



Drawing upon seven decades of expertise in the field of public diplomacy and international education, Youth For Understanding (YFU) has developed an additional pathway to global citizenship through the creation of virtual exchanges. In these online facilitated programs, youth from vastly different backgrounds are provided opportunity to increase their curiosity and empathy for one another, while developing transversal global competencies and soft skills. Virtual exchange welcomes a broad-base of participants—many of whom would never travel past the borders of their own countries—to experience the benefits of intercultural exchange and serve as digital diplomats.

Program

YFU virtual exchanges introduce the intercultural benefits of study abroad to new audiences utilizing the power of technology. The central program in YFU's virtual exchange portfolio is based on a semester cycle, taking place twice annually. Youth are enrolled into online classrooms of 30 - 60 students, each with representation from approximately ten countries. Guided by trained facilitators, participants engage for 13 - 15 weeks with their international peers through asynchronous and synchronous communication methods. They spend two to three hours a week participating in discussion boards, making presentations, videos, photo collages, and other creations to develop attitudes, values, skills and knowledge that give them a newfound global perspective.

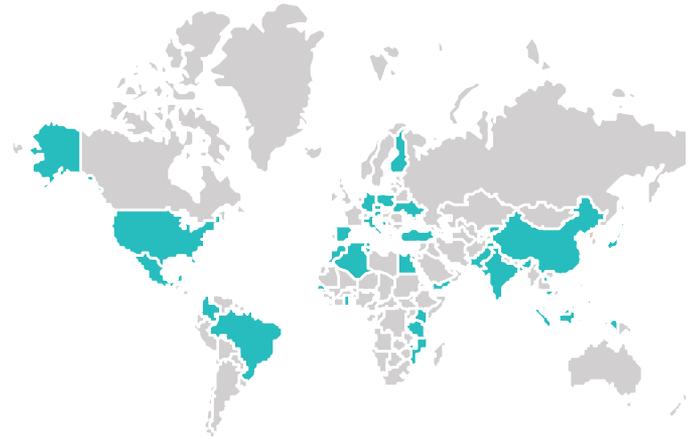
Curriculum

Exercises are designed not only to increase intercultural awareness, but strive to achieve specific learning outcomes and galvanize youth to take action in their home communities. At the end of each project, participants, referred to as digital diplomats, reflect on the knowledge and skills they have gained and explore how these new abilities are applicable to their future growth. Curriculum aligns with recognized global educational standards such as those outlined by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Asia Society.

“I found out that conflict is not all bad, and that when approaching conflict as a place where dialogues can take place leading to individuals being more open-minded and empathetic, we can start to see positive change take place. I also got the chance to record and save my hopes for the future of myself, my community and the world, this will always remind me to work towards these hopes I have for the future.”



*- Portia, 17, Ghana,
Fall 2017 Youth Ambassador*



Virtual exchange promotes intercultural learning that encourages technology-enabled, facilitated, interactive, people-to-people dialogue in a digital space.

YFU virtual programs aim to:

1. **raise awareness** and engage participants in dialogue to combat stereotypes, build international connections, and enhance diversity of thought
2. **shrink the achievement gap** by addressing disparities in educational opportunities based on ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status
3. **counter extremism** by influencing attitudes and combating radical views
4. **identify disinformation** by increasing media literacy
5. provide **personal growth** and empowerment opportunities

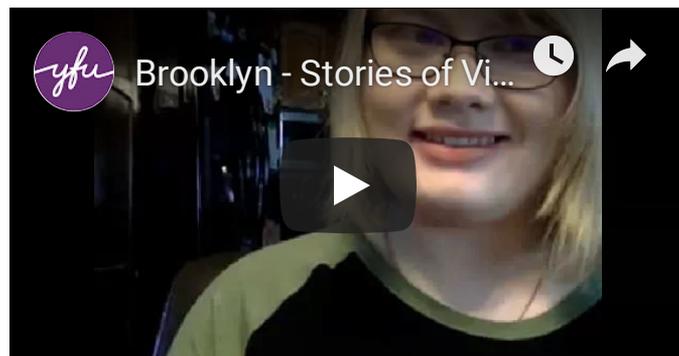
Participants

Through the formation of collaborations with governments and civil society organizations (CSOs), YFU is intentionally reaching a more diverse audience, engaging vulnerable and underrepresented youth who can grow from the mind-opening benefits of intercultural exchange, and who offer meaningful perspectives that enrich the experience of others. Candidates for virtual exchange are self-motivated individuals—students, alumni, and young professionals—active in youth organizations, secondary schools and higher education institutes who have a sense of social responsibility, and who are culturally curious about peers of different backgrounds than their own. Participants between the ages of 14-35, with access to technology and English-proficiency, are selected based on the quality of their application.



“ I am still able to be a voice for people that are like me and that are in my community...”

Listen to Brooklyn's YFU story!



Brooklyn, 17, is an American Digital Diplomat. She joined Virtual Exchange in the Spring of 2018 after an unexpected early return home from studying abroad. She is an advocate of cultural exchange for disabled students and is excited to become more involved in her community.

<https://youtu.be/jx97Mf51Kag>

YFU Virtual Exchange Quick Facts



1600
Youth
Served



40
Countries
Represented



31
States
Reached



77%
Age
14-18



68%
Are
Female



80%
Never Studied
Abroad

Support

The program is supported by YFU staff and a cadre of volunteers and alumni. Trained volunteers serve as **YFU Facilitators** who guide participants throughout their virtual exchange experience—encouraging dialogue, asking follow-up questions, and assisting those facing technological challenges. Select YFU alumni serve as **Youth Ambassadors** who guide discussions and offer peer encouragement throughout the program. **YFU Administrators** provide ongoing technological and programmatic support to stakeholders, including the creation of both written and video instructions, facilitator trainings, and live-time video conferencing.

In the first two years, a trained team of 45 volunteers and 64 young alumni have given essential support - providing encouragement, mentorship, technological guidance, and programmatic feedback.

Program Development and Oversight

YFU is responsible for every aspect of the program cycle, including the:

- Program Model
- Curriculum
- Trainings
- Staging and Registration Process
- Stakeholder Support
- Recognition
- Monitoring & Evaluation

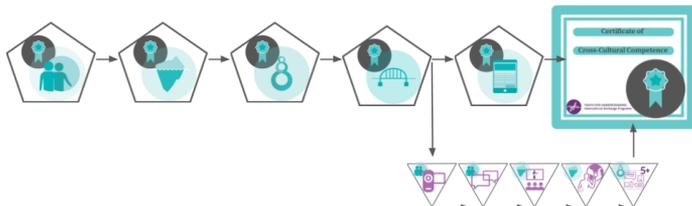


YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs

To apply, and for program details and eligibility, please visit YFUUSA.ORG/Virtual-Exchange

Recognition

YFU wants participants to consider themselves global citizens who believe they can have an impact locally and globally. YFU developed a badging protocol to award achievement milestones and help participants recognize their own learning. Digital diplomats who exemplify high level achievement by engaging in all exercises and projects, completing program surveys, and responding to a reflection questionnaire, may earn a Certificate of Cross-Cultural Competence. Explore YFU badges and criteria to earn them at <http://bit.ly/VirtualBadges>



Upon introduction of the certificate option, the rate of participant program completion increased by 33%.



Cross-Cultural Competence

The ability to effectively communicate and engage in any cross-cultural environment through the acquired values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding of a Global Citizen.

“ I have now made it my responsibility to volunteer every Friday at this center... This is how best I can help my community, by giving my time.”



- Veronica, 16,



“ I will make an impact on perceptions of certain faiths, sexualities, and genders by reaching out to those who express negative thoughts and engaging with them to try to open their mind. I also will continue to establish math circles for young girls in order to bolster their academic confidence and influence their perceptions that women cannot pursue careers in STEM.”



- Ankita, 16, USA

Fall 2017 Youth Ambassador

Alumni Highlight!

Narimen, a 16-year-old from Tunisia, participated in the Fall 2017 Third Space Semester. Her interactions with peers and skills gained through her virtual experience gave her the confidence to apply and be accepted for a YES scholarship to study abroad in the USA. Wanting to bring the opportunity of intercultural learning to others, Narimen started the first YFU Digital Diplomat club at her school and served as a peer mentor in the Spring of 2018 to get more Tunisian youth involved. Narimen will study abroad with YFU this upcoming year and looks forward to continuing her involvement in the virtual exchange community.

“ My experience with YFU Virtual was very unique and life changing... It made me discover different cultures and it taught me how to deal with people that may or may not share the same point of view. **YFU Virtual is something that will teach you how to be a Global Citizen and how to grow as a person and as an amazing leader.**”

Listen to Narimen's story below!



YFU Digital Diplomat Club, Tunisia. Spring 2018 Third Space Semester.



<https://youtu.be/2HM4H6vUu8E>



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Impact

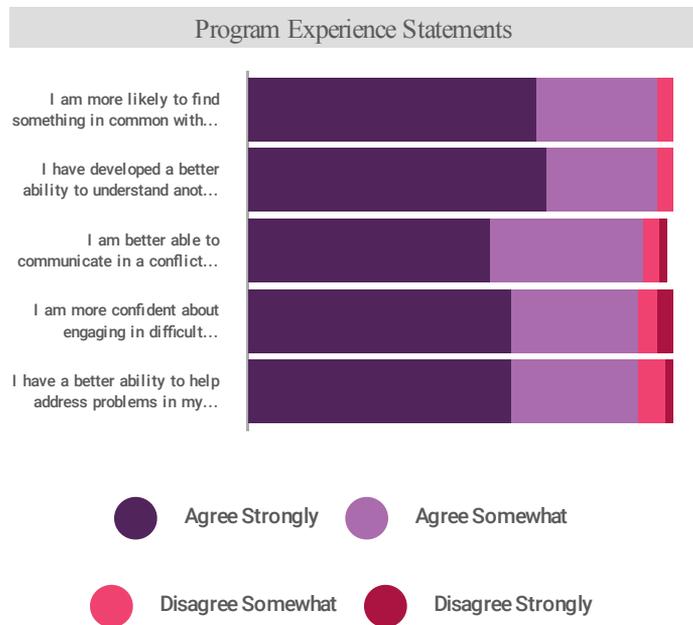
Through YFU’s strong program model and course content, participants have reported positive attitudinal shifts in cultural perceptions. Designed to capture movement, post-program surveys reveal that participants reported an increase in cultural curiosity, empathy, ability to understand and navigate conflict, ability to approach differences in opinion and desire to become active changemakers in civil society.

Surveys reveal, across the board, concrete findings on the course material and capture movement toward openness and curiosity about other cultures, with 98% of those who completed last semester’s post-program questionnaire agreeing they have increased appreciation for cultures other than their own, and 96% agreeing that they are more likely to influence community or global issues that citizens face by discussing topics such as inequality, justice, or fairness.



Programmatic assessments have led YFU to pinpoint five critical factors to cultivating successful outcomes:

- **Diversity** of participants and perspectives
- **Support** from administrators, facilitators, and peer mentors
- **Curriculum** that enhances technological and soft skills
- Meaningful **recognition** of learning
- Practical **monitoring and evaluation** to capture results



“ This program helped me in so many ways, on a personal level, cognitively and socially, and also academically. It inspired me to deepen my knowledge of Cultural Studies, especially in the field of Multicultural Education. Throughout the journey of the virtual exchange, I kept on finding answers to multiple questions I had in mind, had discussions with great beings from all over the world and cleared up so many confusions and pieces of knowledge I had geographically and culturally. I am very thankful for such opportunity, and always proud to share my ideas and lessons I learned from it with others, and very much willing to take part of upcoming initiatives by YFU. Always proud to be an Alumna.”

- Moroccan female, 24
Fall 2017 Youth Ambassador

Report Note This page features interactive infographics. Hover over the charts to explore and view more details.

About YFU

With partners in 56 countries, Youth For Understanding (YFU) brings 67 years of experience in international education and exchange. YFU programs engage learners of all ages to build leadership and cross-cultural skills, while strengthening international understanding and public diplomacy.

YFU programs were founded on a homestay model for teenagers: 270,000 students and their host families have benefited from support of YFU and its 70,000 volunteers worldwide. YFU has since expanded to reach all ages and now includes teacher study abroad opportunities, classroom excursions, community college programs, adult study tours, and virtual exchanges with a common goal of intercultural learning to enhance global citizenry.



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