

## **Report on Two Synchronous Virtual Sessions with Moroccan Students**

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### Virtual Exchange Reflection

Prior to engaging in the virtual exchange sessions with Moroccan students at Al-Akawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, my expectations could most likely be described as naïve, misinformed, and hesitant. Yet emerging from this experience, I can firmly state that this video conference was not only interactive but also eye opening. Getting a glimpse into the life of these Moroccan students and learning more about specific cultural differences but also similarities was something that I found extremely interesting.

Analyzing some of the similarities, I believe the thing I was most shocked to see was just how similar they were to us. I was amazed when I saw how technologically advanced their classroom was almost the exact same as our classroom at Carnegie Mellon. I was also intrigued during one of our sessions when a student in Morocco asked all Moroccan students who owned an iPhone to raise their hand. I believe around 80 – 90% of the class raised their hand. This was extremely interesting to me since, U.S media often portrays Arab world countries that are not Dubai and Saudi Arabia as extremely medieval and not modern. In addition, it was interesting to hear the Moroccan students' take on U.S politics. I found that a glaring similarity was that Moroccan students seemed to share the same education level when it came to American politics. The Moroccan students knew just as much about U.S politics as us possibly even more. What really stood out to me about my conversation with these other students is that the conversation felt extremely comfortable and easy. It did not feel forced and did not feel inorganic instead it felt like I was simply talking to fellow CMU students just from a different part of the world.

Taking a look at the differences, the majority of them came not from the students but rather the culture and society that exists in Morocco. The biggest difference I was shocked to learn about was that in Morocco when it comes to inheritance generally the male child will get double the inheritance of the female. This was extremely shocking to me since in America the inheritance is generally just given to whoever deserves it the most. Hearing about this was discouraging since it is hard to hear such rough gender inequalities exist in other areas of the world. Another difference was that in Morocco they just recently passed a law that allows women to press charges of sexual harassment against men. This news was very shocking but as I dwelled on it, I realized that America is not too different in that many cases, men in power will generally never be brought down to sexual harassment. I felt like the final largest difference I observed was how knowledgeable these students were in regard to world news. Like I mentioned earlier these students were very knowledgeable about U.S news; they were also very informed when it came to Moroccan news. On the other hand, students in the U.S were generally only aware of major world events and news in the U.S.

Reflecting back on this experience I think the two most interesting topics were gender equality and how American culture is viewed in Morocco. Hearing about the various gender inequalities that exist in Morocco was extremely disheartening; however, the positive light is that society and the younger generation is making great strides to combat and fight these inequalities. In addition, it was great hearing their taking on American culture and how they view us. Hearing how much of the U.S influences their media but also how they stay rooted in their own cultures was really great to hear. It was also extremely interesting how informed these students were when it came to U.S news. Currently in America a lot of students do not really keep up with the

news, so when the Moroccan students demonstrated their deep understanding of world events, I was inspired to start reading more about the world myself.

All in all, I really enjoyed this activity and learned a lot from my brief conversations with these students. Learning that these students really are very similar to us and trying to fight inequality within their society was great to see. It was extremely eye-opening learning more about their take on specific controversial topics such as president Trump but also hearing about their use of American media. All in all, this experience demonstrated that despite the long distance we are much more similar than we think. I believe that this experience demonstrates that good heart and doing the right thing transcends borders.