euni well European University for Well-Being

EUniWell
COIL HANDBOOK

A Practical Guide for Academics Starting Collaborative Online International Learning

Co-funded by the European Union

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 1

Part 1 — Understanding COIL 2

1.1 What is a COIL? 2

Typical features of a COIL 2

1.2 Why does EUniWell need COIL? 3

1.3 Voices from the field 4

Part 2 — Getting Started: 10 Key Steps 4

EUniWell support and timeline 5

Useful resources 7

Part 3 — Annexes: Checklists, Templates & Toolbox 8

Annex A — COIL Readiness Self-Assessment Checklist 8

Annex B — COIL Project Planning Grid 8

Annex C — Digital Toolbox 8

Annex D — Further Resources 9

Part 1 — Understanding COIL

1.1 What is a COIL?

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a teaching method that connects two or more classes, based in different countries, so that their students work together for a defined period through online tools. It is **not a brand-new course**: it is a way of enriching a course you already teach by embedding an international, collaborative, virtual component into it.

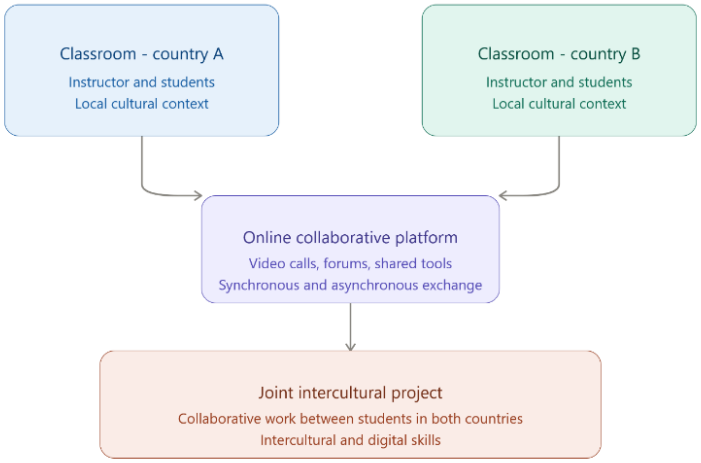
A COIL is designed and delivered jointly by at least two teaching staff members from partner institutions, who co-define learning outcomes, plan joint activities and, together, guide their students through a shared task, project or investigation – most often over three to eight weeks, combining synchronous sessions (live video meetings) and asynchronous work (shared documents, forums, recorded material).

Typical features of a COIL

- Two (or more) partner classes in different countries, ideally with complementary disciplinary or cultural perspectives.
- Two (or more) co-teaching staff who plan and facilitate together.
- A shared learning outcome, task or deliverable – not a simple exchange of emails or a one-off video call.
- A mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities, adapted to time-zone and workload constraints.
- An explicit intercultural and collaborative-competence dimension, alongside the disciplinary content.
- An assessment or feedback mechanism, even a light one, so that the collaborative work counts for students. (examination is typically done by respective home institution and students receive credits from their home institution).

The concept was pioneered by the SUNY COIL Center, whose website offers a useful introduction, illustrations and short videos that can help you picture what a COIL looks like in practice.

COIL in a nutshell



1.2 Why does EUniWell need COIL?

EUniWell – the European University for Well-Being – brings together partner universities across Europe around a shared ambition: to make international, collaborative learning experiences accessible to every student and every member of staff, not only to those who can travel.

Virtual collaboration is central to that ambition for several reasons:

- **It widens access to mobility.** Physical exchanges are not accessible to every student (cost, caring responsibilities, disability, visa constraints, academic calendar). A COIL lets students gain an international, collaborative experience without leaving their home campus, and contributes to the Alliance's broader mobility objectives, which count virtual and blended formats alongside physical exchange.
- **It prepares the ground for joint programmes.** Co-designing and co-teaching a COIL is a low-risk, low-cost way for academic teams to test a working relationship before committing to a joint course, a joint degree, or a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP).
- **It strengthens future physical mobilities.** Students who have already collaborated online with peers abroad are, in practice, more likely to consider – and better prepared for – a physical exchange with that same partner later on.

Good to know: a COIL does not need to cover a full semester or a full course. Many successful first experiences start with a single joint assignment of two to three weeks.

1.3 Voices from the field

What do colleagues who have already run a COIL say about it? Testimonials help demystify the exercise for first-time COIL teachers.

> *"In the module Decolonizing the Curriculum we developed a collaboration with colleagues at Konstanz University whose master's programmes in history and international relations share thematic focus with our master's programme in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies. The students could benefit from jointly developed literature lists with expertise from several research fields, such as Mediterranean history, South Asian history, world literature and Spanish literature. They got the opportunity to do group work both online and in-person with students whose different interests and specializations enriched discussions and gave new perspectives. Eleonor Marcussen, Senior Lecturer in History, Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University*

> *"A Virtual Semester Abroad was developed between the University of Birmingham, University of Amsterdam and Lund University focused on the theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Year 2, undergraduate students were given the opportunity to take a module from each institution. Lectures were delivered online and online synchronous seminars involved students from all three universities. Students highly valued the opportunity to learn EDI related topics in three countries at the same time and to emerge in diverse academic cultures and create a sense of belonging internationally without the need to travel. The programme also established strong partnerships and working relationships between the three academic institutions - Professor Kelly Hall, University of Birmingham, Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology*
>
> *"I took the training course run by ISEP last autumn, and it gave me the tools and resources I needed to set up my first COIL course at the start of the new academic year. During the training we got the chance to create a full COIL course with our international partner. This allowed us to gain a practical understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with COIL." Emilie Camberlein, lecturer in biochemistry from Nantes Université*

Part 2 — Getting started: 10 Key Steps

"I would like to get started — what should I do, concretely?"

The ten steps below take you from a first idea to a finished, reported COIL. They are sequential but expect to loop back – COIL design is iterative, especially the first time.

Step 1. Find the idea / the ideal class

Start from a course you already teach and ask: which topic would genuinely benefit from an international, comparative or cross-cultural angle? Good candidates include case studies, debates, design projects, or any assignment where students would learn from comparing perspectives, data or practices across countries.

- Choose a class where the timing (semester dates, weekly hours) leaves room for a 3–8 week collaborative sequence.
- Favour a class size and format (seminar, project-based, studio) where small international teams can realistically work together.

Step 2. Check institutional support (faculty level)

Before going further, talk to your Head of Department or International Relations Office. Confirm that a COIL component is compatible with your course's official learning outcomes and ECTS, and check whether any workload recognition or teaching-hours arrangement applies to co-teaching.

- Identify who at faculty level can approve or support the initiative.
- Ask whether your institution already has a COIL/virtual-exchange coordinator or support unit.

Step 3. Find your partner

A COIL is a two-sided design. Look for a partner teacher whose course, calendar and objectives are compatible with yours – not necessarily in the same discipline: cross-disciplinary COILs can be very rewarding.

Criteria for an ideal partner

- A course running in a compatible time window (even if start/end dates are not identical. You can check EUniWell academic calendars across the Alliance here)
- Comparable group size and level (undergraduate/graduate).
- A shared appetite for co-designing the activity together, rather than simply telling each other what to do.
- Reasonable time-zone overlap, or a workable asynchronous alternative.

EUniWell's matchmaking process exists precisely to help you find that partner – see the timeline below.

EUniWell support and timeline

CALL FOR COIL! WP7 – Centre for Learning runs a dedicated call to help academic staff across the Alliance find a COIL partner, get guidance on design, and access light funding or recognition where available.

Find your partner: fill out the matchmaking form and attend a live information session scheduled on November 16 or December 16 at 12:30 (CET) here (no need to sign up)

Contact: Every partner university has a WP7 representative who can help you get started, answer practical questions, or put you in touch with a potential COIL partner.

Step 4. Check technical requirements and format

Map out, early on, what digital environment the collaboration will use: a shared video-conferencing tool, a joint or linked LMS space, and any asynchronous collaboration tools (shared documents, discussion boards). Check that both institutions' students can access the chosen tools without licensing or firewall issues, and that data-protection (GDPR) requirements are met for any tool that processes student data.

- Confirm video-conferencing system for both groups (available licences and software capacity, recording rights etc...).
- Agree on a shared or linked digital workspace before the course starts. EUniWell platform Ilias is recommended but not mandatory (EUniWell teams can provide assistance if you are not familiar with it)
- Check time-zone overlap for any synchronous sessions.

Step 5. Work on content and scope with your partner

Once you have a partner, co-design the collaboration together rather than adapting one person's existing plan. Useful points to agree on jointly:

- Shared learning goals: what should students be able to do or understand by the end?
- Activities: joint case study, debate, co-created deliverable, comparative research, design sprint…
- An ice-breaker / team-building activity at the start, so students get to know each other before the graded work begins. (for eg: “what’s in your fridge?”)
- Length: how many weeks, how many synchronous sessions, how much asynchronous work.
- How the collaborative work will be assessed (or simply valued) on each side.

Step 6. Implementation

This is when students start their cooperation. Brief your students clearly before day one: what is expected of them, what tools they will use, and what “working with an international peer” practically involves (asynchronous communication, time-zone courtesy, shared documents etiquette).

- Open the collaboration with the planned ice-breaker.
- Share a simple project timeline with both groups of students.

Step 7. Ensure teams work efficiently together – and readjust if needed

Monitor team dynamics during the collaboration, not only at the end. A short mid-point check-in with your partner teacher – and, if useful, with the students – lets you catch and fix issues early: unequal participation, technical access problems, unclear instructions, or time zone friction.

- Schedule at least one mid-point touchpoint with your co-teacher.
- Keep a light channel open for students to flag problems (e.g. a dedicated forum thread).

Step 8. Organise feedback at the end of the project

Collect feedback from students on both sides – a short survey is usually enough – covering what they learned, what worked, and what to improve. Debrief with your partner teacher while the experience is fresh.

- Use a short, comparable questionnaire on both sides so results can be pooled.

- Include at least one open question on the intercultural/collaborative experience, not only the academic content.

Step 9. Report on your project – share outcomes

Reporting is voluntary but strongly encouraged: it feeds the Alliance's collective knowledge of what works, helps other colleagues get started, and can support testimonials for future calls.

- Share a short outcome summary with EUniWell teams.
- Consider a testimonial (written or short video) for future editions of this handbook.

Step 10. Adjust and improve

Very few first COILs run perfectly. Use what you learned – from the mid-point check-in and the final feedback – to refine the activity, the timing or the partnership for next time. Many of the strongest COIL collaborations are the second or third iteration of an initial attempt.

Useful resources

There will be no dedicated funding to support the EUniWell Call for COIL but all institutions are welcome to use their own funds to support the initiative.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact your **local EUniWell Center for Learning coordinator (WP7)**.

A few avenues worth exploring:

- **Erasmus+ (E+) opportunities:** some Erasmus+ actions support blended and virtual mobility formats; check with your International Relations Office whether your COIL could be linked to an existing or future Erasmus+ action.

  Erasmus+ training opportunities and grants are also available to staff working in higher education, both in teaching (STA) and non-teaching (STT) capacities. Training periods abroad are flexible and can include job shadowing, observation periods, professional development courses or specific competence-building events. You can check EUniWell website for more details on application procedures and contacts at each institution.
- **ISEP COIL Academy:** a training programme for academic staff who want structured guidance and peer support while designing their first COIL. Check with your international relations office if your institution is part of the ISEP network.

Part 3 — Annexes: Checklists, Templates & Toolbox

Annex A — COIL Readiness Self-Assessment Checklist

Use this checklist before you commit to a COIL – most items should be ticked, or on their way to being ticked, before Step 3 (finding a partner).

☐ I have identified a course, or part of a course, suited to an international collaborative activity.

☐ I understand what would change in my course design and workload if I add a COIL component.

☐ I have informed / obtained support from my Head of Department.

☐ I know which digital tools my institution allows and supports.

☐ I am ready to co-design the activity with a partner, rather than simply asking them to follow my plan.

☐ I have time in my calendar for at least one mid-point check-in with my co-teacher.

☐ I have thought about how the collaborative work will be recognized or assessed.

☐ I am prepared to collect feedback from students at the end.

Annex B — COIL Project Planning Grid

A shared working template for you and your partner to fill in together once you start Step 5.

Week	Activity	Learning objective	Format (sync/async)	Responsible

Annex C — Digital Toolbox

A non-exhaustive overview of tool categories to discuss with your partner – always check your institution's approved-tools list and GDPR guidance first.

- **Synchronous video conferencing:** for live sessions and ice-breakers.
- **Shared learning space:** a common or linked LMS course, for example EUniWell platform Ilias (EUniWell teams can provide assistance if you are not familiar with it), or a shared cloud folder, so both groups see the same instructions and resources.
- **Collaborative documents:** for co-writing, joint slide decks or shared boards.
- **Asynchronous discussion:** a forum or discussion thread for teams.
- **Feedback/survey tool:** for the end-of-project questionnaire (Step 8).

Annex D — Further Resources

Selected external resources referenced throughout this handbook, and further reading on virtual exchange and COIL practice across the European University alliances.

- SUNY COIL Center — "What is COIL?" – introductory resource on the COIL model.
- SUNY COIL Readiness Checklist (PDF) – a complementary self-assessment tool.
- Ulysseus COIL Handbook for Teachers (PDF) – a practical guide from the Ulysseus European University alliance.
- Linnaeus University – Internationalise through virtual collaboration – examples and local support at LNU.
- Penn State – EDGE Resource Map – design resources for global/virtual exchange courses.
- UNIL – Corpus pédagogique collaboratif (Padlet, in French) – a collection of pedagogical resources from the University of Lausanne.
- UniCollaboration – the international association for virtual exchange, with a directory, training and matchmaking resources.
- FOREU4ALL – Webinar Impactful Internationalisation through Virtual Exchange/COIL, June 2026