

Shawna, BuShell, González-Ramírez, Jimena, Wilkins, Bryan, Boliari, Natalia, El-Hakim, Mohab, Verónica López, Sandra, Michel, Mary, and Gómez-Restrepo, Carlos. "Exploring Academic Collaborative Opportunities between Two Lasallian College and Their Potential Impact." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 11, no. 1 (Saint Mary's University of Minnesota: 2020).

© Shawna BuShell, EdD, Jimena González-Ramírez, PhD, Bryan Wilkins, PhD, Natalia Boliari, PhD, Mohab El-Hakim, PhD, Sandra Verónica López, PhD, Mary Michel, PhD, and Carlos Gómez-Restrepo, FSC, EdD. Readers of this article have the copyright owner's permission to reproduce it for educational, not-for-profit purposes, if the author and publisher are acknowledged in the copy.

---

## Exploring Academic Collaborative Opportunities between Two Lasallian Colleges and Their Potential Impact

Shawna BuShell, EdD<sup>1</sup>, Jimena González-Ramírez, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Bryan Wilkins, PhD<sup>3</sup>, Natalia Boliari, PhD<sup>4</sup>, Mohab El-Hakim, PhD<sup>5</sup>, Sandra Verónica López, PhD<sup>6</sup>, Mary Michel, PhD<sup>7</sup>, and Carlos Gómez-Restrepo, FSC, EdD<sup>8</sup>

### Introduction

*Indivisa Manent*, an inscription on the crest of the De La Salle family of Rheims, France, loosely translates from Latin as "remain undivided." It is translated today for the Lasallian institutions as "One La Salle," a call for collaboration among themselves to strengthen the effectiveness of their mission (Ramírez Barba, 2018).<sup>9</sup> The faculties of Manhattan College in New York City and Universidad de La Salle in the cities of Bogotá and Yopal, Colombia, recently had the opportunity to collaborate to strengthen each school's joint mission in research and teaching. This continues the work of our Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who, with his Brothers, accepted invitations to start Lasallian primary schools throughout France during his lifetime (Ramírez Barba 2018). The emphasis on social justice continues at Lasallian tertiary institutions established after the Founder's lifetime (Rodríguez Echeverría, 2009; De La Salle Philippines, 2013).

In his 2009 address to the 9th Encuentro of the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU), Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, then Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2000-2014), discussed a spirit of association based on the concept of a shared mission as a salient feature of Lasallian tertiary education (Rodríguez Echeverría, 2009; Wright, 2018). Fortunately, Manhattan College and Universidad de La Salle both have strong support for collaboration at strategic institutional levels. Universidad de La Salle has a strong history of international initiatives. According to its website,

International initiatives arise within the framework of partnership and collaboration exercises between members of the Lasallian community and international actors with recognized leadership in their field of action. They materialize in innovative projects that make the Universidad de La Salle visible internationally, strengthen university praxis, favor socioeconomic development and tend for academic and scientific progress (Universidad de La Salle, 2019).

Universidad de La Salle successfully collaborates with academic partners within and outside the Lasallian network. The helpful, welcoming office of international affairs at Universidad de La Salle arranges meetings among its own faculty and administrators and visiting faculty. The office

of international initiatives provides residential accommodations for visiting faculty at its Chapinero campus in Bogotá.

Similarly, Manhattan College values and supports collaborations within the Lasallian network. At the strategic level, the first two core goals of Manhattan College's strategic plan, *Renewing the Promise, 2011-2025*, encourage collaboration among Lasallian higher educational institutions. Core Goal 1: A Distinctive Learning Heritage, states,

We will advance learning by ensuring the vitality and visibility of our distinctive core identity as Catholic and Lasallian throughout the College.

To accomplish Core Goal 1, implementing mechanism 1.1.2 specifies:

enhance support for interdisciplinary teaching, scholarship, and service, especially, but not exclusively, aligned with the Lasallian and Catholic national and international networks, and integrated with academic, curricular and co-curricular programs.

Core Goal 2: A Distinctive Learning Environment is,

We will advance learning by fostering student engagement and integrated learning through our distinctive environment on campus, in New York City, and with our international networks.

Implementing mechanism 1.2.1 supports efforts to:

develop interdisciplinary and inter-school collaborations in teaching, scholarship, and service, with special emphasis upon serving our local and global communities.

Manhattan College actively supports these strategic goals, encouraging international Lasallian collaboration among students and faculty. At a faculty development workshop in August of 2017, there was a session titled "Mission Driven Initiatives," in which Dr. Cory Blad spoke about a faculty trip to Bethlehem University during which Manhattan College faculty and staff explored collaborative opportunities across the two institutions. At the end of his presentation, Dr. Blad mentioned that Manhattan College was interested in promoting similar connections with other Lasallian universities, including the one in Bogotá. Faculty member and Colombian native, Dr. Jimena González-Ramírez, was present during the workshop and volunteered to facilitate the collaboration with the Universidad de La Salle in Bogotá. In October of 2017, Brother Carlos Gómez-Restrepo, FSC, Brother Jack Curran, FSC (vice president for mission), Dr. González-Ramírez, and Dr. Poonam Arora met to discuss a possible trip to Colombia. The idea was supported and funded at Manhattan College by the office of mission, campus ministry and social action, study abroad, and the associate provost for student and faculty development. A call to apply for a faculty development trip to connect with colleagues at the Universidad de La Salle to explore collaborative research and/or teaching opportunities was sent out in December of 2017. The application asked faculty members to submit a proposal for a project. After applications were submitted in January of 2018, nine faculty members were selected and funded by the offices afore mentioned. Dr. González-Ramírez became the trip coordinator. She

organized and led the faculty collaboration trip to Universidad de La Salle in March 2018 – coinciding with Manhattan College’s Spring Break – with the collaboration of study abroad, the office of mission, and the office of international affairs at the Universidad de La Salle. During and after the trip, faculty members refined their project ideas.

After the October 2018 meeting of the Manhattan College board of trustees meeting in October 2018, a number of Manhattan College faculty who participated in the March 2018 collaboration trip had a post-visit meeting with Brother Carlos Gómez-Restrepo, FSC.<sup>10</sup> During the meeting, the following topics were discussed including updates on various projects and potential opportunities for Manhattan College students and faculty to participate in the Universidad de La Salle’s Summer Academy. Brother Carlos reiterated international objectives for the Universidad de La Salle-Bogotá, including:

- to promote intercultural communication competencies through curricular management fostering global citizenship and language proficiency;
- to promote the international strategic relationship for the creation of joint programs, shared cross-cultural research projects, courses and degrees permitting student and faculty mobility the Universidad de La Salle-Bogotá specifically favors academic and research exchanges within the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU);
- to develop academic and scientific cooperation and social promotion projects with international organizations;
- to advance the international position and visibility of the Universidad de La Salle;
- to lead La Salle’s international cooperation promoting a culture of peace in Colombia.

A fruitful collaboration opportunity across universities in different countries allows both partner universities to grow in new areas that contribute to the formation of students and is aligned with each institution’s mission (Johnston, 2018). A cornerstone of the Lasallian mission is social justice. “Contemporary Catholic and Lasallian education is service to alleviate the anxieties and assure the basic necessities of the poor and marginalized” (Schieler, 2018a). Our research and teaching projects acknowledge and assess social justice concerns to increase the global perspectives of each institution, and leverage the individual talents and creativity of teachers and researchers (Kalaw, 2018; North, 2006).

Manhattan College faculty, in collaboration with their Universidad de La Salle counterparts, have proposed the following projects to take place at the rural and urban campuses of the Universidad de La Salle in Colombia as well as at Manhattan College in New York City. The specific collaborative projects that address social justice are: (1) a sustainable agriculture project at the rural campus; (2) teaching at a Scholars Summer Academy at the Universidad de La Salle; (3) design and construction of a solar house for the Latin American Solar Decathlon; (4) design and construction of a water distribution system for the rural campus; (5) comparison of rural roads in Colombia and New York State; (6) the English, Research, and Technology Immersion summer program at Manhattan College for Universidad de La Salle students; and (7) a collaborative online course with a focus on technology and ethics. This article summarizes these projects and their associated research questions and hypotheses. These projects are at different stages, as some are still being developed while others have been completed. For the purpose of

this article, we focus on the idea-generating process. It is intended that future articles will discuss project results.

## **Projects within the O'Malley School of Business of Manhattan College**

### ***Project One: Sustainability and Development in Colombia – Studying Sustainable Agriculture in Utopía***

*Project Overview:* The O'Malley School of Business at Manhattan College and Utopía (a Universidad de La Salle campus in Yopal) can mutually benefit by bringing together their different areas of expertise and backgrounds to learn from each other. At Utopía, students come from Colombian rural areas affected by violence and poverty in order to become Agricultural Engineers (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). At the same time, Utopía is an educational response to a political problem. Colombia has had a long history of violence and social inequality that has dramatically impacted the countryside--the very places where the students of Utopía were born and are returning to help in the Comprehensive and Territorial Rural Development process. Utopía students graduate with leadership skills that will be employed to encourage and guide social and political transformation and enable agricultural entrepreneurship in their places of origin (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). These skills will contribute to the promotion of social justice and diminish social inequality in the countryside.

At the O'Malley School of Business, students are exposed to a combination of modern business theory with immersive, real-world practice that provides them with the skills they will need to solve tomorrow's challenges (Manhattan College, 2018). Moreover, the curriculum is rooted in the Lasallian principles of excellence in teaching, ethical conduct, and commitment to social justice (Manhattan College, 2018). Students from both institutions come together to study the sustainability of agricultural projects developed at Utopía, as these projects will contribute to social justice through the provision of ecosystem services, adaptation to climate change, and sustainable development of rural areas in Colombia.

At Utopía, students during their third year in the program design an agribusiness project that they will take to their places of origin during their fourth and final year (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). Utopía fosters an entrepreneurial spirit among students that encourages them to design and conduct an agribusiness project in their areas of origin (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). By returning to their hometowns to develop a productive project, students become disseminators of knowledge and technologies in rural areas of Colombia that require more development (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). These students promote social justice and help decrease social inequality in rural areas. As part of their educational journey at Utopía, students seek sustainable agriculture through participatory research, dissemination of new technologies, and development of agribusinesses and agro-exports (Oficina de Filantropía, 2017). By following its mission, Utopía contributes to Colombia's agricultural development, which will be fundamental in the implementation and success of the peace process. Therefore, these projects align well with the Lasallian commitment to social justice.

In addition to peace building and the development of rural areas in Colombia, the agribusiness projects can also promote sustainable agriculture. Together with development, sustainability and

fair trade can be considered because they align the Lasallian values of both institutions and the quest for social justice. Students from both institutions can come together to study the sustainability of the agribusiness projects developed by third-year students at Utopía. We propose an optional study-abroad component for two economics electives at the O'Malley School of Business: Advanced Environmental Economics and Growth and Development. Students from both courses will be given the option to travel to Colombia during Spring Break to visit Utopía and the Universidad de La Salle in Bogotá.

This study-abroad component has two overarching goals: (1) to bring Utopía and Manhattan College economics students together, in a multidisciplinary team, to assess the sustainability of the agribusiness projects designed during the third year of study at Utopía; and (2) to give a hands-on experience to Manhattan College economics students by studying development and sustainability in Colombia. To accomplish these goals, students will measure the sustainability of the projects by estimating the provision of ecosystem services and their contributions to development. Estimating these measures will help Utopía students further understand the way their projects contribute to sustainable development and will provide additional measurements that can be incorporated in the marketing of their agribusinesses or in the application for additional funding from NGOs or the government. On the other hand, Manhattan College students will apply different economic theories and models in a real-world setting, providing a valuable real-world experience that will increase their human capital. This study-abroad opportunity aligns with the mission of the O'Malley School of Business, as students will be given real-world practice to apply their skills to solve important development and environmental challenges that promote social justice. Moreover, students are given the opportunity to witness the promotion of social justice in a developing nation with high levels of inequality that is transitioning to peace after a 50-year conflict that harmed the country and especially the rural areas. In addition, students from both institutions will learn and grow personally from this kind of cross-cultural and intercultural exchange.

*Research Questions:*

1. What are the environmental value and ecosystem services provided by the agricultural projects designed by third-year students at Utopía?
2. How do the agribusiness projects contribute to sustainable agriculture and development of rural areas in Colombia?

*Hypotheses:* The agribusiness projects designed at Utopía will provide various ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and contribute to the sustainable development of Colombia's rural areas. The development strategy at Utopía will significantly contribute to the growth of rural areas, promote social justice, and bring positive social externalities that will help the success of the peace process.

## ***Project Two: Teaching as a Visiting Scholar at the Universidad de La Salle-Bogotá Summer Academy***

*Project Overview:* The Universidad de La Salle-Bogotá has an established International La Salle Summer Academy program that has two short-term sessions running in June and July every year. The program is open to and actually targets academics from across the world. Visiting scholars are invited to teach a wide variety of themes that are subjects of study in the social sciences and humanities disciplines. Most themes are built to address social inequality and other contemporary social issues that are at the heart of the Lasallian mission. Examples are: human values, human rights, women's movement, social justice, service learning, community development, ethics, corporate responsibility, and many others. Given the program's short-term nature, courses are limited to 40 hours of classroom contact and cultural activities are planned for the weekends. The Universidad de La Salle provides visiting scholars with a stipend, accommodations, and round-trip economy airfare.

Several O'Malley School of Business faculty have expressed interest in participating in the Summer Academy. Depending on their areas of teaching and research specialization, the above-listed themes may be addressed in a variety of ways. For example, for this project, the economics faculty can develop and teach any theme that is subject to economic policy in general, but preference might be given to themes more specifically related to international political economy. Given the contemporary challenges of and backlash against globalization, it would be beneficial to have a special-topics course with a theme or themes in the area of international trade and integration within the Colombian context. Specific issues and policies addressed within these broadly defined themes would be: the impacts of trade on poverty and economic growth at the local and national levels; economic and social inequality; social justice, labor markets, and wage inequality; migration; and the environment.

### *Research Questions:*

To develop a solid Summer Academy course in economics for an audience of Universidad de La Salle students, we would focus on the following research questions:

1. What role would a course on regional trade agreements (RTAs), with a focus on the trade arrangements between Colombia and the United States (USA) or the European Union, play in contributing to the curricula of the Universidad de La Salle Summer Academy?
2. What role would such a course play in improving student understanding of the importance of being concerned for and protecting Lasallian values?
3. Which more credible sources offer evidence on the impacts of trade on poverty, income inequality, economic and social inequality, migration, and the environment in Colombia?
4. What are the best policies addressing these social justice issues?

*Hypotheses:* As scholars of economic development and international trade, we have been studying trade and its impacts within the context of European economies in transition and, more recently, in the context of developed economies such as those of the United States (USA), Canada, and the European Union. We would be very excited to study trade within the context of Colombia. Based on our experience, we have four hypotheses:

First, the course will provide solid knowledge and understanding of the reasons for which regional trade agreements are preferred in the present. It will also provide a framework for understanding the ways in which such agreements can both positively and negatively affect various sectors of and participants in the economy and society of Colombia. Second, the course is a great opportunity for studying, discussing, and analyzing economic and social issues that are of major concern to all Lasallians. It will also be an opportunity to apply Lasallian values and Catholic social teaching within the context of the international political economy. Third, benefits can be derived from a variety of studies and economic literature focusing on trade and its impacts on Latin America. It will be interesting to discover the volume and scope of literature on Colombia alone. Lastly, policymaking that addresses issues around trade and integration is scarce. We expect that, as in most developing countries, raising trade barriers would be the most direct and common way to diminish the perceived negative effects of trade.

### **Projects within the School of Engineering of Manhattan College**

The department of mechanical engineering at Manhattan College has chosen to collaborate in two projects that align with the Lasallian mission of the school. The first project involves the design and construction of an affordable dwelling unit that is entirely powered by solar energy. This project aims to improve the living conditions of a neglected population on the Colombian Pacific coast. The second project aims to improve the technology at the Utopia campus by designing and building a water distribution system. The department of civil and environmental engineering is also working on a comparison project focused on rural roads construction in New York State and Colombia. The three projects are described in the following subsections.

#### ***Project Three: Design and Construction of a Solar House to Compete in the Latin America Solar Decathlon 2019***

*Project Overview:* The architecture department at the Universidad de La Salle-Bogotá, together with the mechanical engineering department at Manhattan College and Hochschule Ostwestfalen-Lippe University in Germany, have joined forces to design a master urban plan and dwelling unit totally powered by solar energy, which will compete in the Latin America Solar Decathlon in Cali, Colombia. This is an intense learning opportunity for the student participants since they will be involved in optimizing the comfort conditions of the unit while making it energy-efficient. The participation of three academic institutions represents a challenge for the students who will have the opportunity to improve their communication skills and build solid relationships with institutions from around the world. Because sustainability involves the use of local materials, the unit will be built with steel manufactured in the area and native vegetable fibers for the paneled walls. The project includes a social justice component in line with the Lasallian mission, which should motivate the students because an affordable housing complex will be built in Buenaventura, Colombia, based on the winning team's design. Buenaventura is a neglected port city with a poverty level above 60% (Revista Semana, 2017). The Manhattan College team is specifically interested in establishing acceptable indoor comfort conditions regarding temperature and humidity, thereby creating comfortable dwelling units for individuals with socioeconomic disadvantage.

*Research Questions:*

1. Is it possible to incorporate passive cooling in the dwelling unit and obtain the desired comfort conditions?
2. Will the dwelling units improve quality of life in the underserved areas for which they are designed?

*Hypotheses:* Using the orientation of the house, shade, and wind contributions, it is possible to create indoor conditions that will improve the quality of life for inhabitants through the construction of a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing house. This hypothesis will be tested by conducting surveys among the population inhabiting the units.

***Project Four: Design and Construction of a Water Distribution System for the Utopía Campus***

*Project Overview:* The students at Manhattan College and the Utopía campus of the Universidad de La Salle in Colombia are partnering to design and build a water distribution system that will be used for irrigation as well as for maintaining animals. The project is expected to deepen the participants' knowledge of how soil, water, and plants interrelate; improve their technical knowledge of irrigation; increase soil productivity; create a source of income from selling crops; and develop a culture of conscious use of water in the fields. The project will take place in "Matapantano," a farm where the Utopía campus is located. The Manhattan College team will communicate with the faculty in Colombia to obtain necessary information to design the system by using fundamental concepts in fluid mechanics and hydraulics. The water distribution system will supply sufficient water for irrigation and animal use at the Utopía campus. Implementing such a system will be beneficial for the individual agribusiness projects that will be developed in the rural areas from which the students come. It is expected that the productivity of the projects will increase, therefore contributing to the development of different regions in Colombia.

*Research Questions:*

1. Will the productivity of the soil significantly increase after the water distribution system is set up?
2. Will the students gain enough theoretical and practical knowledge that they can apply in future opportunities, especially students in Colombia who will return to their places of origin to apply this technology to their own farms and the farms in their communities?

*Hypotheses:* The water distribution system will improve the productivity of the land where different crops are grown, thereby allowing students in Utopía to sell excess crops and generate a sustainable source of income for the school. To test this hypothesis, the team will observe and measure the quantity and type of crops produced as well as report the revenue obtained from selling the crops. A cost analysis will determine the payback period of the project and its sustainability. An entity in the school that follows up on alumni development may be established to measure the impact that the new professionals have on their communities.



### ***Project Five: Study and Analysis of Rural Roads in New York State and Colombia***

*Project Overview:* This project investigated rural roads in New York State and Colombia. Rural roads are either constructed using Hot-Mix Asphalt (HMA) or constructed as gravel roads. Individual counties in New York State and local authorities in Colombia have developed individual decision-making criteria to identify rural roads that should be paved using asphalt versus roads constructed with gravel. Most municipalities and counties base their decision on the number of vehicles utilizing the road per day. However, other parameters should be considered while deciding on the pavement surface type: safety, density of farms/houses on the road, and land use (i.e., presence of schools, market, health care center, sheriff/police station, ambulance or fire-fighting station, etc.). This project serves rural areas with limited budgets to construct and maintain their roadway network in a cost-effective manner. The proper selection of roadway pavement type will save municipalities money and preserve their valuable environmental resources. Labor in rural areas will gain expertise by enhancing their skills to construct reliable and durable gravel roads that could function at the same level as asphalt roads. This project could serve the peace development process in Colombia by directing labor toward productive and efficient projects that enhance the infrastructure of rural areas.

#### *Research Questions:*

1. Can we develop a decision-making model to determine which rural roads could function properly and serve the community as gravel roads versus other roads that should be paved using Hot-Mix Asphalt?
2. Does the decision to pave roads using Hot-Mix-Asphalt versus gravel roads depend solely on traffic count and axle weights? Does the number of farms per mile on the road, crop types, count of transported cattle, and land use (existence of schools, clinic, farmers market, ambulance or police station) influence decisions about the proper selection of the paving surface?

*Hypotheses:* Rural local authorities determine the pavement surface material based on various methods and personal experience. These methods result in decisions that are inconsistent, not cost-effective, and unsupported by scientific evidence. The survey results collected from both New York State and Colombia showed strong statistical evidence that this hypothesis is true. The two research teams are currently collaborating to develop a decision-making method based on the collected data. The new method will be supported by statistical evidence and the team is planning to publish the technical findings in a separate journal paper.

### **A Project within the School of Science and the School of Education of Manhattan College**

#### ***Project Six: English, Research, and Technology Immersion Program***

*Project Overview:* Utopía was established as a response to the socioeconomic environment of the region as a means of educating those most affected by the violence during the Colombian conflict. While this platform serves to deliver a modern era of social, political, and engineering leadership back into its rural communities, it is still in its infancy and is primed to foster opportunities that expand on the program's innovative concepts. Considering the economic

background of the students, it is not surprising that they lack the means to expand their education outside of the Utopía system. This is particularly true for those who desire to travel outside of Colombia and seek a foreign education. The students (and faculty) are keenly interested in expanding their studies to gain more diverse scientific and technological breadth. Offering students the ability to visit, study, and work at a foreign institution will nurture these needs and only strengthen their leadership skills as they return to their own communities.

During our visit to Colombia, many of the students of Utopía expressed interest in advanced research degrees; they often spoke enthusiastically about wanting to return to Utopía as a professor. Their desire to commit to fostering the development of future generations in the program speaks volumes about the beneficial effect that Utopía has had on these young people. We set forth a proposal that provides an opportunity for both students and faculty to venture beyond their core projects and become immersed in the areas of language, technology, and science that will allow them to mold their own curricula and teaching into a more expansive program.

The Graduate School of Education (IDD), the School of Professional Studies (Intensive English Language Program or IELP), and the School of Science have proposed a collaborative effort envisioned as an interdisciplinary program that hosts students and faculty from Utopía, at Manhattan College, for a summer English, Technology, and Scientific Research Immersion Academy (SRIA). The curriculum was designed to match the needs of students in response to discussions about their academic and scholarly aspirations. The SRIA will function to enhance proficiencies of students in three particularly important areas. We believe that language, basic scientific research, and technology would benefit them most and that each skill, both individually and as a cohesive interdisciplinary unit, will serve as an important frame with and from which they can build toward an advanced degree. Because development in these areas is not readily available to the students of Utopía at their home campus, we are confident that their experience in the SRIA will bolster their appeal to graduate-level programs worldwide.

The IELP commits to English language proficiency via online diagnostics and language classes. Students will attend lessons aimed at improving their command of and competence in spoken and written English. The students that we have identified as candidates for this program already possess an adequate facility in the language, and English is taught in their home program. However, there are subtle but obvious nuances in their vocabulary and diction that are indicators of their lack of complete fluency. The IELP will aim to increase their awareness of these deficiencies and improve their understanding. Additionally, the students will be entirely submerged in the language through their presence on the Manhattan College campus, studying in New York City, and interacting daily with native English-speaking students, faculty, staff, and community members.

We identified research as that area of expertise in which the students were most lacking. While they do study agricultural sciences, they still require skills associated with basic scientific techniques in chemistry and biology. The School of Science at Manhattan College and the biochemistry program have proposed a series of lecture and laboratory exercises that will provide the students with proficiency in techniques directly related to DNA technologies. This research series of training will include an introduction to DNA structure and function,

organismal genetics, and the translation of genes. All relevant biological functions are encoded in the sequence of our DNA, and having the students gain knowledge about these topics will create a base understanding on which they can build future research opportunities. As part of their experience, they will assist on a National Institute of Health (NIH) funded project aimed at understanding how our chromosomes organize and function inside the living cell. These research experiences will enhance not only their personal skills and understanding of the topics, but also their attractiveness to other research groups and graduate schools. Working directly on a nationally funded project will provide them an opportunity they would otherwise never have.

In conjunction with the research and English language aspects of this project, the students will also be exposed to technology development, design, and delivery. Through the IDD program, they will gain proficiency in digital presentations, web design, and Google Apps. These skills go hand-in-hand with scientific research, where an important aspect of any research project requires clear and sufficient reiteration of experimental results to peers. As we enter an ever-growing digital world, knowledge of technological and digital design will be an invaluable asset. At the culmination of the Summer Academy, the students will merge/unite/link each new proficiency in a combinatorial project. We envision the students using technology (the Web, PowerPoint, and apps) to present, in English, the research results they obtained during the Summer Academy.

In addition, we do not consider this program a one-way street. Manhattan College students will be encouraged to experience their own immersion opportunities in Colombia. Colombia is known as the second richest country in biodiversity. The Universidad de La Salle department of biology conducts important research on tropical diseases and the search for possible vaccines. Considering that a large percentage of students in the biological sciences at Manhattan College are geared toward medical research, studying in these laboratories will offer them unique opportunities for first-hand experiences in high-impact studies related to diseases affecting global populations.

#### *Research Questions:*

1. Will the Scientific Research Immersion Academy (SRIA) enrich the academic and research levels of students so that they become competitive for internationally recognized graduate programs?
2. How long does each Academy session need to run in order to be effective?
3. Are language, technology, and scientific research adequate sources of immersion? If not, what other areas would most benefit the students?

*Hypotheses:* Students who attend the SRIA will be provided an experience that is expected to garner an increased level of competence in digital, technical, analytical, and language skills. We expect that all students who participate in this program will benefit, as compared to their peers, when applying to upper-level and graduate programs of study. Our initial plan suggests that students be mentored at Manhattan College for four weeks. We believe this is an ideal timeframe that would offer sufficient contact time for students to be in class or lab every day of the week. The Academy concept is flexible in its course offerings and could easily be adapted to fit studies in business, mathematics, and/or finance, depending on student needs and faculty interest.

## **A Project within the School of Education of Manhattan College**

### ***Project Seven: Cross-Cultural Behaviors in an Online Lasallian Community of Learning***

*Project Overview:* The Digital Divide has evolved from access to the Internet and computer appliances to the ability to use web-based tools effectively. As web-based tools evolve and learning needs to be accessed 24/7, collaborative efforts should be in place to keep all Lasallian students competent and employable (Mullings, 2015). We can begin to discuss digital inequality through projects that expose partners to the cultural and societal norms that will empower our students to become critical digital consumers.

The cooperation between one program at each university (Master in Instructional Design at Manhattan College and Maestría en Didáctica de las Lenguas at the Universidad de La Salle) gave birth to a joint research project that is aimed at developing an online course that will allow learners from both programs to develop and share knowledge in a cross-cultural setting (Mullings, 2015; Harshman, 2017; Seeberg and Minick, 2012).

This graduate course, named Global and Ethical Perspectives in Cyberspace, explores the global and cultural areas of technology and how they may intersect with ethical issues in classroom instruction and curriculum. The goal of the collaborative effort is to support both institutions in the design of effective online learning and to discover how we can train pre-service teachers to be digital citizens and pass that knowledge on to their students in N-16 classrooms.

#### *Research Questions:*

1. Will this course bring a richer understanding of the technological and ethical issues that surround different cultures within the Lasallian communities in Bogota and New York City?
2. Will this course develop in our students a deeper understanding of the digital divide and how to conquer that disparity within their context?
3. How is effective technology integration deployed in each country?

*Hypotheses:* In the short term, the intervention will surely give both institutions two specific advantages: (1) the consolidation of relationships between both programs of two Lasallian institutions; and (2) the conditions to offer students from both programs – as the global learners they are – the conditions to learn from real experience about the topic of the course. Additionally, both professors and students will have the chance to see what really happens when applying the didactic material (workshop) students will create during their virtual classes. Such material is aimed at being applied in the host country during a one-week visit to each country (New York, USA and Bogotá, Colombia).

As a result of this joint project, the intervention will allow both parties to analyze the results and experiences in order to consider the possibility of working together again in similar academic and cultural actions. Such reflections would motivate programs from both institutions to offer the same or similar initiatives that bridge academic topics, Lasallian values, and cultural experiences.

## **Recommendations**

In order to encourage projects among faculty and students in the Lasallian network of higher education, the authors recommend the development of a comprehensive database of Lasallian institutions and their areas of research excellence and research needs. Every academic institution develops strength through well-developed research groups in certain disciplines, while other disciplines are still in the growing phase or on the institution's radar for future growth and development. The development of this database would enable Lasallian schools to collaborate by preparing joint proposals to pursue research projects as an international group with renowned research experience.

The authors recommend the development of a website that enables faculty members in Lasallian colleges and universities to: (1) access the database and identify areas of strength and research needs within their research discipline; (2) post invitations to collaborate on research projects; and (3) send partnership notifications as the database is updated based on keywords.

An example of this is seen in Facebook friends and LinkedIn professional acquaintances where potential partners are sent out to each other with a profile and then each participant is asked if there is interest to proceed and share more information through the app until the match has gone through a series of filters. In this way, participants can manage partners.

The model that Facebook and LinkedIn have established allows for ideas and products to be marketed through database information. This could also be a revenue source to maintain the partnership database. For example, faculty partnerships that have selected the keyword "Global Marketing" may be sent information on products sold through Utopía agricultural efforts.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have presented a variety of creative ways to collaborate within and between two Lasallian institutions of higher education. For each of the projects addressed in this article, whose outcome is currently in development, we have clearly outlined the relationship of the projects to the theme of social justice. This collective effort sets forth a model that transcends interdisciplinary lines as a means of creating a communal source of education, support, and service in the Lasallian tradition. We have demonstrated how a diverse range of personalities, pedagogies, and experiences unite under the One La Salle network to inspire meaningful connections between two international partners (Deveaux, 2018).

The hypothesized outcomes of each project are intended to deepen the understanding of their delivered content in order to impart change in student behaviors, beliefs, and commitment to community (DeThomasis, 2018; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009). Through the design of these projects, each of us has joined in a mutual understanding that countries and educational systems beyond our own have much to teach us (Apple, 2011; Schieler, 2018b). Our preconceived notions that we who teach and serve in privileged countries with vast resources have all the answers and are responsible to guide the rest of the world have been truly debunked. Our experiences in Colombia have taught us that we have just as much to learn from others; most importantly, we have learned to listen and seek combined input.

We believe that the new cornerstone of social justice is the ability to respect collaboration as an equal contribution and allow for the product to deepen all participants' understanding of each other (Harshman, 2017). We are all members of a distinctly diverse educational and social unit that can mutually influence each of its separate components. Much like the Lasallian star, we are connected through defined points, in no particular order or priority, which ultimately converge at a central core set of principles and commitments to social justice and shared appreciation for the greater advancement of societal values.

## References

- Apple, M. W. 2011. "Global Crises, Social Justice, and Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 62 (2): 222–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487110385428>.
- Ayers, W., Quinn, T. M., & Stovall, D.. 2009. *Handbook of Social Justice in Education*. Routledge.
- De La Salle Philippines. 2013. "Identity & Mission." De La Salle Philippines. 2013. <http://delasalle.ph/identity-mission/>.
- DeThomasis FSC, L. 2018. "Limitless Lasallian Love: I Know I Ain't Lost." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 32–46.
- Deveaux, M. 2018. "Poor-Led Social Movements and Global Justice." *Political Theory* 46 (5): 698–725. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591718776938>.
- Harshman, J. 2017. "Developing Globally Minded, Critical Media Literacy Skills." *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 8 (1): 69–92.
- Johnston FSC, J. 2018. "Promoting Lasallian Higher Education through Shared Mission." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 139–48.
- Kalaw, M. 2018. "Motivational Factors and Teaching Philosophies of Education Students: Realizing the Vision of the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 85–98.
- Manhattan College. 2019. "Mission & Strategic Plan | Manhattan College | Riverdale, NY." MISSION & STRATEGIC PLAN. 2019. <https://manhattan.edu/about/mission-strategicplan.php>.
- Manhattan College, The O'Malley School of Business. 2018. "The O'Malley School of Business | Manhattan College | Riverdale, NY." 2018. <https://manhattan.edu/academics/schools-and-departments/school-of-business/index.php>.

- Mullings, D. V. 2015. "Bridging the Learning Gap: Cross-Cultural Learning and Teaching through Distance." *World Journal of Education* 5 (2): 1. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v5n2p1>.
- North, C. E. 2006. "More Than Words? Delving Into the Substantive Meaning(s) of 'Social Justice' in Education." *Review of Educational Research* 76 (4): 507–35. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076004507>.
- Oficina de Filantropía. 2017. "Utopía: A Proposal for the Reinvention of Agricultural Colombia. Universidad de La Salle." Universidad de la Salle. [http://utopia.edu.co/wcm/connect/UTOPIA/c3592dbc-2bfb-46fb-8eca-5a91007a9e74/brochure\\_ingles.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kulkrDW](http://utopia.edu.co/wcm/connect/UTOPIA/c3592dbc-2bfb-46fb-8eca-5a91007a9e74/brochure_ingles.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kulkrDW).
- Ramírez Barba FSC, G. 2018. "Some Questions and Answers about Lasallian Higher Education." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 65–83.
- Revista Semana. 2017. "Las seis deudas históricas por las que protestan en Buenaventura. Data from Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), Colombia. [www.dane.gov.co](http://www.dane.gov.co)." 2017, May 22, 2017. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/buenaventura-cifras-de-pobreza-desempleo-inseguridad/526149>.
- Rodríguez Echeverría FSC, Á. 2009. "The Lasallian Mission at the Tertiary Level." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 25.
- Schieler FSC, R. 2018a. "The Impact of Lasallian Universities: Three Touchstones to Identity." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 99–110.
- Schieler FSC, R. 2018b. "With Our Eyes Fixed on the Future." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 9 (2): 53–59.
- Seeberg, V., & Theresa M. 2012. "Enhancing Cross-Cultural Competence in Multicultural Teacher Education: Transformation in Global Learning." *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 14 (3): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v14i3.569>.
- Wright FSC, G. 2018. "John Baptist de La Salle: The Man & His Message." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*, 149-161, 9 (2): 13.
- Universidad de La Salle. 2019. "What are International Initiatives?," <https://www.lasalle.edu.co/la-salle-internacional/iniciativas-internacionales/que-son-iniciativas-internacionales>.

## Endnotes

1. Shawna BuShell, who is an assistant professor of education at Manhattan College, earned her doctorate in instructional technology and media from Columbia University's Teachers College.
2. Jimena González-Ramírez, who is an assistant professor of economics at Manhattan College, earned her doctorate in economics from Iowa State University.
3. Bryan Wilkins, who is an assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry at Manhattan College, earned his doctorate at the University of Maryland.
4. Natalia Boliari, who is an associate professor of economics and finance at Manhattan College, earned her doctorate in public policy from Carleton University.
5. Mohab El-Hakim, who is an assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering at Manhattan College, earned his doctorate in civil engineering at the University of Waterloo.
6. Sandra Verónica López, who is a visiting assistant professor of mechanical engineering at Manhattan College, earned her doctorate in biomedical engineering from The Graduate Center at the City College of New York (CUNY).
7. Mary Michel, who is an assistant professor of accounting, CIS, and law at Manhattan College, earned her doctorate in accounting from Columbia University.
8. Brother Carlos Gómez-Restrepo, FSC, who is Visitor Provincial of the Lasallian District of Bogotá, earned his doctorate in leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. He is a former rector/president of the Universidad de La Salle in Bogotá and Yopal, Colombia, and a current member of the board of trustees of Manhattan College in New York City.
9. Although this journal usually requires that all citations use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) format, an exception has been made in this issue to allow citations to be made using the American Psychological Association (APA) format.
10. Brother Carlos was, on this occasion, visiting Manhattan College campus in his role as a member of the board of trustees.