Office of International Programs
Faculty International Program Development Grants
Report

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Proposal title: SDSU Spain Summer Abroad Program
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Proposal abstract: Development and first offering of a Study Abroad program, under the auspices of CEA Global Education, in Barcelona, Spain. I taught two main SDSU courses, SPA 340 and 405B, conducted in English to satisfy general education requirements in departments other than Spanish and Portuguese. I also supervised student orientation, took the students to course-related historical/cultural sites in Barcelona (e.g. museums), and accompanied them in cultural activities and on visits to nearby cities (Figueres and Girona).

Overview of intentions/activity: Even though (as a native) I know Barcelona very well, and even though I have taught SDSU students for fifteen years, imagining and planning the two courses while factoring in the mostly unknown contribution of CEA Global Education was difficult. As the Summer Program progressed, I had to modify the syllabus many times to make it fit the abundant resources and limited time available, as well as to accommodate the skills and reactions of the specific group of students that enrolled. For example, the planned tours of city streets (to view architecture and historic sites) and of museums took quite a bit more time than I had projected, and CEA’s commissioning of professional guides for some of the tours led to a mismatch between the material I presented in the classroom and the paintings, sculptures, etc. that the students were exposed to in the museums. But I made adjustments almost every day, not only in the content of the lessons, but also in the sequence of presentation, in order to match intentions with reality, and, as a result, the program that was actually given accomplished the goals of the program I had projected, although not in every detail. Should I teach the classes again, I have a much clearer idea of how to proceed next time.

In preparation for the trip abroad: I did extensive research in the history of Catalunya and Barcelona, especially regarding their literature and art and architecture. I had decided to organize the course around the Robert Hughes book Barcelona, so I read the book a number of times, made detailed notes, and devised strategies to coordinate street and museum tours with the book’s contents. I wrote a very detailed syllabus for
the course and revised it many times. I participated in four orientation sessions at SDSU
to promote interest in the program, then conducted two orientation sessions with
students who enrolled. I consulted with staff of CEA Global Education, both in
Barcelona and in Tempe, Arizona, the company’s headquarters, to secure coordination
with them about such important matters as student accommodations and the
availability and scheduling of group activities in Barcelona. I arrived in Barcelona about
two weeks before the program was to begin, so that I could meet with CEA staff there,
acquaint myself firsthand with the facilities for the students and for myself, and
generally to assure myself that the students would be well taken care of and that the
program would be off on the right foot. During that period I also scouted the routes of
planned cultural/historical walks to see whether what I had traced on a map in
California was practical *in situ*.

Upon arrival/specific activities: The combined classes met Monday-Thursday for three
hours in the morning to discuss the day’s reading in preparation for the afternoon’s on-
site activity (e.g. an architectural walk or a museum visit). After a lunch break, the class
reassembled in the afternoon for the cultural activities for another two or three
(sometimes four) hours. As noted above, I had to modify the syllabus often in the light
of experience. Since many of the cultural activities were led by guides hired by CEA
(rather than by myself, as I had expected), and since those guides had to be hired in
advance, the sequence of visits didn’t match with the sequence of planned lessons, so
the latter had to be changed. Also, the guides had their own routines connected with a
building or a museum, which often didn’t gibe with what I had prepared for the
morning. For example, when we visited the MNAC (National Museum of Catalan Art),
the guide did an excellent job helping the students to understand medieval painting, but
he didn’t take them to the modern galleries, where I had hoped to expose them to the
work of such masters as Santiago Rusiñol and Ramón Casas. Two lessons learned were
that the syllabus must be flexible enough to match the morning session’s content with
the afternoon activity arranged by CEA and that I must get in touch with guides in
advance to tell them (e.g.) what part of the museum’s collections to take us to. In spite
of the necessity for adjustment from time to time, the program was a success.

Conclusion, recommendation, and next steps: I think that the students will agree that
the program was a success. Viewed pedagogically, they learned a lot about Spanish
culture, civilization, and literature (with a focus on Catalunya), and they learned it in a
far more vivid way than that available in a classroom in California. CEA did a wonderful
job in looking after the students, providing them with lodging, providing comfortable
classroom space and computer facilities, and arranging for course-related activities. The
program should definitely be continued in future summers. I personally learned a lot
about how the program should be changed in view of the guide situation, the hours
consumed by cultural activities, the specific nature of the activities, and the students’
reaction to a different culture and to the cultural materials presented. If I return as the
instructor and SDSU coordinator of the program, my next step would be to streamline
the syllabus and adapt it to what I have learned about the students, CEA, the guides,
and the time constraints. If someone else is the instructor, I will happily pass on to him or her the lessons I have learned.