

Creating a Global Community During COVID-19 Pandemic: Bringing Educators Together

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Introduction

When one thinks of medical anatomy education it is often linked with team-based cadaveric dissection, microscope lab, hands-on ultrasound imaging and clinical skills. Each of the learning events often associated with first year medical school is in person and very much hands on. A tradition of 800 years came to a world-wide halt in 2020. The global pandemic abruptly shifted a heavy hands-on curriculum into a remote virtual realm. And with that necessity became the mother of much needed invention. Within chaos came opportunity; a range of instructional innovations and insights. However, due to COVID-19-related restrictions, academics were not able to attend conferences to exchange ideas. We sought to leverage this unique situation to easily and inexpensively establish the ultimate in cross-institutional collaboration. With the use of *Zoom™*, we removed the geographic hindrances to worldwide collaboration. The Global Community of Anatomical Science Educators (GCASE) is a group of passionate international educators dedicated to pursuing scholarship and facilitating educational and scientific exchange at the international level.

Aims

- Utilize virtual communication technologies to connect anatomical sciences educators worldwide.
- Pursue scholarship and educational activities at the international level
- Support, promote, engage, and increase high-quality scholarly activities and innovations in anatomical sciences education and research

Approach

The Anatomical Sciences Scholarly Interest Group (ASSIG) at OUWB took advantage of our new virtual academic world to establish a first of its kind international community of like-minded anatomical science educators. Anatomy faculty in the Department of Foundational Medical studies recruited members from their personal international networks. Zoom was used to assemble an international collective (n=25) from five continents (North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia; Figure 1).



Figure 1. Location of the GCASE members (yellow pins) across five continents using Google Earth

Accomplishments

- Established an international professional association called “Global Community of Anatomical Sciences Educators (GCASE)
- Developed essential documents, processes and procedures
- Codified GCASE as a part of the International Federation of Anatomical Associations (IFAA)
- Developed GCASE bylaws and held elections for board members
- Created a website for the GCASE association (<https://hajjhuss.wixsite.com/my-site>; Figure 2)
- Registered GCASE in the state of Michigan as a non-governmental organization based at OUWB
- Submitted a proposal to edit a special issue in the Journal of Academic Development and Education (JADE)
- Developed a survey to examine possible futures, with lessons learned and to share teaching tools

Activities in Progress

- Editing a special JADE issue focusing on anatomical sciences: Anatomical Sciences in Medical Education and Research.
- Collecting data on how institutions implement diverse, asynchronous approaches in teaching and learning the anatomical sciences, both pre- and post-pandemic.

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Global Community of Anatomical Science Educators



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Figure 2. GCASE official website

Future Goals

- Increase visibility and membership of GCASE
- Increase network of collaborators among anatomical sciences educators
- Increase scholarly output related to the anatomical sciences
- Apply for grants related to anatomical sciences research and education

Summary

COVID-19 pressured us to reimagine how academics gather to solve problems, share scholarly work, and network. Through regular virtual meetings, members of GCASE learned about the many difficulties, barriers and obstacles encountered globally in anatomical teaching and scholarship due to COVID-19. The community that formed from an upheaval of normalcy continues to foster collaborations and has opened the door for robust international communication.

Acknowledgments

Medical illustrator Audrey Bell for the creation of the GCASE logo

New members interested in joining GCASE are welcomed to contact Dr. Hajj Hussein at hajjhuss@oakland.edu