World Business Leaders Interaction in Higher Education:
A novel experience

Gustavo Coronel [a, *] and Kathleen Mathai [b]

[a] Laureate International Universities, Chile; [b] Laureate International Universities, USA

Abstract: This article describes a disruptive approach that offers higher education students and faculty the experience of learning from world business leaders and interacting with fellow members at their institutions. The World Business Forum event was transmitted live to 36 higher education institutions in 19 countries. Webcast and social media discussions around the event were used to create both a local University community and a global Laureate community. The World Business Forum is a two-day event, produced by HSM Global that serves as a platform for the ideas and trends that are shaping the future of business. In 2011, twenty business and political leaders spoke at the event. Through its partnership with HSM, Laureate was able to broadcast the event to auditoriums on university campuses and to add live content and discussion around speakers, making the webcast relevant to an academic audience. Universities were provided with academic, technical and communication manuals to guide them through the implementation of the event on campus. The network-wide webcast had participation of 36 higher education institutions in 19 countries, and 56,400 viewers. The Laureate-hosted Facebook page generated 2,900 "likes," 3,000 "posts" and 410,000 views and Twitter produced thousands of tweets from around the world. Both the participation on campuses and social media indicated that the webcast provided broad access to the event and created a global forum for students and faculty to participate in the event.

Keywords: community engagement, streaming media, social media, global community, innovative education

Introduction

Higher education is in a continuing migration from the Humboldt University model to one of community interaction and student collaboration that takes advantage of industry, private and public sector know-how (Wissema, 2009). More universities are integrating community engagement activities across different countries according to social, cultural, political and

economic dimensions, generating localized models oriented to satisfy students learning outcomes (Correa-Bernardo, Butcher, & Howard, 2012). A critical task that surpasses traditional models in higher education institutions is to adjust the educational offer to students' demand of the time.

Laureate is an international network of 58 accredited campus-based and online institutions of higher education, offering undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 675,000 students around the world. Accordingly, it believes that exposing its faculty and students to extracurricular activities are critical value drivers to capture society's real needs and integrate them as part of the learning processes.

A partnership with HSM Global, a business event and video content management entity, provides the opportunity to align HSM events with Laurate's goal to provide Universities with access to high quality business-related content that could enhance student learning, and provide tools to the faculty' teaching experience. Additionally, this alignment is consistent with the goal to offer a professionally oriented education with an international perspective to prepare students to achieve and succeed in the global marketplace.

One of HSM's premier events is the World Business Forum held in New York City. Each year, HSM brings academic, industry, and political thought-leaders together for a two-day conference focused on themes such as people and talent, leadership, marketing, and other emerging trends.

A classroom remains virtually unchanged, with exception of the blackboard, because underneath it all, the goal of a classroom of the future has little to do with education (DeMillo, 2011). The recent 2011 National Study of Undergraduate Students and Technology (Dahlstrom et al., 2011) suggests that technology can be used in more transformative ways, such as participatory and collaborative interactions, to achieve higher-level teaching and learning that is engaging and relevant to students' lives and future plans. One method to accomplish this, the study suggests, is to use technology to extend learning beyond the classroom.

Thus, Laureate put together a large global team of technology, academic and business experts, to blend their experience in delivering small, localized webcasts with access to the World Business Forum in an academic context; they were given the task to extend *the classroom* using social media to create a global community around the event.

Webcast Design

The Event Format – In New York

The World Business Forum is a US-centric event with English language speakers. The design of the event intended to provide quality and cost-effective access to the greatest number of students and faculty within the language, time zone, and internet capability constraints.

To minimize those challenges, the team chose to broadcast from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm (EST) using two language channels in English and Spanish. World Business Forum presenters spoke in English and simultaneous translation into Spanish was provided. In addition, thirty student and faculty members attended the event in person and actively participated in the

webcast and in blogging on the social media sites. Three moderators were selected to fill-in the breaks between the live speakers with student interviews. The organizer produced videos and academic discussion around the topics, thus creating a specific "wrapper" around the standard event broadcast.

The event was divided into two-hour blocks or themes with multiple speakers aligned with each theme as showed in Figure 1. Topics included true leadership and purpose, management innovation, managing teams and talent, megatrends, global leadership challenges and others. This format allowed each campus to plan events around each theme and provided a means for universities in other times zones to participate. For example, a block that started at 9:00 am in New York could be viewed in the afternoon in Madrid.

Figure 1. Event schedule by theme.

The Event Format – On Campus

The Institutions provided one or more auditoriums for students to view the broadcast on campus, centralizing access to mitigate internet connectivity issues. Each campus appointed an experienced faculty member as Master of Ceremonies for each auditorium. His or her role was to engage the on-campus audience discussions at allocated times during the broadcast to provide academic context and localize the experience.

Maximizing student access was a key metric for the webcast; the event format allowed campuses to cycle students through auditoriums based on the themes. For example, an auditorium of 100 seats could allow 500-700 unique students to experience a thematic block of the event.

Social Media Interaction

Facebook and Twitter served as the primary social media tools before, during, and after the event. A Facebook page and Twitter tag were dedicated to the event. Students and faculty both at the event in New York and on campus were encouraged to interact using social media.

Bloggers (digital reporters) from media outlets were invited by HSM to attend the event in New York or watch the webcast from Buenos Aires, Madrid and Mexico. Their comments were posted and re-tweeted to faculty and student participants. In addition, social-media experts participating in the event encouraged involvement by posting challenging questions and polls related to the subject matter.

Application of the Webcast on Campus

The event organizers provided support in the implementation of the webcast in three key areas: academic, technical and communications.

An academic topics and event planning guide was developed, providing speaker biographies, key speaker topics, supplemental resources and media elements, and suggested discussion questions that could be used by the Master of Ceremonies to integrate into auditorium discussions or by faculty to use in the classrooms before and after the broadcast. These elements were especially valuable as they introduced the students to speakers that are well known internationally in the business arena but not as familiar to students. The Master of Ceremonies and faculty shared the material with students before each speaker to encourage student participation, knowledge sharing through social interaction and engagement in this format, which is typical in an online environment (Ma, Will, Yuen, Allan, 2010).

The presence of faculty and students at the event in New York and their participation as commentators for the webcast provided a real-life perspective of the event and a connection with their classmates and peers. The three Masters of Ceremony engaged students in real-time question and answer sessions. Students from around the globe posted questions on Facebook or Twitter for the faculty and students at the event.

A technical manual and several planning phone calls were coordinated between Laureate and campus coordinators to outline roles and responsibilities, technical requirements for the auditoriums, bandwidth and connectivity planning and testing, and technical support during the event. Each institution assigned one IT person to implement and control all technical issues including TVs, computers and all social media traffic.

A communication package was provided, including customized posters to be used on campuses, suggested email promotional "blasts" to send to students and faculty encouraging participation, press releases for use before and after the event, and an electronic certification of attendance. In addition, four newsletters highlighting key speakers were sent to network participants. As shown in figure 2, communication teams at the universities localized the materials to reflect the particular needs of each institution. At least one person per campus was assigned to promote the event by email, banners, publishing posters and press releases. Locally, Facebook and Twitter were used during the event as communication tools between students, faculty and staff.

Figure 2. Sample of promotional materials.

Results

Participation in the Worldwide Event

Participation of Network Institutions was approached by two main strategies:

One strategy was to have faculty and students from sixteen different Institutions attend the event in New York. As showed in Figure 3, 19 faculty members and 18 students attended the full event. Of particular interest was the interaction attained in situ where interviews of students by faculty created continuous active and engaging interaction for the audience.

However, the primary objective was to provide access to the greatest number of students possible, to strengthen their learning in their field of study. Consequently, on-campus attendance

was the principal objective. Each campus maintained attendance report forms to track student participation in each auditorium per day and per theme. As Laureate had never held a global event with a social media component, it was also suggested that campuses monitor the media and social network traffic in their specific countries and provide any quantitative and qualitative feedback available. Figure 4 shows the geographical distribution of the over 56,000 attendees from 36 institutions, which represent 8.3% of Laureate total students, which demanded a complex array of campus based facilities.

Country	Institution	Participation in New York	
		Faculty	Students
Chile	Universidad Andrés Bello (UNAB)	3	3
Chile	Universidad de Las Américas (UDLA)	-	1
Chile	Universidad Viña del Mar (UVM)	1	2
Costa Rica	Universidad Latina de Costa Rica	1	-
Ecuador	Universidad de Las Américas (UDLA)	-	1
England	University of Liverpool	1	1
France	Institut Français de Gestion (IFG)	2	-
Germany	BiTS (Business and Information Technology School)	-	1
Honduras	Universidad Tecnológica Centroamericana (UNITEC)	1	-
Mexico	Universidad Tecnológica de México (UNITEC)	1	1
Mexico	Universidad del Valle de México (UVM)	2	2
Peru	Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas' (UPC)	2	2
Portugal	Instituto Superior de Línguas e Administração (ISLA)	-	1
Spain	Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM)	1	1
Turkey	Istanbul Bilgi University (IBU)	1	1
USA	Walden University	2	2

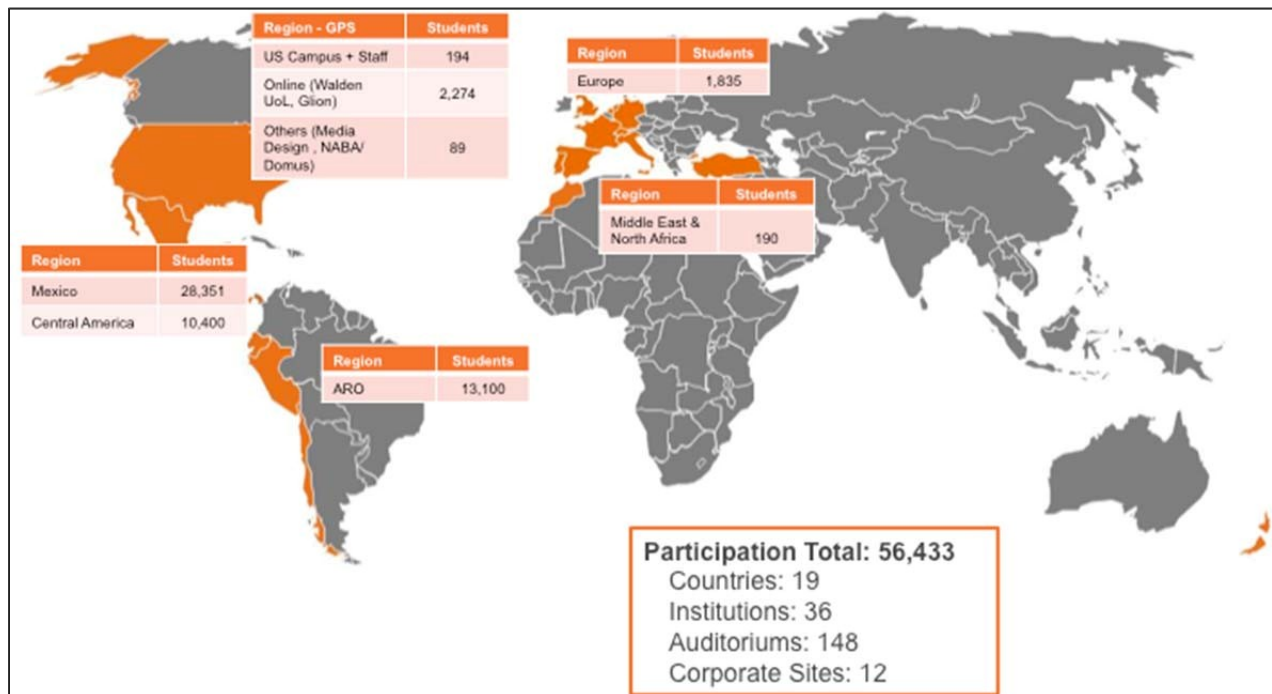*Figure 3.* Event participants in New York.

Figure 4. Laureate participation in the World Business Forum.

Social Media Interactions Among Network Participants

The use of social media greatly contributed to building a global network community around the World Business Forum. To access interaction through this channel, Laureate analyzed the Facebook page traffic for this event. The "How People Are Talking About Your Page" data was calculated based on Facebook interactions that occurred over the seven days immediately prior to the event. This calculation is based on instances of people linking to the page (i.e. becoming a 'fan'), posting to the page's wall, linking, commenting on, or sharing content (posts, videos, photos, albums, etc.) on the wall/page, answering a question, RSVPing to events, linking or sharing a check-in deal, or checking in at the wall. As showed in figure 5, a substantial increase of traffic on Facebook was observed when the network began promoting the event and during the October 5th and 6th webcast time period.

Figure 5. Facebook statistics.

Also interesting are the "Who You Reached" demographic profiles of the Facebook page participants. As depicted in Figure 6, over 51,000 participants primarily from Mexico, Central, Chile, Peru and Ecuador participated on the corporate Facebook page with the majority of people between the 18-34 years of age demographic and a nearly equal split of males and females in all age groups.

Similar increases in social media for individual campus campaigns were recorded in Mexico. Universidad del Valle de Mexico (UVM) received over 100 new Twitter followers as a direct result of the World Business Forum and had nearly 5,000 active Facebook users during the event. Other campuses in the region reported also a significant increase in social media traffic.

Accordingly, fifty percent of social media comments at both Universidad Andrés Bello (UNAB) and Universidad de Las Americas (UDLA) in Chile were related to the World Business Forum during the week of October 3. All the comments were positive and quoted the speakers, mentioned that auditoriums were full, and praised the quality of event.
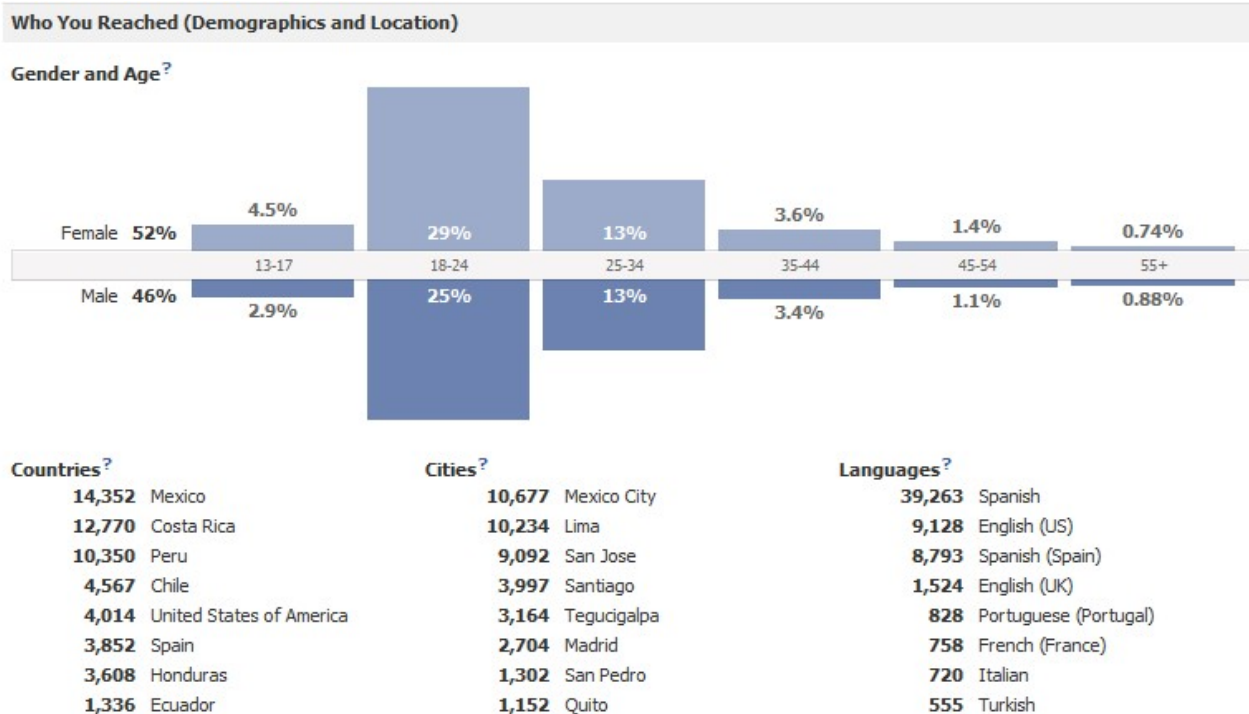
Who You Reached (Demographics and Location)

Gender and Age?

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Female 52%	4.5%	29%	13%	3.6%	1.4%	0.74%
Male 46%	2.9%	25%	13%	3.4%	1.1%	0.88%

Countries?
14,352	Mexico
12,770	Costa Rica
10,350	Peru
4,567	Chile
4,014	United States of America
3,852	Spain
3,608	Honduras
1,336	Ecuador

Cities?
10,677	Mexico City
10,234	Lima
9,092	San Jose
3,997	Santiago
3,164	Tegucigalpa
2,704	Madrid
1,302	San Pedro
1,152	Quito

Languages?
39,263	Spanish
9,128	English (US)
8,793	Spanish (Spain)
1,524	English (UK)
828	Portuguese (Portugal)
758	French (France)
720	Italian
555	Turkish

Figure 6. Demographic data of Facebook page users.

Other Metrics

Several regions of Laureate International Universities, including Mexico/Latin America, built robust media plans that included on-campus panel discussion between media and faculty, press releases and video of the panel discussion posted on social media, podcasts of faculty commentary, and videos of campus participation.

Following the event, the global team held "logistics lessons learned" sessions. Findings were categorized into three primary categories: event logistics, event production and technology. The greatest single disatisfier was the quality of the translations. Participants indicated that they prefer a translator to be of the same gender as the speaker and that the translator have a greater understanding of the topic. For future events, the Laureate team intends to cast translators to ensure they can translate in a business context.

Conclusion

Laureate's worldwide network of higher education institutions share a mission to make quality higher education accessible and affordable so that more students can pursue their degrees. Through this event, Laureate wanted to expand the students' classroom experience and provide a unique learning opportunity that would not generally be available to many individual students or faculty because of cost and geographical constraints.

The webcast of the event and the pilot of social media around the event showed that it was possible to produce an event of this magnitude while building a higher education global community. The presence and social-media interaction with classmates and faculty members expanded the classroom. Based on these results, Laureate intends to continue nurturing the network's higher education learning strategies with innovative approaches as the one here reported.

References

Correa-Bernardo, M. A., Butcher, J., & Howard, P. (2012). An international comparison of community engagement in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Development, 32*(1), 187-192. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.04.008

Dahlstrom, E., de Boor, T., Grunwald, P., & Vockley, M. (2011). *The ECAR national study of undergraduate students and information technology* (Research Report). Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE, Center for Applied Research. Retrieved from http://net.educause.edu

DeMillo, R. A., (2011). Abelard to apple, the fate of American colleges and universities. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ma, W. W. K., Yuen, A. H. K., (2011). Understanding online knowledge sharing: An interpersonal relationship perspective. *Computers & Education, 56*(1), 210-219. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.08.004

Wissema, J. G., (2009). Towards the third generation university, managing the university in transition. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.4337/9781848446182