This poster session sets out to show how Internet technologies can be used to help promote cross-cultural awareness between culturally distinct groups of students. The students involved in this project reside in different continents, but share an interest in learning about the lives and culture of others. The group of students from the United States has a keen interest in Japanese culture. Some of them are looking into the traditional cultural of Japan. Traditional tea ceremony; ikebana; history; cooking; history; traditional dress; kimonos and the role nature plays in shaping cultural thought--are just a few of the things of interest. Others are interested in the more contemporary cultural things such as music, student life, movies, animation, electronics, computer technology and cars. And still others are interested in the different aspects of society. For them things related to the hierarchal society of Japan, the work-ethic, politics, political thinking among students, the life of the salary man and the role of women in society are of interest. On the other side are the Japanese students who have been involved in English language and cultural instruction most of their lives. The Japanese students are interested in things that they cannot experience through their formal studies. For many of them Western culture is seen as a textbook entity and few have had any first-hand experience in meeting the people of the culture. They are interesting in knowing ‘how Americans think,’ for instance. They are keen to learn about student life: what students do when they are not studying; what kind of movies they like; where they like to go on holidays; how they socialize. While students can gain an understanding of foreign cultural through instruction and reading, it lacks in authenticity. In short, they are interested in learning about the ‘real Japan’ or the ‘real America.’ And this project helps fill that gap.

In order to help the students get started, a Bulletin Board Service (BBS) is set up on the Internet. While the respective schools do indeed have comprehensive Internet and intranet systems, the option of using a public BBS is beneficial for all parties. A public BBS allows either side to deal with administrative tasks without have to communicate with the respective institutions. Then a topic/discussion schedule is set up. Here the teachers negotiate with students and then negotiate with each on what topics should be put on the BBS and how much time the students will
have to post their messages. And finally an in-class demonstration is provided to help the students understand how to use the BBS and to get some hands-on experience. The first topic for discussion is a self-introduction. By doing this the students have a chance to describe themselves and have a chance to learn about the other on the BBS.

Once the participation on the BBS is in full swing, the students themselves negotiate topics for discussion during the live Internet video conferencing project. A fair amount of thought is giving to this, as both sides need to consider the issues associated with live discussions. Time management during the live discussion is perhaps the biggest issue to be addressed.

This poster session shows how cultural gaps between societies can be bridge through the use of the Internet. The respective students provided summaries that detailed their views on the process of getting to know each and each other’s culture, and their views on the use of the Internet for such projects. All of them expressed enthusiasm for such exchanges. This poster session will address some of the technical issues, including time differences, microphone use, positioning video cameras etc. It will always provide some practical advise on how to get such a project up and running. Finally, it will provide data on the students reactions based on pre and post surveys.