended questions, was administered to students in the second week of the semester. Student demographics and more information about student perceptions of the collaborative project were collected before students were put into teams by their professor, with each team composed of students from both universities. A post-survey was given one week before the final exam, after each team had written a 1,000-word story, to determine students' experience and to capture their perceptions of the collaborative reporting project experience.

The purpose of conducting a study with quantitative and qualitative questions (Creswell, 2009) was to elicit opinions to help researchers better understand student perceptions. The researchers' ultimate goal was to collect a variety of data that would be useful in

determining the successes and failures of the project. **Data analysis:** Descriptive statistics were used to describe students' perceptions of the study and their previous experience working in groups. SPSS was used to calculate means and standard deviations, and to conduct a series of paired-sample *t*-tests, which were used to compare the pre- and post-survey results. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed and grouped into three themes.

Results

The 85 students who participated in this survey reported a mean age of 19.55 ($SD = 1.262$). The gender of students was 67.1% female, 29.4% male and 3.5% unidentified.

Theme #1: Learning/Engagement: Students' anticipated need for additional class time to work on the project did not materialize, according to data that were statistically significant. The paired sample *t*-test shows that in the end, students did not need as much class time to work on the project as they had expected ($t = .470, p < .001$).

Another statistically significant finding pertained to their concerns about the possibility of receiving inadequate instruction to prepare for such a different assignment. The paired sample *t*-test shows that students received more instruction by the end of the semester than they expected ($t = 2.668, p < .01$). Students reported they had fewer unanswered questions throughout the semester than they had anticipated ($t = 2.681, p < .001$). One West Coast student wrote: "I think the instructions were pretty laid out. I didn't find myself confused at any point and when it came down to word limit, my group and I exceeded it." However, another West Coast student wrote that he wished the students had had "more in-class time to type and do online work."

Although the collaborative project resulted in many positive outcomes, the study found that some students were disappointed at certain aspects. For example, students had expected more facilitation from their professor about using technology to communicate ($t = 4.714, p < .001$), although no students elaborated on this aspect via their qualitative responses.

By the end of the semester, students indicated they were less motivated to learn journalism principles and practices because of the collaborative project ($t = 2.793, p < .01$). One West Coast student demonstrated self-doubt at the end of the semester, which could indicate a lack of motivation to improve his/her

skills: “I felt I was not as advanced in writing as they were and at times felt discouraged, as if my writing wasn’t good enough for our story.”

Students also did not find the experience of working with other journalism students to be more engaging than a traditional assignment they would have produced on their own ($t = 2.982, p < .01$). The unique challenges of group projects, such as division of labor and reliance on another person to be dependable, were addressed by these two West Coast students: “The disadvantage (of a group project is that) group members might not do their part of the project and the assignment is not complete. There is more stress involved” and “Group projects in general are not my favorite to work on. The different personalities of my groupmates made it difficult at times.” Indeed, one Mid-Atlantic student indicated that working on one’s own is easier than working in a group: “No person will ever be stressed out by having to research the entire topic on their own.” A West Coast student would have preferred to work with only one other student in her own class, rather than in a four-person group that included two students from each university: “I felt as though I could have done this project with only my (West Coast) partner. Working on this project with the (Mid-Atlantic) students just added unnecessary stress to it. My teammate and I felt as though we had to remind them constantly to do their parts. Also, having only one (Mid-Atlantic) member respond most of the time made it very stressful because we were unsure if they were going to get their part done on time.”

The project provided less practical, hands-on learning than expected, when compared with a traditional classroom ($t = 2.857, p < .01$). To that end, students were given research, interviewing, and writing instruction in class, but were expected to help out their fellow teammates who needed assistance. This West Coast student found the project a “pleasant experience,” adding, “I got to teach the (Mid-Atlantic) student about journalism and help him interview people.”

Theme #2: Professional Practices: From brainstorming story ideas to conducting interviews and writing stories, the collaborative reporting project provided students a glimpse of professional journalism.

Several West Coast students acknowledged the advantage of collaborating with students across the country. “Learning through the collaborative project is simulating what it’s like to work with someone on a

news story,” wrote one West Coast student. Another wrote, “The collaborative project’s objective emulates what real-life journalists do when coming up with a news story. Also, collaboration played a big role in the project, as well as in real-life journalism.” One other West Coast student wrote that an advantage of the project was “being able to work with someone from another state, as well as working on a team like we would in a real news network.” The project clearly had an impact on one Mid-Atlantic student who wrote, “It was an eye-opening experience to work as an actual journalist.”

A statistically significant finding was the desire for more deadlines. The paired sample t -test shows that students were grateful for having had specific deadlines ($t = 4.355, p < .001$). However, students said they fell short in meeting deadlines effectively ($t = 2.352, p < .05$).

The difficulty of working in a bi-coastal group was expressed by one West Coast student: “Having to work with someone out of state really challenged us to be on top of communicating and meeting deadlines.” A Mid-Atlantic student seemed to embrace the challenge and even saw a personal benefit: “An advantage was learning to work with a team – meeting deadlines that individually helped my time management skills.” The frustration of one West Coast student was apparent when he addressed the disadvantages of the project at the end of the semester: “(A disadvantage was) having to push teammates on deadlines and give them reminders. I did a lot of work for everyone else to ensure I’d get a good grade. People slack.”

Despite the fact that this was a collaborative project in which every student was expected to write a portion of the story based on interviews he/she conducted, students perceived individual research to be more important than any group research they may have done ($t = 3.977, p < .001$).

By the end of the semester, they became less enthusiastic about publishing their team’s article on a website dedicated to the collaborative project ($t = 2.734, p < .01$).

Theme #3 Soft Skills: Although they were enrolled in a news writing course, many students anticipated the project would improve their so-called “soft skills,” such as interpersonal communication, collaboration, and time management.

Interpersonal communication: Several students reflected that their communication skills improved as a result of participating in the bi-coastal group project.

Because they were working on campuses nearly 3,000 miles apart, two distinct communication challenges existed: using technology to communicate with students from the other university, and managing the three-hour difference in time zones. “It just added more confusion as group feedback was harder to get,” wrote a West Coast student. Another West Coast student wrote in the pre-survey: “Communication and group work is hard enough while being in the same state. But different time zones, work schedules, class times, etc. that’s a whole different beast.”

Despite communication concerns at the beginning of the semester, a significant finding was that students didn’t believe they learned new ways of communicating through technology ($t=4.901, p < .001$). The experiment was intentionally designed to be tool-agnostic, so that students could choose whatever digital communication tool worked best for them whether it be texting, emailing, messaging through social media, teleconferencing, telephoning, or through some other means. As far as communicating with students in their own class, the project fell short of their expectations that the project would give them greater opportunities to communicate with their peers ($t = 2.326, p < .05$). Class time was given every few weeks to allow students to talk in person with their classmates. For some students, that meant talking to the one other classmate who was in their group. But other students who were the only one representing their university did not have an opportunity to talk in person with any group members.

In communicating with their specific professor, students reported they mostly used email ($t=2.712, p < .01$), and that they used social media messaging and posts ($t =4.059, p < .001$) to communicate with their teammates.

After the project was concluded, a West Coast student wrote, “An advantage was learning the skills of communication and organization.” Another West Coast student wrote, “Having to work with someone out of state really challenged us to be on top of communicating and meeting deadlines.”

Teamwork. One Mid-Atlantic student predicted the project would help improve his teamwork skills. At the end of the semester, he wrote, “The collaborative project allowed me to work on communication within my group while also (having) a challenging time barrier with my group members. It allowed us to bounce ideas off each other and gave me valuable viewpoints in different situations.” Another West Coast student

noted that her/his leadership skills increased as a result of the project: “The advantages are learning how to communicate with someone who doesn’t seem to want to participate. I was the leader and I learned how to politely direct my teammates in a productive direction.” Participating in the collaborative project forced another West Coast student’s team “to create a harmonious article that synthesizes multiple students’ research.”

The course curriculum did not include any formal instruction on collaboration, although both professors provided suggestions and insight during class lectures. When problems would arise, more specific advice was provided in private conversations with students. However, some students still experienced issues such as teammates missing deadline. A West Coast student wrote in the pre-survey that a disadvantage of the project would be “some members in the group not turning the work in on time.” And indeed, that happened in her group, evidenced by her post-survey comment, “Some people in the group didn’t do their work.”

Another statistically significant finding was that by the end of the semester, students thought written and verbal feedback from their professor was more valuable than verbal feedback by classmates. The paired sample t -test shows that feedback from their professor was more important than they expected ($t =4.227, p < .001$) and peer coaching from project partners was less important than anticipated ($t =-2.315, p < .05$).

A Mid-Atlantic student was concerned at the beginning of the semester that “poor communication skills” would hinder the project, and indeed, that did seem to be an issue with his group: “My teammates were far away so there were no face-to-face, immediate interactions.” The inability for all team members to meet in person to discuss the project was an issue for this West Coast student who wondered at the beginning of the semester if “not being face-to-face” would be a hindrance. It appeared to be an issue for his group, as evidenced by his comment in the post-survey: “Working with the (Mid-Atlantic) student was difficult. It was not only the time difference, but with my other two group members we were able to sit down in class and actually talk about what needs to be added, cut, improved. Social media interaction is not enough.”

Time management. Another soft skill highlighted by the project was time management, which prompted

at least a few students to mention in the qualitative data that the project helped them improve their time management skills. “I learned how to set aside time to work on something that is important. I definitely learned time management skills on this project,” wrote one West Coast student. Another wrote that the project was advantageous to them because “I had to manage my time better.”

The issue of time management was even more challenging because of the three-hour time difference between the universities. A Mid-Atlantic student predicted that the time difference would be a disadvantage. In his post-survey, he wrote: “It can be hard to stay in touch due to the time difference and different attitudes. I strongly feel like my team needed to work on time management.”

Discussion

By conducting a survey with 85 undergraduates in two universities over three semesters, this study found that students benefitted from the project by improving their hard and soft journalism skills. However, many students also experienced frustration due to the time difference and lack of commitment from some teammates.

The survey showed that students received more instruction about the project than they anticipated. Professors talked about the project in nearly every class session and distributed two detailed memos laying out the timeline. In the first memo, students were informed when they would learn the names and email addresses of their teammates (selected by their professors), how they would select their top three choices of story topics, and when they would be notified of their designated story topic. The initial memo also laid out the deadlines for the various stages of the story, including story pitch, lead to nut graph (first four paragraphs), initial full draft, and final full draft. In the second memo, teams were given the deadlines for the five updates they were required to post on a private Facebook group created for the collaborative project. The two memos were posted online, via the course management system for both classes, so they could be referenced throughout the semester.

The data clearly shows that students wanted deadlines. Students were given deadlines weeks in advance so they could schedule interviews with sources and blocks of time for writing. However, for some students, a lack of time management skills, combined with school, work, and family responsibilities, made

it difficult for all teams to meet every deadline. Team members were required to delegate work among themselves and submit a single story for their group, at each step of the process. Thus, if one student failed to turn in his/her portion on time, the entire team could miss a deadline.

Students struggled with computer-mediated communication, as indicated by the qualitative data. As mentioned earlier, this was a tool-agnostic experiment because the professors suspected that no single form of digital communication would work for all groups; thus, they did not want to restrict students to only texting or teleconferencing. It was up to students themselves to figure out what mode(s) of digital communication worked best for them. But even when students are working together in the same classroom, group projects can result in socio-emotional challenges because of past negative experiences including a classmate “hijacking” the project or another student “free-riding.” Combine those worries with the anticipation of how to effectively communicate with teammates three hours apart—whose sleeping and waking hours were not in sync—and it quickly becomes obvious that students would be challenged in new ways. Before this project, most students had worked on group projects but never with students at another campus or in another time zone. Before the project even began, professors explained the importance of working well in a group, but not all students heeded the warning. Overcoming these challenges required planning, cooperation, and flexibility on the part of all group members.

The wording of three quantitative statements in particular should be taken into consideration when evaluating students’ responses. Students were asked to rank their responses to the following statements using a Likert-type scale: The Collaborative Project experience 1) was more engaging than a traditional assignment that I would do on my own. 2) provided more practical, hands-on learning than traditional classroom instruction, and 3) gave me greater opportunities to communicate with the students in my class. Students disagreed with all three statements, in statistically significant findings, which at first glance may indicate they did not find value in the collaborate project. However, the authors wish to point out that the word “more” may have been what prompted the responses. It doesn’t mean that the project didn’t provide opportunities for engagement, hands-on experience or communication with classmates, just

not more than a traditional class. The statements intrinsically asked students to compare collaborative learning to traditional/independent learning, rather than just asking them: Did the project provide opportunities for engagement, hands-on experience, and communication with classmates? The wording of the statements is pointed out not to dispute the findings, but to provide greater reflection.

Many students noted in the qualitative data that the collaborative project forced them to get “out of their comfort zone” and to become aware of different perspectives, especially those of students on the opposite coast. “I liked that I was able to work with people that are far from here. I enjoyed reading some of the documents from some of my other classmates,” wrote one Mid-Atlantic student.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study will provide guidance to professors, regardless of their discipline, who wish to organize a collaborative learning project with students either in their own class, in another class on their campus, or in a class on a different campus. Such projects can be attractive to smaller schools that may have limited resources. In this particular instance, honing hard journalism skills such as researching, interviewing, and writing, as well as improving upon soft skills including interpersonal communication, working in a team, and time management, can be rewarding for students. However, if a collaborative project is being organized with another campus, the professors suggest it be done with colleges in the same time zone to lessen time management and communication challenges that were quite frustrating and discouraging for many students. Expecting students who’ve never met in person to be able to negotiate a three-hour time difference was probably too ambitious, at least for a lower-division course. “The advantages of learning through the collaborative project was learning to deal with time zones and due dates. Often times, me and my teammates would miss opportunities to video chat due to schedules,” wrote one Mid-Atlantic student.

Another suggestion from the researchers would be to have students commit to a code of conduct in an effort to increase the productivity and communication of each group’s members. The researchers of this study had considered implementing a code of conduct, or even having the students write one themselves, but that aspect of the project did not materialize. Looking back, it may have been worthwhile to have had all stu-

dents sign a boilerplate commitment, even one they did not write themselves.

The researchers highly recommend both professors be willing to devote a considerable amount of time to planning the project well before the term begins, including determining what story topics will be available to the teams, how students will be selected for the teams, and what deadlines will be set at various stages. In addition, both professors must be diligent in their communication with each other and in giving timely feedback to students. (After all, the professors themselves need to model effective and responsible collaboration to their students.) Without frequent communication between the professors, this project has the potential to be unfulfilling, frustrating, and needlessly stressful to students.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited by its small sample size and the number of semesters in which the study was conducted. Future studies could be conducted with a larger sample size and, if desired, over a longer period of time. A study could be done with groups working on the same campus, in which they are able to meet in person, compared with a collaborative project involving students at different campuses but in the same time zone. A comparison of groups working with and without a code of conduct could also provide valuable knowledge.

Based on these findings, inter-collegiate collaborative projects should be encouraged because they can help students develop both the hard and soft skills needed to be a successful journalist. By participating in the collaborative project, students realized that working as a team is part of being a 21st-century journalist. As one West Coast student commented at the end of the semester, the project “simulated what it’s like to work with someone on a news story.”

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