



**February 28th, 2022**

The FRIENDS Project Caravan was conducted by the Royal Thimphu College on 28th February, 2022 as part of the FRIENDS Intercultural Passport Dissemination and Promotion. The caravan event also had a brief introduction to the FRIENDS Project including its purpose and focus on Capacity Building in Higher Education Institute's like RTC.

For the Caravan event, though the initial plan was to visit Norbuling Rigter College in Paro physically with RTC FRIENDS Team and the Intercultural Passport Award winners, this was not possible due to the spike in Covid-19 cases in Bhutan which resulted in a lockdown till date. Therefore, in order to accomplish this task, the RTC FRIENDS team members had several coordination meetings/correspondences with the Dean of Norbuling Rigter College and a faculty member to facilitate the Caravan virtually. However, due to the lockdown, students could not report back on campus and also considering the uncertainty of the lockdown relaxation, all HEI's in Bhutan including RTC and NRC had to immediately switch to Online classes. Due to this and upon discussing with the Dean at NRC and a faculty member, it was mutually agreed that we could host the Caravan event virtually on the afternoon of 28th February and NRC provided assistance in promoting our Caravan event among their students and also arranged to call off classes on 28th February.

With all logistical issues being taken care of, the RTC FRIENDS team and the Intercultural passport winners teamed up to start working on the presentations and agenda for the event. The students even showcased their respective Digital stories to the students of NRC and talked about their experience and some takeaways from the experience.

The caravan event started with Ms. Tshering Choden welcoming the students from NRC and their Faculty Mr. Kuenzang Dorji to the event, Ms. Tshering Choden was accompanied by Ms. Kencho Pelzom, International Relations Manager along with Ms. Leki Dem Tamang, Mr. Jigme Thukten Singye and Ms. Choeing Lhazin from RTC as part of the FRIENDS Team. Ms. Tshering introduced the RTC FRIENDS team members to the audiences and briefly talked about how the teams were selected and what their respective responsibilities/functions were. Ms. Kencho Pelzom also welcomed everyone to the event on behalf of the management team at RTC.

The first part of the caravan activity focused on the FRIENDS Project including a brief presentation on the project and also explaining why such a project is beneficial for HEIs. Ms. Tshering also took the opportunity to present the FRIENDS Project website to the audiences and presented to them the Bhutan subsite. Ms. Tshering also introduced the FRIENDS Teahouse concept to the audiences and also showed pictures of the Teahouse on RTC campus.

Followed by the presentation on the FRIENDS project, Ms. Tshering and Ms. Leki took turns to present on the second part of the event and presentations. Ms. Tshering introduced and presented on the following topics:

- 1. *Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diversity - Explaining the importance of having intercultural awareness despite being mobile and adapting to the good practices of our European HEIs in internationalizing our campus.***
- 2. *Massive Open Online Course - Introduced the different units associated with the Intercultural Awareness MOOC and explained the weightage of being able to receive 4 ECTS through this MOOC and also showed them the MOOC interface and registration process.***

Ms. Leki Dem talked about the following topics:

- 1. *Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diversity - Digital Storytelling Contest***
- 2. *Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diversity - Intercultural Passport Award***

Under these sections, Ms. Leki talked about how the digital storytelling contest was tied with the MOOC and how students were able to receive the Intercultural Passport Award. Ms. Leki explained that the theme for the Digital storytelling contest was in line with the objective of the FRIENDS project to help promote internationalization of campus and exploring Cultural Diversity while remaining aware of the intercultural differences.

The third part of the event focused on the experiences of the students who were successful Intercultural Passport holders. The students explained how they had prepared for the entire process which required them to submit a digital story focusing on any sort of intercultural experience or engagement they had without necessarily having the need to travel out of Bhutan. The students also talked about how taking the MOOC helped them in getting to understand the international students who were on campus with RTC and at the same time, they had a different perspective to every situation and they were able to analyze the situation more effectively.

The students also explained how they learned other skills through the MOOC such as time management and multitasking, because though they were attending the MOOC virtually delivered by our European partners, they also had to make sure to meet their academic requirements at RTC so juggling between the two have helped them become better organized, learn time management skills and at the same time they could see the potential within themselves to challenge their capabilities and succeed.

The students had also showcased their own digital stories in their presentation in order to motivate their fellow student colleagues from Norbuling Rigter College to take up any opportunities that may come their way and to keep the passion for learning alive. The final focus of the presentation was with regard to the FRIENDS Teahouse established on the campuses of RTC and RIM. Since our intercultural passport winner students are in charge of running the Teahouse, Ms. Choeing briefly talked about how the space has benefited the students on campus and the equipment through the FRIENDS project is helping the students with getting their assignments done and helping them to research/print anything very conveniently.

With all the presentations completed, the RTC FRIENDS team were ready to take questions from the audience and interestingly most of the students had asked if they could also register for the MOOC and get their MOOC completion certificate, however since the FRIENDS project was limited to just RTC and RIM, we told them that it was possible for them to register and undertake the MOOC but since their HEI is not part of the FRIENDS project, NRC is not included in the drop down list of the Universities to register. The other question, that some students had for our Intercultural Passport holder students was with regard to their bootcamp as part of their Digital storytelling contest and MOOC completion and to this though our students were disappointed with the changes the Covid-19 pandemic brought with it, they said the bootcamp would definitely add more to their intercultural awareness experience however they were also very grateful for the opportunity the FRIENDS project and RTC had provided them with regard to being able to make and win the digital storytelling contest and at the same time complete the MOOC.

The caravan event concluded with Ms. Tshering thanking the Dean of Norbuling Rigter College and their faculty Mr. Kuenzang Dorji for facilitating and agreeing to provide assistance to RTC for the caravan and also thanked all the students who had taken the time to attend the event virtually on their own personal data expenses as they could not report back to campus due to the lockdown and make use of the campus WIFI and internet facilities and thanked the entire team of NRC for prioritizing the FRIEND Caravan event.