**April 2021**

**LaGuardia Community College recipient of prestigious Stevens Initiative award to implement global learning, civic engagement, and career success with universities in the Middle East and North Africa**

LaGuardia Community College has been awarded a grant of $750,000 by [The Stevens Initiative](https://www.stevensinitiative.org/), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, with funding provided by the U.S. Government, and is administered by the Aspen Institute. The Stevens Initiative is also supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.

LaGuardia will lead the development and implementation of the virtual exchange program [*Global Scholars Achieving Career Success*](https://www.stevensinitiative.org/project/laguardia-community-college-of-the-city-university-of-new-york/) (GSACS), a multinational collaboration between five CUNY colleges (Borough of Manhattan Community College, Guttman Community College, Hostos Community College, LaGuardia Community College and Queens College) and four universities in the Middle East and North Africa (Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, The American University in Cairo, Jordan University of Science and Technology, and Palestine Ahliya University).

The GSACS innovative curriculum model uniquely combines UN Sustainable Development Goals with experiential learning and career-readiness activities. The grant, which is the highest in the Scaling Virtual Exchange category, will impact over 3,500 students across partner institutions. The funding will expand and deepen virtual exchange, also known as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), programming at LaGuardia and CUNY by creating equitable, inquiry-based, experiential, and career-oriented global learning opportunities for our students.

Selected faculty and their international partners will receive rigorous professional development in virtual exchange and experiential learning pedagogy before implementing GSACS in their credit-bearing courses. Following professional development, faculty partners will lead their students through collaborative activities focused on a specific UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Utilizing mobile-friendly platforms, students in each virtual exchange will collaboratively explore a UN SDG through dialogue with peers, professors, and industry experts from the U.S. and MENA region. They will build on this knowledge by engaging with local communities and/or relevant organizations to examine the causes and impact of a global issue and to develop solutions at the local, national, and global levels. Each virtual exchange project culminates in international teams presenting their work at a transnational virtual student-led conference. The program concludes with a career development workshop where participants engage in guided reflection on how the competencies they developed in GSACS translate to career success.

The project will be led by Dr. Olga Aksakalova, Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of Collaborative Online International Learning ([COIL](http://laguardiacoil.org/)) at LaGuardia. Her research and teaching emphasize transnational approaches. Dr. Aksakalova is a recipient of a grant from [*Transitioning to Virtual Exchange Covid-19 Relief Fund*](https://face-foundation.org/higher-education/transitioning-to-virtual-exchange/call-for-proposals-selected-projects/), an initiative of FACE Foundation launched in collaboration with the French Embassy and the US Embassy in France.

The LaGuardia team includes two content experts, Dr. Habiba Boumlik of the ELA Department and Dr. Lucy McNair of the English Department, and Pablo Avila of the Center for Teaching & Learning, who will serve as the project’s Digital Learning Director. Support will also be provided by the Center for Career and Professional Development, under the direction of Jessica Perez.

GSACS will benefit from and help scale LaGuardia’s COIL program. Founded by Dr. Aksakalova in 2016, the program has facilitated partnerships with over 20 higher education institutions across the world and supported over 60 COIL projects across disciplines. “This project takes LaGuardia’s COIL program to a new level, establishing a solid link between global learning and career success and allowing students to engage deeply with the Middle East and North Africa region,” states Dr. Aksakalova. “This is also the first CUNY collaboration that aims to support and grow COIL across the University.”

GSACS has been conceived and designed in the true spirit of collaboration, cross-cultural solidarity, and a shared commitment to global and digital learning. It cultivates and capitalizes on the strengths of each partner institution, and it builds on the effort of the CUNY COIL Working Group represented by Dr. Aksakalova and other CUNY campus GSACS Principal Investigators (PIs): Jessica Levin (BMCC), Dr. Grace Pai (Guttman), Professor Amy Ramson, Esq. (Hostos CC), and Dr. Schiro Withanachchi (Queens College). Since 2019, the Working Group has been spearheading the effort to scale and institutionalize COIL across CUNY.

This grant from the Stevens Initiative marks a major milestone in expanding the impact of virtual exchange, while connecting CUNY’s goals of elevating students’ global learning, experiential learning, and career success outcomes.

Congratulations to the LaGuardia team and all participating institutions!