

Testimonial of combined English and Biology trip

David Schwingamer

English Teacher
Collège Ahuntsic

Biology teacher José Marcoux began Collège Ahuntsic's Projet Hawaï in 2018 as an option for Sciences nature students doing their *épreuve synthèse* program. In designing the project, he had the idea from the very beginning that it might also be a natural fit for students doing their *propre au programme* English course.

Our college's Bureau des activités internationales invited the English department to a meeting where José laid out the itinerary for the trip, including multiple interactions in English with science experts in Hawaii. It was decided that an English teacher would tag along for the first edition of the project to see whether and how it might be possible to do all or part of the English course's theory, lab, and coursework in Hawaii.

I ended up being that English teacher, and during that first trip the fit with an English course was obvious in some ways (authentic contact with native-speaker experts in fields related to the students' program) but challenging in others. Which level or levels would work? Could students focus on how a person is speaking (for the English course) while at the same time trying to focus on what the person is saying (for the Biology course)? What theory and practice would the students need in advance to get the most out of their interactions with native speakers in Hawaii – or should the theory all be done on site? Would there be enough time? Should (or even could) there be evaluations during our time in Hawaii?

Back in Montreal, I presented my analysis to my department. We took a close look at the *devis ministériel* for the B Block English courses at each level, saw where the fit made the most sense, met with Administration to sort out technical aspects, and met with the teachers' union to better understand the impacts on workloads of different group sizes.

What has been most satisfying is working closely with José and other Biology teachers to plan, shape, and alter the project as needed to make it work best for both courses and, ultimately, to best serve the students. The nicest example of this collaboration is student assignments that have parts in English so that a single assignment can be used for evaluations in both courses.

In the fall of 2022, Caroline Leduc another Biology teacher, even gave a short lecture on fish physiology during the English class that worked brilliantly for pointing out the differences between formal and informal English and introduced factors that will help students differentiate fish they will need to identify while in Hawaii.

Finally, working with Biology teachers and some great people in our Bureau des activités internationales for the benefit of not only ourselves but also our generous partners and hosts in Hawaii has led to some wonderful service-learning opportunities and a deeper understanding of *aloha*.

The project has become a community of mutual support and learning all around.

Which is pretty cool, right?





In the photo, from left to right:

José Marcoux, Biology teacher at Collège Ahuntsic
David Schwingamer, English teacher at Collège Ahuntsic