Guatemala Study Abroad Alternative Spring Break
Faculty Report

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Proposal title
Guatemala Study Abroad Alternative Spring Break Program

Country/ies visited
Guatemala

Institution visited
Patalup Primary School

Dates of travel
24 March – 3 April 2011

Number of student participants:
8

Previous IP proposals submitted and grants awarded
(list titles, countries and dates):
Multicultural Education Summer Study Tour ; Guatemala; 8 – 19 February 2006

Have all required reports been submitted?
Yes.

Other funding for this activity available/applied for:
Proposal Abstract (75 word maximum):
This is a proposal to implement the Guatemala Study Abroad/Alternative Spring Break Program in Patalup, Guatemala. This international experience allows San Diego State University students to participate in an international learning environment. Students will experience service learning and action research in this alternative Spring Break program.

Travel report:

I. Opening/overview of intentions/activity
The purpose of this study abroad program was to provide SDSU students with the opportunities to 1) practice teaching elementary school students, 2) learn about the Qiche culture of Guatemala by visiting with families in the rural community of Patalup, and 3) visit historical cultural sites in Guatemala City, Antigua, and Lake Atitlán. Providing students with an opportunity to study multicultural education concepts in the international setting of Guatemala is the ultimate goal of this international project.

II. In preparation for the trip abroad
I recruited students for the program using flyers, e-mail, and a website (http://edweb.sdsu.edu/guatemala/index.htm) created for this purpose. As this study abroad program allows students to gain teaching experience in a public school, I targeted Liberal Studies majors primarily. These students are required to have an international experience and upon graduation most transition to the teacher education program at SDSU. I also provided information to departments and programs that require international experiences for graduation or program completion. I conducted four orientation sessions as required by the San Diego State University for students who participate in international study abroad programs. Scholarships were also provided for needy students and I administered these scholarships. I interviewed students, read their essays, and decided who would receive scholarships. I coordinated with our liaison in Guatemala to secure hotel lodging, make placements for students to teach in the Patalup Primary School, and to make reservations for us at cultural sites and museums we visited.

III. Upon arrival/specific activity
Upon arrival on Thursday evening, we were met at the airport by our in country liaison, Juan Toj, who escorted us to the Guest House where we stayed for the evening.
After breakfast the following day, we visited the Children’s Museum in Guatemala City. This museum is significant because it is a part of the educational program of children in Guatemala City and contains interactive attractions that SDSU students could experience. For example, SDSU students participated in a paper making activity. Following the Children’s Museum visit, we went to the Mira Flores Museum built on the site of Myan ruins.

After spending the morning in Guatemala City, we traveled by charted bus to Antigua, the former capitol of Guatemala. After lunch, we checked into our hotel (Real Plaza) and then students were free to spend the afternoon touring Antigua. Some took advantage of the pools, the Spa, and Massage parlour. After breakfast the following morning, we toured this ancient city of Antigua and shopped. In the late afternoon, we boarded the bus for Chichicastenango.

Upon arrival at Chichicastenango, we checked into our hotel (Santo Tomás), had dinner, and unpacked. The next day we explored the city on foot at our leisure. Chichicastenango’s market is known internationally, and students were amazed at how the city came alive on market day (Sunday), and then became quiet, almost like a ghost town, until the next market day (Thursday).

On Sunday, I met with the director, a teacher, and a member of the board of directors of the Patalup Primary School to firm up the plans for SDSU students teaching in the school the following week. I also shared with them the school supplies that had been donated by SDSU students and brought to Guatemala by SDSU students in the Guatemala Study Abroad Alternative Spring Break Program.

Each night we had a debriefing of the day’s activities. On Sunday evening, we also completed our lesson plans for teaching in the school beginning the next morning.

On Monday morning we traveled by charted bus to the mountain community of Patalup and the Patalup Primary School. In the words of one of our participants, “When we pulled up in our bus to the school in Patalup, the children ran to the gates, ran out of their classrooms, and swarmed us like we were celebrities. They were so excited to have us be there and were so eager to learn.” After a greeting and tour of the school by the director, the students performed indigenous dances for us. We were then shown our classrooms and we began teaching our prepared lessons. Qiche is the first language of most of the children and they are not fluent in English, so the school requested that we teach them lessons in English and Spanish. For example, we taught the third and fifth graders the colors
and numbers in English and in Spanish, and taught the ninth graders simple conversations.

After teaching two classes, we had the morning break. During this time, we mingled with students, many of whom were eager to know us. Again, one of our participants writes, “We taught the children hopscotch, a game that was so unfamiliar to them, sang songs with each other, finger-painted, and played soccer.” Following the break, we taught an additional class, and then had lunch. A hot, homemade lunch was prepared by a lady from the community. We were served lunch on the veranda of a nearby dental clinic which had a 360 degree view of the mountains of Patalup and Chichicastenango. After lunch we taught one additional class of secondary students.

At about 3 p.m. each day, our bus took back to our hotel in Chichicastenango. During the hours between our return to the hotel and dinner time, the students usually sunbathed by the hotel’s pool. I used this time to prepare for the evening debriefing. We had dinner at the hotel at 6 p.m. We had our debriefing at 7:30 p.m. and students usually worked on their lesson plans for the following day following the debriefing. We followed this schedule for four days.

On Thursday, our last day at the school, we distributed all of the school supplies that were donated by SDSU students. The Patalup Primary School students and teachers put on a show for us to thank us for coming.

On Friday we toured the Widow’s Weaving Cooperative at Camancha. The women of this cooperative were all made widows when their husbands were killed by army soldiers during the civil war in Guatemala. After the trek back down the mountain from the Widow’s Weaving Cooperative, we traveled by chartered bus to Panajachel on Lake Atitlán in Sololá where we checked into our hotel (Cacinque Inn) and had lunch.

The students shopped in Panajachel on Friday and enjoyed ziplining on Saturday morning. On Saturday afternoon we departed for Antigua where we spent one last night at the Real Plaza before departing on Sunday morning for the Guatemala City International Airport and the USA.

IV. Conclusion, recommendation, and next step?
The first implementation of the Guatemala Study Abroad Alternative Spring Break Program was a tremendous success, as evidenced by rave reviews from each of the students who participated. Please see our website for their testimonials: http://edweb.sdsu.edu/guatemala/index.htm
We recommend that the College of Education establish undergraduate and graduate courses in which Liberal Studies and College of Education students can enroll to receive credit for this exciting and popular program.

Students who participated in this program taught primary and secondary students in a rural school. After SDSU students visited the school and saw the need for improvements in the facilities at the school, they expressed interest in service learning projects. Specifically, they explored the financial feasibility of painting the interior of the school classrooms. Thus we are exploring two additional “next steps”: first, we want to increase participation in the program to at least 24 students. Second, we will explore university policy regarding the possibility of having half of these students work on a service learning project, while the other half continues the practice of teaching the primary and secondary school children.

A study abroad program in Guatemala is valuable to San Diego State University because it increases the university’s ability to provide a world class education to its students. The Guatemala Alternative Spring Break Study Abroad Program also provides an exciting and relatively inexpensive option to students whose programs or majors require an international or study abroad experience. Latin American cultures and languages have been a part of the San Diego community for many generations and increasingly those cultures and languages are becoming a part of United States society. The Guatemala Alternative Spring Break Study Abroad Program will provide teacher preparation students with the opportunities to interact with the indigenous people of Guatemala—whose culture is shared by great numbers of students in United States cities generally and in San Diego public schools particularly—for years to come.

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