Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Using Technology to Connect Students Internationally and Inter-Religiously

Rev. Dr. Sue Dickson
Assistant Professor
Ashland University
USA

Abstract

In the fall of 2010, an interdisciplinary, honors seminar at Ashland University connected Middle Eastern, North African, U.S. American and European undergraduates for weekly, group discussions online. The groups included Christians, Muslims, agnostics and atheists. The U.S. American students met weekly to process and analyze these discussions. Using this course as a springboard, this paper examines issues of cross-cultural and inter-religious communication that arose during the course; the impact of the final media project on the students and on their understanding of how the media influences thoughts, stereotypes and behaviors; and the advantages and surprising dangers of connecting students internationally and inter-religiously with technology. The final product of the course, a video news story developed from Al Jazeera footage by the students, generated passionate, revealing, and astounding outcomes.

Excerpts from this paper were presented at the Midwest American Academy of Religion 2011 Session, Rock Island, IL Augustana College and excerpts will be presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual meeting, November 2011.

The Context

Recently, CNN ran a special report as part of the CNN in America series entitled: *Unwelcome: the Muslims Next Door*. The special takes us to Murfreesboro, TN a town of 104,000 people where a Muslim community of about 250 families plans to build an Islamic Center. A group in the town, led by an African-American and a prominent, daughter of southern privilege, have organized resistance to the center and brought a lawsuit against the Muslim community. Questions such as "Is Islam even really a religion?" arise. Television producer, author and journalist, George Alexander, writes:

> Like the positions segregationists promoted during the civil rights movement a generation ago, you hear opponents make claims like, "They want to disrupt our way of life. They want to kill us. They beat their women. They're not like us." … You …see how much work needs to be done in the area of religious and ethnic tolerance when it comes to the American family. But how do we get there when real fear moves through the blood streams of a lot of Americans aided by 24/7 media airwaves that can polarize and demonize any group of people if you listen to the rhetoric long enough?[1]

How do we overcome the fear of and ignorance about Muslims that is endemic in our culture today? How can we abolish the stereotypes and prejudices that we absorb unwittingly from the media? How can we build more authentic relationships with people from the Arab and Muslim world? In a post 9/11 world in which thousands of U.S. Americans have been killed in the war on terror, and in Iraq and Afghanistan, is it possible for people of the west and people of the Arab and Muslim worlds to develop relationships of understanding, mutual respect and perhaps even admiration? This is the story of one classroom in one Midwestern university that attempted to address these questions by using technology to connect students in the U.S. with students from the Arab and Muslim world.

The Problem

Ashland University is a mid-sized, liberal arts university amidst the small towns and Amish farm country of Northeast, Ohio. The university includes colleges of Business, Nursing, Education, and Arts and Sciences. Most of the students come from within a two hundred mile radius of the campus and are not widely traveled. Much of what the students 'know' about the world, they have learned from the U.S. American media. They come to Ashland with little or no global experience.

---

[1] Huffpost Media, March 31, 2011.

Many of them are unable or unwilling to take the time and/or incur the financial burden of study abroad. Lack of knowledge about the historical, political, social and cultural backgrounds of world events is the norm. There is even less understanding about cultural realities and worldview. Students often exhibit a sense of discomfort with and fear of critical thinking about global issues because such thinking requires testing, revising or even letting go of popular stereotypes that have been reinforced by the media and the local culture. The faculty and staff of Ashland University, like those of many universities today, are engaged in an effort to enable students to rise above those fears. They realize the importance of and are actively seeking to incorporate global perspectives into the undergraduate curriculum. The mission statement of the university includes a statement about graduating students who are aware of their responsibilities as global citizens. A new 'Global Passport Strategy' has been initiated. And, in January 2008, a Faculty Learning Community was organized around the topic 'International Education.' When that group became aware of an opportunity to work with a U.N. affiliated, non-profit organization, *Soliya*[2], to offer undergraduate students an interdisciplinary seminar connecting students with university students from the Arab world, several faculty members enthusiastically agreed to team-teach the course.

The Project

The interdisciplinary seminar, taught in the fall of 2010, used technology to bring global perspectives, cross-cultural relationships, and inter-religious dialogue into the classroom. The Faculty Learning Community, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Global Education Office, the School of Business, the Religion Department and the Honors program cooperated with *Soliya* to organize groups of six to eight students from the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. (Muslims, Christians, agnostics and atheists) that met weekly, online throughout the semester. The Ashland students also met weekly in an Ashland classroom. As a supplement (certainly not a replacement for international travel or study abroad), these online events succeeded in piquing the interest, expanding the horizons, revealing the prejudices and challenging the worldviews of the Ashland students. They introduced Ashland students to realities of globalization and cross-cultural relationships that otherwise would have remained misunderstood, obscure, in the realm of theory, or altogether ignored.

The goals of the project included: raising students' awareness of the realities of the relations between the western world and the Arabic and Muslim world; correcting ignorance and stereotypes; allowing students to hear, engage with and critically analyze conflicting narratives about the relationship between the 'western' and the 'Arab and Muslim' worlds; honing students' cross-cultural understanding and communication skills and providing Ashland students with an opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship with university students from the Arab and Muslim world. This use of technology was inexpensive and effective. It offered students an unprecedented opportunity to learn about and experience relationships with people in the Arab and Muslim world. It challenged their understanding and worldviews. It incorporated global perspectives into the classroom. And, it was an important example of engaged, interactive, and experiential pedagogy that has great potential for undergraduate classrooms in many fields.

Soliya's flagship program, the 'Connect' program, links students from the west (primarily the U.S. and Western Europe) with students from the Arab and Muslim world (primarily the Middle East and North Africa) for weekly online discussions throughout a semester. Working in English and with a bi-lingual facilitator, the groups come to know each other personally and academically. They engage in 'ice-breakers,' they pre-read and discuss academic and news articles, they share information about their lifestyles, worldviews, religious practices and religious beliefs. Questions of dating, music, marriage, family life, careers, work, school, gender, politics, war, terrorism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, religion and many other issues regularly emerge. At Ashland, in preparation for the group discussions, students spent time studying culture theory, the basics of interreligious dialogue and the history of the Middle East. Each week, time in class was devoted to debriefing the international/interreligious dialogues.

The Outcomes

The student learning outcomes of these groups ranged from members 'friending' each other on social networks and continuing to communicate long after the semester was over,

---

[2] *Soliya* is a non-profit, U.N. affiliated organization that aims to shed light on the relationship between the 'west' and the 'Arab and Muslim' world in a way that promotes understanding, respect and joint action. The word *Soliya* is an integration of the Latin word meaning sun (sol) and a classical Arabic word from *Lisan al Arab* meaning beam of light (iya).

to group members throwing up their hands in frustration and anger—sometimes both! Several weeks of introductory, trust-building meetings were needed to set the stage for deeper, more meaningful dialogue. Some of the groups never got through the initial stage and into authentic dialogue. Even though there were facilitators charged with preventing it, one of the groups was hijacked by someone who wanted to use the group as a forum for proselytizing. The U.S. American students at Ashland were disgusted and infuriated by this. The facilitator was contacted and asked to handle the situation. However, the problem was never fully resolved. Instead, the U.S. American students withdrew emotionally from the group. The U.S. American students felt enormous, largely self-imposed, pressure, to be 'politically correct.' They did not want to be rude, or insensitive, or to offend their counterparts. This was both an illustration of healthy humility and an unhealthy inhibitor to authentic dialogue.

One U.S. American woman was frustrated that the Saudi Arabian woman in her group could not admit to feeling oppressed and abused by her monarchical form of government. The Saudi Arabian woman was frustrated that the U.S. American woman could not see how important the order and stability of her monarchical government was to her. They argued and debated past each other. Neither one actually listened carefully enough to the other to actually be changed or stretched. However, at least they were honest enough to debate and, in the de-briefing the U.S. American woman could see how she had failed to really listen.

Another U.S. American woman listened carefully for the ideas of the two Egyptian women in her group and was annoyed that the Arab and Muslim men seemed to control the conversations. She persisted in trying to speak with the women, but the men seemed intent on thwarting her questions to them. She wanted to call them on it, but was afraid of being seen as a 'pushy westerner.' She resorted to 'friending' the women on a social network site.

As they worked in these groups, many students became aware of their ignorance about inter-religious dialogue and cross-cultural communication. They wrestled with some of the challenges inherent in authentic dialogue. As they became sensitized to the perspectives of their Arab and Muslim counterparts, they realized that being honest about their own ideas and feelings might mean offending them. They struggled with the tension between honesty about feelings and ideas that might cause conflict and refraining from comments in order to keep the conversations pleasant. In the de-briefings, they began to understand that they were encountering an important reality of inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogue. Authentic dialogue requires enough commitment to the process, enough trust and enough confidence in the good will of the other, that honesty—and conflict—can be tolerated. Actually, if there is no disagreement, no conflict, there is probably no authentic dialogue. Still, this lesson is extraordinarily difficult for undergraduates to learn. The tendency often is to find common denominators. Students gloss over or downplay differences in a misguided attempt to be 'nice.' Superficial chats may be possible on that basis. Authentic dialogue is not.

The students had to learn how to listen, really listen, to the other. They learned the art of listening so closely to the other that they would be able to effectively represent the other's viewpoint to a third party. Then, and only then, did they express their own ideas. Learning how to speak the truth after truly hearing the other person's truth helped students speak from a position of respect without being aggressive, defensive or insulting. They learned to use 'I' statements. They discovered that sometimes honesty does offend. They also discovered that dialogue based on honesty and commitment also emerges in authentic relationships. Students learned that if they chose to be honest, they were opening themselves up to criticism. Honesty means being willing to become vulnerable. Only the most emotionally mature of students (or persons!) can handle this kind of authentic dialogue. Yet, those who are courageous enough find themselves affirmed and sometimes evolving through genuine engagement with an honest other.

Some students became so frustrated and angry that they gave up on the process. At the beginning of the semester, these students had called themselves open-minded, eager to learn, ready to befriend people from another culture. But, by the second or third group meeting, many of them doubted their ability to be open-minded (which may be an important first step toward actually *being* open-minded). Some of them were questioning their understanding of world events in ways they previously had never imagined. Many wondered whether it was even possible for true friendships to exist between people from such different cultures. A few were fearful, resistant and defensive about the challenge to their worldviews and stereotypes. They could not adjust to new ways of thinking about the relationships between western people and Arab and Muslim people. They were unable or unwilling to learn or to become vulnerable enough to experience growth. Other students were amazingly available to their Arab and Muslim counterparts, honest, and respectful, grounded and open.The outcomes were different for different students. Some realized the depth, and insidiousness of their prejudices and stereotypes.

They began to discern ways in which the U.S. American media, culture, family and friends had influenced their worldview and their ability to relate to the Arab and Muslim students authentically. They set about revising their behaviors and thoughts. Others resisted the idea that their worldview was not everyone's worldview and could not accept that any of their ideas might need revising. For them, dialogue was debating to win rather than learning from and about the other. An important learning for many of the students was that they had absorbed fear and anger toward the Arab and Muslim world inadvertently. The media had influenced them in ways that they had not previously recognized. One student admitted to a distressing (at least from my perspective) student learning outcome. He claimed that his stereotypes and prejudices (which he could now identify and acknowledge) had been confirmed rather than disproved by his relationships with the Arab and Muslim students in his group.

The Final Project

One of the primary goals of the *Soliya Connect* program is to introduce students to the power of media to influence thoughts, worldviews, stereotypes and relationships. "The use of technology as a means of fomenting extremism and violence is well documented."[3] Just to remind you of a couple of examples, think of the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* that glorified the Ku Klux Klan, or the 1935 *Triumph of the Will* promoting Nazi ideals or the 1993 radio and television programs of *Libre de Mille Collines* in Rwanda that fomented genocide. Since 1993, digital media technologies have advanced to the point where events anywhere on the globe can be seen in offices and living rooms and bedrooms as they are happening. Many of you may remember watching the first Iraq war from the comfort and safety of your living rooms. And, the reverse is true as well. The events happening in our offices and living rooms and bedrooms can be seen by anyone on the planet in an instant through technology. It seems intuitive to say that the media has power to impact attitudes, worldview and behavior, but does it always? Why? How?

The introduction of new media technologies, from the telegraph to the internet, engenders curiosity about the impact of these technologies on individuals and society. Since this course was offered at Ashland in the fall of 2010, the 'Arab Spring' has erupted and changed the face of North Africa and the Middle East. By many accounts, technology and specifically social networks played and continue to play a significant role in these popular uprisings. In North Africa and the Middle East, we have seen the fear that digital technologies provoke in oppressive governments. The besieged governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and even governments as far away as China, initiated media blackouts to try to prevent the spread of images and information about the uprisings. Clearly, these governments recognize—and are terrified by—the power of technology to bring about social change. The *Soliya Connect* program could not have foreseen these events, and yet, the final project for the students in this program clearly confirms the power of the media to influence, to inform, to misinform, to unite and to incite.

As a final project, the students were given several hours of raw footage from *Al Jazeera* news network about a bombing in the Gaza strip. Each student produced a five minute, video news story from these clips which was uploaded to the web. The finished products were analyzed and discussed by the groups. Why students chose one clip over another; the focus of the segments; the unspoken perspectives of the students; their overall stated objective and the impact of their finished products on their audience were all topics of online and in-class discussion. Perhaps predictably, U.S. American students in their videos tended to focus on the political support and ideological rationale for the violence revealed in the clips. They were interested in justifying and explaining the bombing philosophically. They included narratives of the broad, historical context of the situation. Clips of political leaders from around the world giving official statements about the bombing, and officials from the area commenting on the situation, figured prominently in most of their stories. Almost all of the U.S. American students showed the same clip of Condoleeza Rice and the Secretary General of the U.N. commenting on the bombing. This is striking since the students had several hours of footage to work with and only five minutes for their presentations. A few included dramatic images of the bombed buildings and the panic resulting from the bombings. In general, their stories were historically, intellectually, and philosophically oriented. They were concerned with presenting the bombing in a way that appeared balanced, rational, detached. Indeed, they *were* detached. The Arab and Muslim students, on the other hand, were not detached. They tended to focus on the human experience of the bombing. They identified with the people on the streets.

---

[3] Argo, Nichole, Shamil Idriss, Mahnaz Fancy. *Media and Intergroup Relations: Research on Media and Social Change,* Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund and Soliya online publication: 2010, p 4.

Images of the wounded and killed, the damaged streets and buildings, sirens and ambulances were central to their stories. Crowds reacting with passion (including the shouting of religious leaders) were prominent. Several of the Arab and Muslim students chose a clip showing a child on the beach screaming over the body of her dead father. To the U.S. American students, their stories seemed too passionate, intimate, dramatic and inflammatory. The U.S. American students said things like, 'It is supposed to be a news story. Just tell the facts. We have to show both sides.' To the Arab and Muslim students, the U.S. American videos seemed defensive, biased and incomplete. Certainly, an interesting consequence of these projects for the Ashland students was the concrete illustration of the power of media. The U.S. American students saw that their own products, which they had believed to be factual, philosophically fair and politically balanced, were perceived by their Arab and Muslim peers to be biased, untrue, incomplete and infuriating. The Arab and Muslim students were angered by what they saw and by the slight they perceived. By the same token, the U.S. American students reacted negatively to the work of their Arab and Muslim counterparts. In the de-briefing, the U.S. American students came to understand the power of media at a visceral level. Students who had been enjoying conversations with Arab and Muslim peers, who had been learning about the lifestyles of Arab and Muslim teenagers, about their music, and dating, and families and laughing with them, suddenly found themselves feeling misunderstood, angry, threatened.

Students discovered that technology's influence on society is more subtle and complex than we might guess. In the late 1940's Lazarsfeld and Kendall conducted a study that found that exposure to radio, television and film did not change people's attitudes as much as it reinforced existing attitudes. This is what the Ashland students discovered as well. The final projects did not change anyone's ideas about the Gaza bombing event. Rather, the videos were applauded if they affirmed previously held beliefs. They engendered anger if they contradicted previously held beliefs.[4] New studies have begun to explore how the media affects worldview, hostile or aggressive behavior and stereotypes. These studies shed light on the experience of the Ashland students who learned firsthand how critical the media can be in influencing thoughts and behavior. Worldview is heavily impacted by 'cultivation theory' which says that even though media tends not to immediately change our attitudes and beliefs, over time it shapes our worldview. We come to expect the world to be the way it is portrayed in the media and we expect people to behave the way they do in the media. Miller, Monin and Prentice found in a 2000 study that 'our assumptions about social norms predict our behavior more than our own stated beliefs or values do.'[5] Thus, the worldview of the students in the *Soliya Connect* program, a worldview that portrayed people from the Arab and Muslim world negatively, and which had developed over time and exposure to the media, was being challenged by their experiences of actual individuals from the Arab and Muslim world. At the same time, those media-shaped worldviews were being reinforced by the final project.

The final project presented violence in the form of an attack. That attack was perceived by both groups to be an attack on their people. The bombing was obviously an attack on the Arab and Muslim world. It was Arabs and Muslims who were killed. The footage showing the responses to the bombing on the part of the Arab and Muslims was perceived by the U.S. Americans to be an attack on them. The U.S. Americans identified with the bombers as protectors of freedom and democracy and felt unjustly (and largely unconsciously) attacked by the Arab and Muslim people who wanted to take revenge on the bombers. Violent constructs become more accessible after viewing violent films, or seeing violence on television. In 2001, Bushman and Anderson found that violent video games primed participants for violence.

---

[4] It is interesting to note that the Lazarsfeld and Kendall study was done when U.S> American culture was relatively stable in the years immediately following WWII. The media at this time catered to people's tastes and reflected already dominant beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes. In the more turbulent 1960's and 70's the media began to challenge dominant beliefs and attitudes. Stereotypes were questioned. And, it was at this time that fears emerged about violence on television influencing viewers' behaviors. In 1961, Alert Bandura conducted experiments to see whether children became more aggressive after watching aggressive 'bobo doll' play on television. He found that 'not everybody, or even most, mimic media aggression, but under very specific conditions, some do.' (referencing Steele, 1988). Nonetheless, 'many scholars generally accept the basic principle of social learning theory' (referencing Pyszczynski, Solomon, Greenberg, 2003). This suggests that individuals will imitate the behavior of characters that they admire and see in the media. Congressional inquiries in the 1980's did not discover a causal relationship between exposure to violent media and aggression. Rather, they found a correlation between the two. People who behave violently watch violence in the media. However, the media may not cause the violence.

[5] Ibid. p. 19.

Participants who played violent video games were more likely to behave aggressively, think aggressive thoughts and feel angry than people who played non-violent video-games.[6] Furthermore, an individual's self-esteem is influenced by the status of his or her group. Therefore, if an individual's group is attacked, that individual will tend to defend the group and to feel a stronger bond with the group in order to maintain self-esteem. Exposure to images of violence against one's group causes individuals to …cling tighter to their cultural worldviews or ideologies, and to desire stronger retribution towards outgroups.'[7] On the other hand, affirmation of a group makes individuals less resistant to change and persuasion, more open to new ideas and more tolerant of others. Thus, the final project in the *Soliya* program, by exposing both groups to images of violence against what each group perceived as its 'own' group, unintentionally may have reinforced the stereotypes of the participants and made the people from the west and the people from the Arab and Muslim worlds more resistant to change and less willing to be tolerant of one another's perspectives. Perhaps the student who admitted that his prejudices and stereotypes had been confirmed by the program was simply verifying the findings.

Stereotypes, on the other hand, are based on constructs that can be easily, thoughtlessly, sometimes unconsciously, pulled up from our memory banks. They are emotional judgments that are based on implicit feelings. The strength of the stereotype is related to the frequency and immediacy of the constructs that create it, the vividness of a construct, and its relation with other accessible constructs. In her experiments, Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D. has revealed 'how memories can be changed by things that we are told. Facts ideas, suggestions and other post-event information can modify our memories.'[8] Therefore, if the constructs that affirm a stereotype (which is a type of memory) are negated or interrupted or challenged, the stereotype begins to fade. On the other hand, if the memory is reinforced, it becomes more deeply ingrained in our psyche. Thus, the *Soliya* project itself, by introducing students to each other and allowing them to get to know one another was combating the stereotypes that the final project was reinforcing.

Some Conclusions

Ashland student evaluations of the course included words such as: awesome, amazing, interesting, fruitful, excellent, and challenging. And, more importantly, they included comments such as: I realized how uniformed I am, I was frustrated by the conversations, the discussions really helped me to learn about the Middle East, it was aggravating, this was a great experience and should be done again, and, I believe the *Soliya Connect* program captures the spirit of true liberal arts education and offers a unique experience. These online events succeeded in piquing the interest, expanding the horizons, revealing the prejudices and challenging the worldviews of the students. The discussions introduced Ashland students to realities of globalization and cross-cultural relationships that otherwise would probably have remained obscure, in the realm of theory, or altogether ignored. This use of technology was an 'excellent example of engaged, interactive, and experiential pedagogy.' It also exposed some of the potential difficulties and dangers in such an undertaking.

The course as a whole, the online component, and specifically the final exercise were not without challenges. Conflicts developed. Frustrations emerged. Anger surfaced. There were some technical difficulties which could have been avoided (or anticipated). There were some students who ceased to participate from both east and west leaving some groups diminished. There were students who were reluctant to engage in authentic and serious dialogue for fear of offending their international peers, or sounding belligerent, or ignorant. Other students became so offended by some of the discussions, or so shamed by what they were learning, that they simply shut down. And, some of the students were intrigued, enthused, encouraged, moved and motivated to continue cross-cultural, inter-religious studies. This course was extraordinarily challenging. The professor and student evaluations highlight some of the issues. They fall into three primary categories: 1) cross-cultural sensitivity (awareness and knowledge and skills in cross-cultural communication) 2) technical difficulties (equipment failure, coordinating assignments and due dates) and 3) individual student commitment, religious and cultural openness, and emotional maturity. In addition, I would add that new research into media science reveals that a re-thinking of the final project would be in order.

[6] Bushman, B.J., & Anderson, C.A. (2001). Media violence and the American public: Scientific facts versus media misinformation. American Psychologist, 56, 477-489.

[7] Argo, Nichole, Shamil Idriss, Mahnaz Fancy. *Media and Intergroup Relations: Research on Media and Social Change,* Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund and Soliya online publication: 2010, p 8.

[8] School of Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, Elizabeth R. Loftus, PhD. Distinguished Professor of Social Ecology, and Professor of Law, and Cognitive Science, Faculty page.

Much wisdom was gleaned from this experience that might help others avoid problems. A fundamental understanding of culture theory and an introduction to specific cross-cultural communication techniques and skills is an essential category of preparation for students in a class with this kind of technological, cross-cultural component. Technology cannot take the place of academic preparation, sensitivity and skills and it is much less forgiving than face-to-face engagements. Meaningful, sensitive and productive intercultural and inter-religious dialogue on this level, and using technology, presents some unique difficulties that are only now beginning to be recognized and addressed. The facilitators and the professors who led the de-briefing discussions must be well-trained and aware of the essential and critical role they play in enabling the students to process and find meaning in the experience. Equipment issues must be anticipated and plans in place for how to handle technical glitches. A level of emotional maturity, academic integrity and courage, and genuine openness must be cultivated in the U.S. American students before they engage in this kind of program. Assumptions about friendship (or not), and other expectations must be candidly addressed. These are reciprocal relationships. Much of their success and value depends on the Middle Eastern and European students as well as the U.S. American students. And yet, working with students at all levels of cross-cultural awareness and preparedness is actually a more authentic reflection of what U.S. American students might expect to experience in the 'real' world. Often, more is gained and learned from stormy relationships that are stubbornly pursued than from superficially pleasant ones.

Most of the U.S. American students indicated that they found the experience personally stimulating (if difficult), intellectually thought-provoking (if disturbing), and well worth the effort. Without exception they enthusiastically endorsed the use of technology in the classroom and this type of interaction (with some amendments) for future classes. Evaluations show that students who participate in *Soliya* believe that they have a much better understanding of the Arab and Muslim world after the experience than they had before. Before the *Soliya* experience forty to fifty percent of students say they 'have a lot in common with their counterparts in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East/North Africa. After the experience that number jumps to eighty to ninety percent. Since 2003, over 3,000 young people from more than 80 educational institutions in twenty-five countries have participated in the *Soliya Connect* program. Clearly, this program is addressing a contemporary need.

Intuitively, many people sense that new technologies are having an enormous impact on our personal attitudes, our worldview and our behavior. What we know (or think we know) and what we see (even if we see it online, or on the evening news filtered through the eyes of an editor) influences how we think and how we process and respond to information, how we respond to others and how we behave. It shapes our ideas and attitudes and worldview. The fall 2010 class helped Ashland University students experience how technology may be used positively and negatively in a learning environment. It revealed to them how the media can be used, abused and manipulated. It introduced them to cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in an economical and effective way. It exposed prejudices and stereotypes on the part of U.S. American students and also Arab and Muslim students. It initiated relationships that may have changed the way our students relate to others for the rest of their lives. Our hope is that the knowledge gained, the skills practiced and the experience itself will be the beginning of the students' journey toward deeper, richer, more authentic global competency and will serve them well for years to come as they grow into the role of responsible global citizenship.