

The friendships that begin in the Master of Arts program in History and Government lead to a fertile exchange of teaching ideas. Recently they've led to teaching collaborations across time zones.

Last spring, MAHG graduate Brett Van Gaasbeek, who teaches in a blue-collar suburb of Cincinnati, called his longtime MAHG roommate David González, who teaches in the predominantly Latino neighborhood of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. They had frequently groused together about the last month of APUSH, after students have taken the AP exam and lost all motivation. There was the old stand-by of showing popular movies based on actual events and analyzing their historical accuracy. But that was getting stale. Van Gaasbeek proposed a joint project to González. "What if we asked our students to research cultural aspects of their home cities, to see what both cities had in common?"

The project would promote one of Van Gaasbeek's goals: encouraging his students to learn about their home city. "At the beginning of the year, I ask, 'How many of you have been to downtown Cincinnati?' It's only a half hour away. Yet I have 16-year-old kids who have never been there." González, too, saw that the project would push his students to explore aspects of Los Angeles that they otherwise would not explore on their own. He also hoped it would broaden his students' awareness of other ethnic groups in America. "Many Latino students in inner-city Los Angeles rarely get an opportunity to interact with students from different backgrounds, let alone students halfway across the country," he said.

The teachers talked over influences on civic culture that both Los Angeles and Cincinnati had experienced: civil unrest or rioting; influxes of immigrants; changes in arts and entertainment; the arrival of religious sects. Excited, they took the idea to their students, dividing them into groups to cover the variety of topics. Loading their research onto shared Google Drive folders, students in the two cities would compare findings. Then they'd talk city-to-city in Google Hangouts.

Exploring the topics, students in one city prompted students in the other to reach into unthought-of areas. Some of González's students wanted to compare LA and Cincinnati in terms of political preferences. So a parallel group formed in the Ohio class. Both groups were interested in the Democratic primary options. The African American group in Ohio were most familiar with the Clinton campaign, yet their research sparked an interest in Sanders, due to his stands on issues popular with youth, as well as a photo one student found of Sanders marching in the 1960s with Martin Luther King. The students in LA responded in surprise, pushing them to think about whether the African American community in Ohio would really support Sanders.

Parallel groups wanted to explore sports culture, but were thrashing about for a way into the topic. Then one of Van Gaasbeek's students suggested: "Why don't you talk about Opening Day?" The students in LA had not heard of this phenomenon, a celebration of baseball that draws many downtown for a day, even if they don't

follow the sport throughout the season. The L.A. group were surprised to discover that none of their city's more famous franchises, such as the Dodgers and Lakers, originated in the city or even the state but were imported from other parts of the nation. They also found it ironic that Dodger Stadium was built after demolishing most of the Chavez Ravine area of L.A., then a lower-class Mexican-American neighborhood, while the current majority of season ticket holders for the Dodgers tend to be Latino locals.

Van Gaasbeek's students are sophomores, taking the first in a series of AP classes that by senior year, the school hopes, will result in college credits that will save money on a university degree. Many have been recruited to the AP track, and struggle with the challenge. But this end-of-year project excited their interest. Through the cross-city interaction, they began "researching something that matters to them."

One previously under-motivated student now showed initiative. The weekend before students first met in Google hangouts, he went to Cincinnati to document graffiti and wall murals. In the Rhine district, founded by German immigrants but now predominantly African American, he photographed street art influenced by both cultures. Unbeknownst to his teammates, he loaded these photos, with others he'd taken in the African American Avondale community, into Google Drive. "David's students came in on Monday and said, 'Wow! We never thought about doing this, but there are all kinds of Latino street art in LA—graffiti, street dance, music, political stuff.' Sure enough, David's kids decided to go to downtown LA the next weekend to photograph street art," Van Gaasbeek said.

Working against the end-of-year deadline and a variety of technical problems not unknown to public schools, several of the groups completed videos of their findings, showing the results of research in both cities. You can view these at this YouTube link:

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0iHyMaHBDJ3VRQsMuru2mxOzeINLeKO>

"As they compiled their research, my students continually commented on how the history of both cities reflected the larger trends within U.S. history. Some further suggested that working with students across the country would perhaps prove more beneficial *before* the AP exam, since there is so much history and culture to learn through dialogue and conversation," González said. "And I completely agree with that, given that I witnessed how over the span of a couple of days, students went from speaking of 'their history' in reference to the Cincinnati students to speaking of 'our history' when they finished their videos. This project caused my students to widen their sense of civic engagement and responsibility. I cannot wait to do it again." Van Gaasbeek expressed his gratitude for González. "I have made such great educational contacts in the MAHG program," Van Gaasbeek said, "a host of people who have inspired me to be a better teacher and a better educator."