Team International generally dealt with East-West (that is, trans-Pacific) intercultural communication issues, while Dr. John Afele from Ghana gave compelling testimony to North-South issues relevant to education through the Internet (Afele, 2000).

The online conference format allowed for accepted papers posted before the events, topic prompts or questions, to be discussed in asynchronous forums such as e-mail lists and Web board posts, plus synchronous Web chat sessions during the scheduled conference period, with dialogue able to move across different media.

Web Board introduction to the International Team’s Mandate

Steve McCarty: To start from the critical questions, there is a default context to much discourse over the Internet that reflects many taken-for-granted assumptions unconsciously carried over from an era of provincial communications. The very concept of "international" often implies the blessings of the U.S. radiating outward to a passive audience in "other" countries. Westerners are called "people" while less wealthy and powerful non-Westerners are often called "tribes" and so forth. Economically powerful mother tongues are called "languages" whereas the less powerful speak "dialects" and so forth. Western societies are treated by sociology, non-Western societies by anthropology. Internet culture is conflated with American culture and reified into a democratizing force, whereas the outcome depends on the true purpose for which technology is utilized.

The intercultural communication dimension is therefore not just a concept to plug into a two-dimensional chart of factors affecting distance education outcomes. It is rather a long road paved by intercultural sensitivity and a gradually widened outlook that begins to contemplate what true globalism would involve. It is a movement from monolingualism and monoculturalism to multilingualism and multiculturalism at the individual and societal levels (McCarty, 1998).

The above-mentioned article speaks broadly to Conference Chair Jim Shimabukuro’s second question for the International Writing Team concerning the "major stages that will define the anticipated changes," which followed from his first question about "the potential, via new technologies, for learning in two- and four-year colleges that is truly international and multicultural." Fortunately it is now possible, even without changing the curriculum, for each subject to be embedded in a larger context via the Internet. Nowadays people can live in two worlds for the cost of little more than one. To a considerable extent the f2f world is geographically constrained to the local context, but the cyber world is where students and educators in each field can join a larger community of scholars and practitioners, accelerating the evolution of knowledge. Less clear in outcome is the negotiation of ethics online, the contention of purposes, between the world community of scholars and other sectors of society with more economic might. Educators have proven to be good learners and have generally upheld the higher ethics in their communities. Now the necessity of lifelong daily learning may work to the advantage of scholars, who have a worldwide community that can finally be connected, and readily organized through shared ethics and standards such as the scientific method.

As Academia is reconstituted in cyberspace, it will be helpful for the curriculum to include new subjects as well, aimed at more knowledgeable enculturation of learners into the cyber world where people will
increasingly work, play, and interact globally. The default context of Internet discourse should thus be the world that includes all humanity.

**Excerpt from an asynchronous and then synchronous dialogue among Team International members**

Gloria McMillan (Pima Community College): Have any of you attempted to re-shape an existing course to include a global component?

Thomas Danford (West Virginia Northern Community College): I have tried to get students to become aware of global microbiology events, outbreaks of infectious disease and the like. Often these events are wonderful "teaching to the moment" situations. It can also lead to a discussion of cultural aspects, since behavior and customs influence disease transmission and impact.

**Discussion initiated on the Web Board continued during the Web chat. Excerpts, slightly edited for clarity:**

<KeikoS> (online conference participant:) Steve sensei, you brought up a point I have never thought about, Internet and Americanism. I guess I have been Americanized, too.

<Steve> As an expatriate I can gain some objectivity about the US. Keiko, Japanese people who speak out in English are rare, and desperately needed.

<KeikoS> What happened to my humble Japanese with my English?

<Steve> My Japanese speaking is more polite than my English. And yes, I bow, even on the telephone because the gestures and attitudes accompany the language. Like fish seeing the water, it is hard to see the default context.

<KeikoS> Where there is communication, there is communication style, which could be different in cultures. Or is it that Internet culture is different altogether?

<Steve> Between the US and Japan you can see how greatly communication styles can differ.

<Danford> Do you think that it interferes with or deters communication, that styles are different?

<KeikoS> Sometimes things don't get across as intended.

<Danford> I don't see much difference between the Internet and physical/real life, except that the Internet can much more easily be multicultural.

<KeikoS> I feel Internet is a different mode of communication. I write like a Web page these days: header here, bullets there, reference to URL.

<Danford> Well, I certainly write differently for MOO [online chat rooms] versus a Web page.

<Steve> I feel very at home in cyberspace after all these years and can be myself, sorry!

<Danford> I feel at home in cyberspace too!

<KeikoS> Comfortable in cyberspace. Shinagawa sensei brought up how we teach culture online in language classes.

<Steve> There is overlap, yes, with the Language Team.
Dialogue among Team International members took place on other conference forums as well, such as the e-mail discussion list following up the presentation by Mauri Collins and Zane Berge. Excerpts:

Steve McCarty: Another example of convergence to divergence is the situation where technologies that support global collaboration are still used by faculty and students within commuting distance of the campus, when each educator, student and institution could be anywhere in the world. Why not have, say, area studies taught from the area, with Asian studies taught from Asia, and so forth, like foreign correspondents? The various logistical and social barriers to this evolution could make an interesting discussion or research theme. Where there is convergence there is all the more urgency to recognize divergence, to practice intercultural sensitivity and appreciate, for example, the accommodation made by non-native users of English in giving us a *lingua franca*.

Gloria McMillan: What a cognitive and affective leap [it would be] having hosts in the country whose literature (or other composition-related topic) we are studying. Several steps precede "getting it" for people, especially bureaucrats who are mainly concerned with the bottom line and lack of disruption to existing courses and delivery mechanisms already in place. If we see the goals, they probably instantly think of the barriers.

Some folks here suggest a Web page of Global Literary Finds. This could be aspects that only the new format highlights, that students would never get in the typical 2nd hand or 3rd hand exposure to global cultures that they get in community colleges from anthologies and teachers who--by and large--have never been near the place whose literature (or whatever) they are studying. We found something unique about *haiku* that even published poets who were at our session didn't know [necessity for a seasonal reference].

John Afele (University of Guelph, Canada; more recently, World Bank and ADB regional project manager): I share with you the optimism for creating a world in which people and their own cultures are integrated without losing their own sense of belonging. That the advances in convergent communication technologies would allow us to touch each other. The process of defining a Global Village/Community would rely on how successfully the academic community employs the modern tools to impact knowledge, through virtuality, while being relevant to local communities: Global knowledge, local impact.

Technologies, as proven, can measure their progress in tangible formats, whereas orchestrating a unifying social philosophy is more subtle. Yet, in my ability to interact with you, to learn what distance education can achieve in creating a knowledgeable global society, I am optimistic that we would grow to know and understand each other more; to provide solutions to some of the chronic ailments of humanity - rural poverty, particularly in the South... the likelihood of some families not eating anything at the end of the day, and that is most likely going to occur in Africa.

John Afele [In response to questions]: For a predominantly formally illiterate rural population, such tools [as discussed in the Collins & Berge keynote] would be relevant, and in areas where telecom infrastructure is poor. Therefore, wirelessness and simplicity would be keys in the community access mechanisms.

As for the secondary schools in Ghana, they are very grammar school type. The goal is to reach the university, and a number of students fall out at two stages (GCE O, and A Levels - British system). The basic and secondary school structures in Ghana have recently changed, but I wonder if the new system would actually learn what the majority of Ghanaians do and why - philosophy of existence and the TOOLS and Processes of livelihoods.

At the end of the day, even the most socially just society must be translated into FOOD. The question would be asked: Our new school system in Ghana, wherever else in Africa, does it bring food? The tools and processes relevant to the immediate community would best be developed in community colleges.
References
