“Emerging Best Practices from the Virtual Exchange Field: A Virtual Follow Up Conversation.”

Speakers:

Michael Kimball, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Northern Colorado

Lisa Roberts, Project Director, Chicago Sister Cities International STEAMuseum

Rhianna Rogers, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, SUNY Empire State College

Moderator:

Henry Shepherd, Assistant Director, Stevens Initiative

Thursday at 4:30 p.m. Eastern / 3:30 Central / 2:30 Mountain in Vidyo Cloud

**SUMMARY**: The digital age has fundamentally transformed many facets of the human experience, including how we communicate, the platforms we seek out for entertainment, and how we engage in learning. Technology is remaking every aspect of education, bringing a variety of scholarly expertise and courses to more diverse students across the world, from our poorest to our wealthiest global citizens. At present, we are seeing the reshaping of education and how it is developed and delivered unfolding right in front of us. Inevitably, these changes are changing the way all students learn and want to be taught. As educators, it is our responsibility to understand, vet, and adapt to these changes in order to ensure our students’ success in the 21st century and beyond.

This virtual conversation is a continuation of the highly successful panel titled “Emerging Best Practices from the Virtual Exchange Field: Lessons Learned from Stevens Initiative Programs,” held at the Global Learning Conference, hosted by DePaul University on October 12, 2017 in Chicago, Illinois. Meant as continuation of best practices, tips, and advice for novice and interested participants in the virtual exchange phenomenon, panelists Dr. Michael J. Kimball (Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Northern Colorado), Dr. Rhianna C. Rogers (Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at SUNY Empire State College), and Dr. Lisa Roberts (Project Director for the STEAMuseum in Chicago) returned to discuss, with moderator Henry Shepherd and viewers, the importance of virtual learning, cross-cultural exchange, and the development of cultural competencies in 21st century learning. In this time of cultural unrest, it is important to think about ways to combat cross-cultural misunderstandings. It isn’t easy to do, which is why training and practice help, but in times of unrest we need people to do so in order to rebuild joint sense of global community. As Rogers stated, “developing cross cultural learning through virtual exchange experiences moves learning beyond the golden rule – treating others as you would have them treated – and moves learners towards the platinum rule – treating others as THEY want to be treated. As we all know, it is easy to surround yourself with like-minded individuals, but is it is harder to try and understand why someone else thinks what they do, especially when it may be from a very different perspective than your own.”

Our hope was to addressed some “real-world” strategies for the development of internationally relevant course materials as well as leave with a better understanding of strategies for collaboration in cross-cultural academic environments. In education, we have an opportunity to blend the virtual with the physical and reimagine education in a way that is more inclusive towards global citizenry.

The Stevens Initiative is an international effort to build global competence for young people in the United States and the Middle East through the use of virtual exchange: online, international, and collaborative learning. In 2016, the Initiative made awards to 10 organizations to implement virtual exchange programs reaching over 20,000 young people. In this session, educators, facilitators, and administrations from awardee organizations discuss their programs, lessons learned, and promising practices that have emerged over the past year of programming.

<http://www.stevensinitiative.org/reflection-global-learning-conference/>

**Speaker Bios**

Michael Kimball

Michael J. Kimball is an Associate Professor of Anthropology, certified mindfulness teacher, recipient of the University of Northern Colorado’s 2017 Faculty Engaged Scholar Award, and author of the forthcoming book, Ethnowise: Embracing Culture Shock to Build Resilience, Responsiveness & Connection. His scholarship and teaching focus on engaged anthropology, heritage studies, and the infusion of mindfulness into intercultural exchange. Through his 13-year partnership with the international nonprofit Soliya, Kimball is a virtual exchange faculty pioneer, connecting university students in the United States with counterparts in Muslim majority Middle East and North African countries via his curriculum and Soliya’s intensive online, facilitated small-group dialogues.

Lisa Roberts

Lisa Roberts is Project Director for the STEAMuseum, a virtual exchange project of the Stevens Initiative and the Chicago/Casablanca Sister City Committee, of which she is co-chair. Lisa’s career has centered on developing unorthodox ways of educating people about science and nature, with a special interest in artistic and technological media. She’s the former director of Garfield and Lincoln Park Conservatories and previously worked at the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Field Museum of Natural History.

Rhianna Rogers

Rhianna Rogers is an associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at SUNY Empire State College. She is trained as both an anthropological-archaeologist and historian, specializing in Mesoamerica and native cultures of the United States. Rhianna holds multiple appointments at Empire State College, including undergraduate roles in the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences & Humanities, the School for Graduate Studies, and International Programs. She teaches courses in Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Native American Studies, Historical Studies, Research Methods, and the Social Sciences, and is the inaugural coordinator of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies for the College. Rogers has been a part of a variety of SUNY-wide initiatives related to her expertise in OER development and implementation, including consulting on multiple IITG grants, Lumina/PLA grants, as well as offering collegial support as a COTE and TOEP fellow in OER academic innovation.