

## Chapter 13

# An International E–Community Engagement Initiative Exploring College and Career Pathways: A Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides a literature review and conceptual framework for a current international e-community-engagement project which is taking place from January through March 2024. Through the initiative, students from five higher education institutions are placed on international teams and are tasked with developing interactive presentations on careers which are delivered remotely to youth in South Africa. The chapter explores the literature on e-community-engagement; first-generation college students; students learning about college majors and careers; near-peer mentoring; international, e-community-engagement; internationalization; global teamwork; and global citizenship. The chapter contributes to the discussion surrounding the impact of e-service-learning in higher education, particularly in remote and international settings. In addition, it aims to stimulate innovative research and programs that prepare youth for the workforce of the future.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite having the most educated population in the history of the world, young people continue to face employment challenges and societies continue to struggle with misalignment between the job market and the labor market (Mann et al., 2020). With discrepancies between the career aspirations of young people and the labor market (Hoff et al., 2022), it is critical that young people are prepared for jobs of the future (Mann et al., 2020). Career preparation and career guidance programs can help young people understand the labor market and have realistic expectations for what their future careers might look like (Mann et al., 2020). Service-learning and e-service-learning initiatives can serve the community and become an integral part of this process.

This project is the second initiative of a group of international scholars who are exploring the opportunities and limits of international e-community-engagement. The five scholars are affiliated with higher education institutions in South Africa, Iraq, India, Morocco, and the United States of America. We are an interdisciplinary group who became connected with one another through our involvement in the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association. We represent the disciplines of linguistics, business, computer science, education, and community engagement.

The first initiative involved small teams of higher education students from our five institutions in preparing and delivering interactive Zoom-based presentations on topics pertinent to culture (i.e. food, culture, holidays, etc.) to youth in South Africa (Falk et al., 2023). This second initiative draws on the same overall framework of international e-community-engagement, with some modifications to the approach and with a new focus on college degrees and careers rather than culture.

Thus, in early 2024, five students from each of our five colleges and universities participated in an orientation session and were divided into diverse international teams. Presently, February 2024, they are planning and delivering career orientation presentations and will participate in a final reflection session in March 2024. Presentations are delivered to youth in middle school and high school who are part of the University of Pretoria's Pre-University Academy and to a small group of students from the University of Pretoria's Extended Curriculum Program who are not yet fully matriculated into their degree programs. We will be examining the potential value of this initiative in regard to career exploration, professional networking, and bridging cultural divides. Moreover, this project pushes the boundaries of service learning and community engagement work. We seek to understand how service learning and community engagement can be applied remotely and internationally for career exploration for pre-university students.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review and conceptual framework to ground the proposed initiative. This review includes literature on international, e-community-engagement; first-generation college students; students learning about college majors and careers; near-peer mentoring; internationalization; global teamwork; and global citizenship.

The theme of this edited volume is the application of service learning in higher education. This chapter will expand the reader's thinking on the application of service learning in a remote, international context. It will also expand the reader's imagination in regard to the application of higher education service learning to career guidance. This chapter will be of interest to higher education faculty and staff and middle and high school teachers and administrators. It will be of particular interest to those involved in career advising, service learning, and community engagement as well as those interested in exploring alternatives to traditional study abroad and foreign exchange programs.

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