Office of International Programs
Faculty International Program Development Grants
Report Template

Please complete this form after you return from travel and email to oip@mail.sdsu.edu.

Name Phoebe Roeder
Faculty/Rank Lecturer
Department Liberal Studies
College Division of Undergraduate Studies
Office phone 619 594-4812
Other phone
E mail address proeder@mail.sdsu.edu
Proposal title January Mexicali International Experience
Country/ies visited Mexico
Institution visited Via International
Dates of travel January 12-16, 2012
Number of student participants: 15

Previous IP proposals submitted and grants awarded
(list titles, countries and dates): None

Have all required reports been submitted? NA

Other funding for this activity available/applied for: In order to keep the cost low, the two faculty leaders did not receive salaries for this activity.

Proposal Abstract (75 word maximum):

This proposal is for faculty travel and lodging funds, in support of an intensive five day study in residence program for students with Via International in Mexicali, with assigned readings and online assignments/discussions prior to departure and a lesson plan or mini-project due after return. The 1 unit course is experiential, team-taught, and involves
students and faculty from the Liberal Studies program and the Honors Program, both of which are in the Division of Undergraduates studies, and both of which now require Study Abroad.

Travel report:

I. Opening/overview of intentions/activity

The Liberal Studies Program established an International Experience requirement starting in the 2011-2012 catalog year. The Honors Program had established its own international experience requirement earlier. Both programs have students who have a limited ability to pay for international experiences and/or family/job responsibilities that limit the time they can be away from San Diego. I visited Tijuana about four years ago for a tour and presentation by Los Nino/Via International and later heard the excitement of a graduate student who participated in a five-day program in Mexicali. Based on these positive experiences, I decided this type of program would be perfect for some of our Liberal Studies majors.

II. In preparation for the trip abroad

Karey Sabol, Associate Director, International Engagement for the Division of Undergraduate Studies (ksabol@mail.sdsu.edu) arranged a meeting in spring 2011 with Juan Carlos Rivas (JunaCarlos@viainternational.org), the director of volunteer trips for Via International ~ Los Ninos, 717 Third Avenue, Chula Vista, CA 91910. Juan Carlos described the various Volunteer tours that Via International offers, including the one in Mexicali. See http://www.losninosintl.org/

Because an international experience requirement was new for LIB S students, we decided to invite Stacy Sinclair, director of the Honors Program, to join Liberal Studies is sponsoring the Jan. 2012 program. We believed that offering the program to both groups would increase the likelihood that we would get enough students. Stacy introduced Karey and me to Bruce Harley (bharley@rohan.sdsu.edu), Library, who has taught honors courses in the past. He agreed join me as co-leader.

Karey took the lead on negotiating with the College of Extended Studies and Via International. She also created the web site, initiated e-mail contact with students concerning the program and scholarships, and led the two pre-departure workshops with help from me and Bruce Harley. As a separate initiative, she worked with a team of graduate students to do pre- and post-surveys and interviews with the students as an assessment of the program.

Juan Carlos worked out the itinerary and had his team ready to direct all the activities (Alonzo), translate (Jesus), provide great meals (Tita), and drive the bus to all the sites.
III. Upon arrival/specific activity

Alonzo met us on the US side of the border and led us to the bus on the Mexicali side. Our introduction to Mexicali began with a visit to the UABC Museum, where we learned about the early hunter-gatherers who inhabited Baja California and the later immigrants—Mexican, Chinese, and even Russians—who came when water was first brought to the area in 1900. Our students had an eye-opening experience when we went to the border to an office that provides immediate help to deportees and to see a dormitory where any immigrants to the area can obtain five nights with a meal, shower, and bed.

Our primary activities, however, were with people who had been working with Los Ninos for many years. Los Ninos began as an agency to help women who had come to Tijuana from other parts of Mexico so that their husbands could obtain work. Initially, Americans had helped train these women to choose more nutritious foods and even grow some fresh vegetables – radishes, lettuce, etc. The more capable women were chosen to lead new groups of women. Some of the women were encouraged to form simple businesses and given microcredit (from Los Ninos) to get started. SDSU students got to make empanadas, oatmeal cookies, and carrot cake at the micro-bakery. Later they put on “bee suits” and saw how another group of women care for bee hives and collect and sell the honey. The bee experience is, of course, the most dramatic! We also spent a morning at a cactus farm shoveling dirt away from an irrigation channel and learning how the farm family had started the business. We had a delightful barbeque with “napolis” (cactus) included in the main dish.

Service learning was a key part of two activities: making concrete for a new sidewalk at a school and again to form concrete pillars for a small bridge needed by the children of one community to reach their school in a second community on the other side of a waterway. Alonzo, who orchestrated all the activities, should get an award for “classroom management.” I was tremendously impressed by how smoothly each activity went. All 19 of us were engaged in the activities, and each activity resulted in a completed project ready to be used by the children and their parents. Our students were amazed at Alonzo’s passion to help the people improve their lives; they were pleased that $50 of their fees went to the materials they used in the projects.

Each night, the students wrote four things they discovered; their reflections were fascinating, especially since some of them had lived in Mexico, some had immigrant parents, and some had never even been out of the US. When they returned home, for their main project the honors students wrote a paper and the Liberal Studies students wrote a lesson plan script. As a scientist, I saw many aspects of the trip that related to the California science standards; some student wrote on them. Others wrote on more cultural, historical topics. However, what they learned about themselves was the most important. They dubbed the place we stayed the Los Ninos Igloo; we hit the coldest weather I had ever experiences in
my six years of regular visits to the Imperial Valley. They learned that showers may only get hot if you ask for the hot water to be turned on. They learned that they could all sleep together in a big, double room with bunk beds and decided that was great because they got to know each other so well. Most of them chose the program because it was short and cheap, but they completed it feeling they had had an experience that they would never have had as a tourist abroad.

I think this type of Mexicali experience is perfect for future teachers who will need to work with children and parents, some of whom have come from these same types of communities.

IV. Conclusion, recommendation, and next step?

As soon as spring break is over, I will start working with Karey Sabol, Adrienne Richart of College of Extended Studies, and Juan Carlos Rivas of Via International to set up one or two trips for January 2013 and probably two back to back trips during spring break 2013. I strongly suspect I will need this many trips in order to cover the demand. As coordinator of the Liberal Studies Program, I know that I typically have 90 Liberal Studies students needing any given requirement per semester. If about half of them do more expensive international experience options, I will still need about four—maybe five—trips with twenty students each per year! Unfortunately, Mexicali is awfully hot except during the above times!

The activities provide by Via International are especially appropriate to students who will need to teach all the different subjects and also work well with children and their families. I think this program has tremendous potential. I hope other faculty will be willing to lead some of these new sections and find the experience as satisfying as I did.

V. Additional Information