

Title of Grant: Development of a new Humanities course, Introduction to Latin American Civilization and Culture.

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Abstract:

This grant was a proposal to develop a new Humanities course, Introduction to Latin American Civilization and Culture, as requested by the Dean of Arts and Sciences of this college. Developing this course would benefit students in a number of disciplines by strengthening the Humanities course offerings in the Arts and Sciences for Transfer program and the Professional and Technical Studies specializations at the college.

Actual Outcomes:

The syllabus for the new Humanities course, Introduction to Latin American Civilization and Culture, was developed and taught during a summer Study Abroad Program in Peru. The syllabus included the course description, course objectives, a detailed list of expectations and an evaluation rubric. The course provided the students with the opportunity to gain information about the architecture, history, sociology, literature, music, art and cultural mores of Latin American society in general and of Peru in particular. The design and implementation of this new course benefited the discipline's and the college's course offerings. In addition, the comparisons that the students were able to make between their own culture and the Latin American culture served to inform the community and the VCCS. Professionally, this grant enabled me to expand my knowledge of Latin American culture, specifically as it related to Andean civilization and culture.

Other Colleges:

While this new course would not be classified as an event, there were nineteen participants in the Peru Study Abroad Program in the summer semester. Of these students, eleven enrolled and completed the new Humanities course. The students who took the new Humanities course represent four colleges in the state of Virginia: Germanna Community College, John Tyler Community College, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the College of William and Mary.

Discussion and Critique:

It is clear that there is great interest in this new course since the majority of the students participating in the Study Abroad Program this summer chose to take the Introduction to Latin American Civilization and Culture course. This course was one of four offered to the students through the Program. Teaching this new course as a part of a Study Abroad experience had its advantages and its disadvantages. The advantage for the student was the opportunity to actually visit the places and to experience the culture that was discussed in class. Also the interaction with the Peruvian people proved to be invaluable and

could not be reproduced as effectively in the classroom setting in the United States. For the course development, however, it proved to be a limitation in that many of the readings and the discussions focused specifically on Peru. While the general topics and the framework for the course were broad, some of the content, readings, and assignments were understandably focused on Peru and the Andean region where we were traveling. To effectively teach this course on campus, the syllabus, assignments and readings would need to be expanded to include other regions of Latin America. This expansion of the current syllabus would be a logical next step in the development of this course and would be an excellent topic for future study.

This project achieved many of its proposed goals particularly as they relate to the initial development of this new Humanities course. It would be advisable, however, to expand the current course syllabus and to teach it several times on a trial basis prior to proposing its addition to the VCCS Master Course file.

Evaluation:

Professor Sharon Burnham reviewed the course description, objectives, syllabus, ancillary materials and assigned readings for the new Humanities course. Prof. Burnham was selected to review these materials because of her experience teaching Humanities courses at the college and her expertise in leading and teaching courses in study abroad programs. Upon review of the designed new course materials, she has stated that the “choice of required text and reading materials is excellent. An assortment of selections at varying levels of difficulty offers students information on Latin American ... politics, culture, economics, and society.” Moreover, she states that “The HUM 295 syllabus is extremely detailed and allows students to both pace themselves to cover the assigned readings and also to work ahead, if needed.” She also concludes that it would be worthwhile to “expand this course and offer [it] in the traditional classroom setting to afford students who cannot participate in the travel component of the program the opportunity to take a Humanities elective with an international focus.” In addition to Prof. Burnham’s evaluation, the students who enrolled in and completed the new Humanities course were asked to fill out a survey on Blackboard.

Dissemination:

To date, findings have been informally disseminated at the International Education Peer Group meeting. In addition, I plan to share my insights and results with the faculty and administration who serve on the International Education Oversight Committee at the College and with the community at our college’s annual Festival of Arts and Culture.