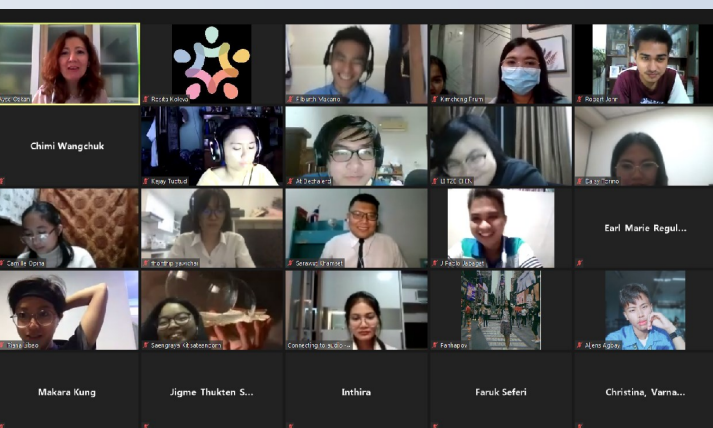




FRIENDS

PROJECT NEWSLETTER



Welcome to FRIENDS'

3rd Newsletter

Wherever you are reading this, we hope you are safe and healthy and have all the support and help you might need in these challenging times. COVID-19 has dramatically changed the lives of people across the world and its long-term impact on education and internationalisation is yet to be seen. If this terrible pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of having friends to rely on in times of adversity and the agility to adapt to fast-paced changes.

We in the FRIENDS consortium like to believe that thanks to our joint commitment to the project's cause and the mutual understanding and support for each other, we not only staying true to our project's acronym but are also managing to mitigate the COVID-19 circumstances and to navigate the subsequent changes in the project timetable in a smooth and timely manner.

Learn all about our efforts and activities in FRIENDS in the period of April - October 2020 in the next couple of pages and join our community dedicated to tolerance, friendship and intercultural dialogue!



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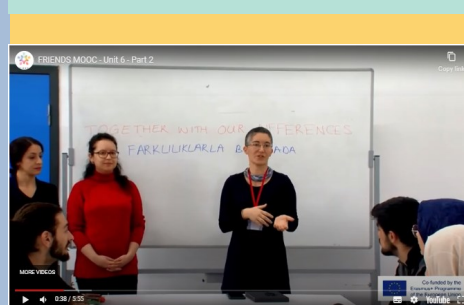
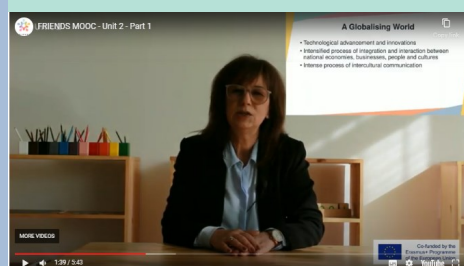
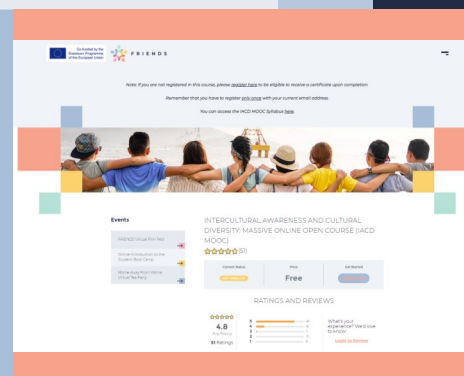
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Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diversity MOOC

In early 2018 when the FRIENDS project was being designed, the activities aimed at enhancing the efforts for internationalisation at home through the means of virtual mobility incl. through the development and piloting of the Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diversity (IACD) MOOC seemed highly appropriate. However, there was no way of knowing back then how indispensable for their internationalisation the integration of the IACD MOOC in the official curriculum of the 12 Asian universities involved in the project would become. 6 April 2020, the initially planned start date of the IACD MOOC followed the introduction of lockdown across the nine countries represented in FRIENDS. All of sudden, the IACD MOOC not only offered hands-on and self-paced learning opportunities for students across campus in the fields of cross-cultural dialogue and cultural diversity but it also turned into the single most important tool for internationalisation of the student communities in times of pandemic across the 12 Asian universities involved.

In fact, the piloting release of the six-week IACD MOOC coincided with the publication of numerous articles rushing to herald the end of internationalisation in higher education as we had known it for ages thus paving the way for the post-mobility world where virtual mobility dominates the universities' internationalisation agenda. It remains to be seen to what extent and how fast the higher education institutions will be able to bounce back and regain their internationalisation capabilities from the times prior to the pandemic. In any case, the introduction of the IACD MOOC in the FRIENDS project could not have been more topical. This is evidenced through the extremely high number of registered learners during MOOC's piloting stage. As of late July 2020 when the latter ended, over 8000 students across the 12 Asian universities involved had registered compared to the 1200 originally planned. More over, the number of students who had completed successfully the IACD MOOC as of late July 2020 was 4873 compared to the 180 originally planned. In other words, the IACD MOOC's success rate at its piloting stage was close to 60% compared to the 15% originally targeted.

The IACD MOOC is accessible through the FRIENDS project website at the following [link](#). The IACD MOOC consists of 18 units and covers a variety of topics, incl. an introduction to key concepts and theories in cross-cultural studies, dimensions of culture, cultural taxonomies, ethnic and cultural diversity, barriers to intercultural communication, linguistic barriers as hidden dimensions of culture, European cultural identity and diversity, business etiquette and protocol, and effective strategies for working in multicultural business environments. Finally, upon successful completion of the IACD MOOC, the learners receive an online certificate of accomplishment issued through the MOOC platform established on the FRIENDS project website.



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Digital Storytelling Contests across the 12 Asian FRIENDS Universities



Following the publication of the [Digital Storytelling How-to Manual](#) in early 2020, each of the 12 partner universities in Asia announced a digital storytelling contest at institutional level to facilitate the piloting of the Intercultural Passport (IP) virtual module in the FRIENDS project. The 12 contests aimed to promote digital storytelling both as a means for self-expression and self-discovery of the storyteller as well as a tool for reflection and engagement with viewers and peers. The use of storytelling as the basic form of sharing experience is as old as mankind itself and digital storytelling refers to the application of technology in this ancient tradition of knowledge transfer. In the FRIENDS project, the digital storytelling component was integrated to enable the assessment and validation of students' prior learning and experience in the fields of intercultural awareness, cross-cultural dialogue and cultural diversity. Furthermore, it aims to empower student peers and young people across the five Asian countries involved to become more tolerant and understanding and to help them further develop their intercultural competence.

The 12 digital storytelling contests took place in the period of April – July 2020. In total, 230 digital stories were submitted compared to the 180 originally planned. The digital stories crafted as part of the contest across the 12 Asian universities in FRIENDS are available on the project website under the Stories of Friendship section. The assessment in the contests was conducted at institutional level and based on the four judging criteria specified in the above mentioned How-to Manual, namely creativity and originality (30%), impact and content of storytelling (30%), editing and cinematography (20%), and structure and navigation (20%). As a result of the submitted digital stories' evaluation, in total 39 student winners were announced across the 12 Asian universities, namely three per university in Bhutan, Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand and four at each of the three Philippine partner institutions.

The 39 student winners were offered the opportunity to join the Student Boot Camp originally planned to take place at VUM in Bulgaria in the summer of 2020. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic affected this project activity and forced the partners to postpone it for the summer of 2021. In the meantime, the 39 student winners of the 12 digital storytelling contests joined in online are expected to become an integral part of the universities' newly established FRIENDS Teahouses.



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Intercultural Passport Virtual Module

The Intercultural Passport (IP) is a virtual module designed in the FRIENDS project to both develop and assess students' intercultural competence. The virtual module's piloting in the course of April – July 2020 is part of the consortiums' efforts to integrate intercultural dimensions into the universities' official curriculum thus contributing to internationalisation at home and building students' global skills. The IP certificate awarded upon the successful completion of the same-named virtual module was launched as a metaphorical supplement to the official international passport each student needs when traveling abroad. In other words, the IP virtual module and certificate should enable students to move easily across different cultures just like the international passport would allow them to cross political borders.

In line with the IP Award Guidelines, the virtual module is subject to a student's completion of the following two prerequisites:

1. IACD MOOC described on page 2 of this newsletter and available through the project website.
2. Crafting and submission of an original digital story to be assessed by the university with the aim to validate the student's international and/or intercultural prior experiential learning as mentioned on page 3 of this newsletter.

The award of the IP certificate is linked to 4 ECTS corresponding to approx. 120 hours of student learning. During the IP piloting stage, in total 230 IP certificates across the 12 Asian universities involved in FRIENDS were issued compared to the 180 originally planned. The credits obtained by the 230 students will be recognised by their home university in line with the internal procedures in place. The IP exploitation strategies applied across the 12 Asian universities in FRIENDS vary to a great extent and include, inter alia, the IP introduction as a new module in the university's elective curricula offered to students across campus, the embedding of IP content within already existing modules delivered, the IP inclusion as a prerequisite in the selection procedure for outgoing mobile students, and the IP embedding in the induction programme targeted at incoming students.

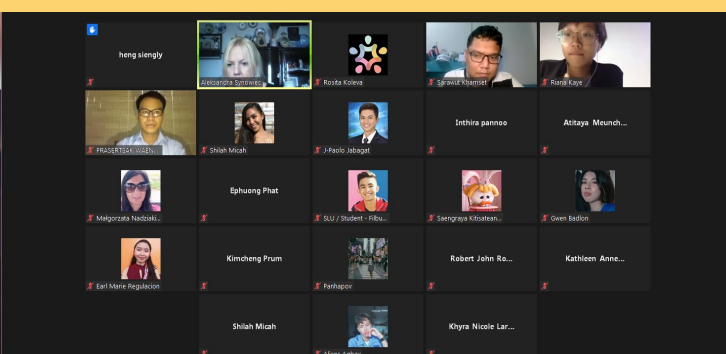
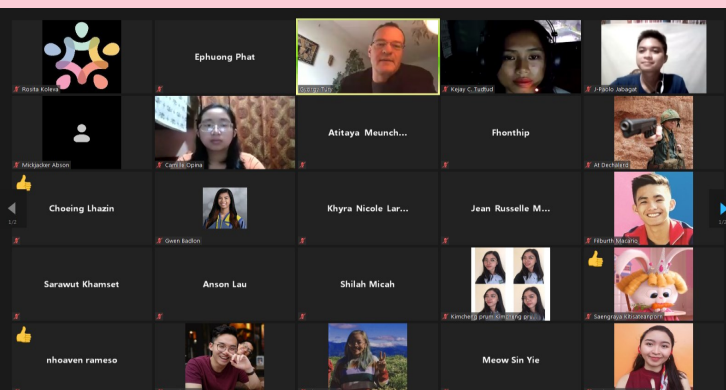


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Online Introduction to Student Boot Camp



The COVID-19 pandemic's repercussions on international mobility are undoubtedly much heavier than anyone in the FRIENDS consortium would have expected in early 2020. In light of this, a number of measures had to be taken in 2020 to mitigate the pandemic's negative impact on the FRIENDS project activities' timely progress. There is an extensive evidence that physical mobility provides far more benefits than the virtual one when it comes to cultural immersion and the development of personal and professional skills and competences. It is also commonly known that none of the mobility formats could replace the other but only complement and enrich it. As a result, the partners in the FRIENDS consortium decided to only postpone for 2021 and not to cancel the Student Boot Camp originally planned to take place at VUM in Bulgaria in the summer of 2020. Simultaneously, the FRIENDS partners agreed to organize and facilitate an online introduction to the face-to-face training event in the period of September - October 2020 to allow students to benefit and take the best from both types of mobility and to ensure activities linked to the forthcoming launch and initial operation of the FRIENDS Teahouses are not hindered.

The online introduction to the postponed physical student mobility to VUM was conducted by experts and lecturers from the four European partner universities in FRIENDS who provided online trainings dedicated to some of the key themes included in the Student Boot Camp's agenda, namely Leadership, Student Engagement, Art Management, and Project Management. Each of the four online mini modules had a duration of 8 teaching hours delivered via zoom in the course of three days in the period of 29 September - 30 October 2020. The agenda of the online training sessions could be found [here](#). The four online mini modules were attended by the 12 Asian FRIENDS universities digital storytelling contests' student winners. As a result of the new knowledge and skills acquired, the students are expected to have become well equipped to engage proactively in the FRIENDS Teahouses' initial set-up activities and operation.



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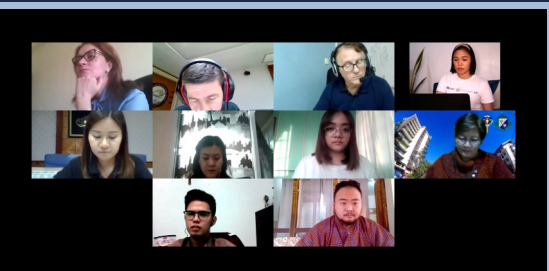
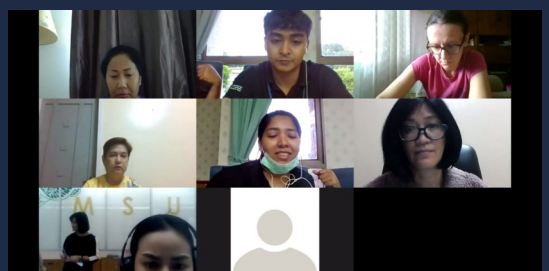
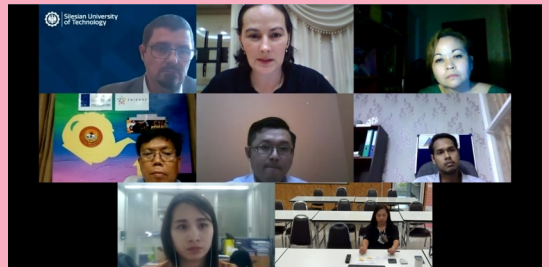
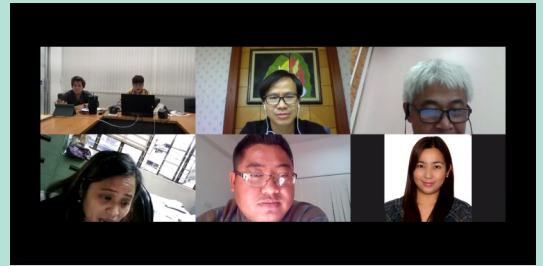


Home Away From Home

Virtual Tea Party

The Home Away From Home (HAFH) Virtual Tea Party was organized to assist the FRIENDS partners in the process of drafting the HAFH Programme despite the ongoing international travel bans across Europe and Asia. Prevented from joining the face-to-face meeting and the HAFH Retreat originally scheduled to take place in early October 2020 at PYU in Thailand, the FRIENDS partners met online on 8 October to deliberate and co-create the HAFH Programme. The latter is designed to meet the needs of international students and students with diverse cultural backgrounds studying at any of the 12 FRIENDS Asian universities involved. The document seeks to present an integrated model for student care and support and after publishing its prototype in English, each of the 12 Asian universities will further adjust it to their local contexts and endorse it at institutional level.

The HAFH Virtual Tea Party hosted by PSU from Thailand was attended by nearly 50 representatives and project team members from across the consortium. The online event's [agenda](#) included joint introduction session where partners from Bhutan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand reported on national policies and regulations concerning international student care and support already in place, good practices applied at institutional level to assist and enhance international students' welfare as well as typical issues and challenges encountered and the solutions applied by the universities. Subsequently, the virtual tea party participants split in five groups to discuss in detail the topics of academic support, health care incl. mental health and counseling, cultural issues and social integration, campus life including activities, facilities and accommodation as well as services including visa, immigration issues, and information support. The listed topics participants in the five breakout sessions brainstormed about during the virtual tea party represent the backbone of HAFH Programme to published in late November 2020.



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FRIENDS Virtual Film Fest

In 2020, the FRIENDS community joined the [#Erasmus Days 2020](#) global initiative by taking part in the first ever FRIENDS Virtual Film Fest. The virtual event was facilitated via zoom and live-streamed at the [FRIENDS project's facebook page](#). The film fest's official programme included digital stories crafted in the FRIENDS project as part of the involved Asian students' efforts to obtain an Intercultural Passport. The student stories of friendship, personal growth and mutual understanding had been preselected by project experts in the following three categories: best visual effects, best script and best short film. In addition, in the weeks leading to the virtual event, family, friends and fans of the digital stories' authors had the opportunity to vote for their favorite video on the FRIENDS project's facebook page. The video with the highest number of likes received the audience award. In total, more than 2200 visitors of the FRIENDS project facebook page have watched the event. Also, thanks to the FRIENDS Virtual Film Fest the number of FRIENDS project followers on facebook has tripled within less than two weeks.

The winners in the first FRIENDS Virtual Film Fest are as follows:

Best Short Film and Best Visual Effects categories:

Digital Story title: Wai

Author: Inthira Pannoo

<https://youtu.be/9KgwvXYsHbY>

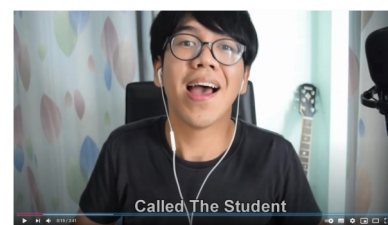


Best Script category

Digital story title: What I Learned from Meeting Exchange Students

Author: Wasin Tonmat

https://youtu.be/DSZhb7p_Odw



Audience Award

Digital story title: Behind the Screens

Author: Earl Marie Regulacion

https://youtu.be/GigtN_BBZl



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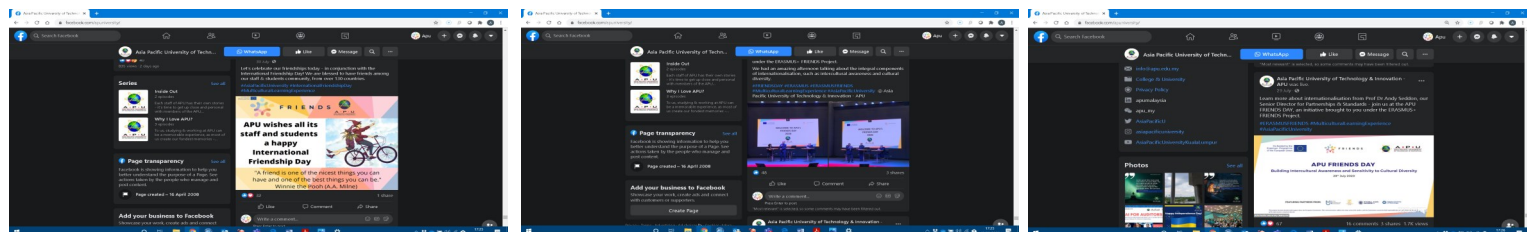
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Recent Institutional FRIENDS Events

Friendship Day at APU, Malaysia

29 July 2020

The event involved staff from APU as well as representatives from Bulgaria, Poland and Turkey who gathered to talk about internationalisation and to promote the FRIENDS project and the Student Boot Camp. The APU winners of the Digital Story Contest were also announced.



Intercultural Passport Awards and FRIENDS Teahouse Launching at BUC, Malaysia with Ms. Ellen Flanagan, Political Attaché at the EU Delegation to Malaysia

19 August 2020



Official Opening of the FRIENDS Teahouse at PYU in Thailand

30 September 2020



FRIENDS Teahouse Launching at UC in the Philippines

14 October 2020



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