Office of International Programs  
Faculty International Program Development Grants  
Report Template

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Proposal title: Food, Nutrition and Culture Abroad  
Country visited: Spain  
Dates of travel: May 25 – June 25, 2014  
Number of SDSU student participants: 20  
Number of non-student participants: 0  
Proposal Abstract (75 word maximum):

3 credit course - GEN ST 450 - The Mediterranean dietary pattern has a well-established beneficial role in health promotion. Epidemiologic studies reveal the protective role of adherence to this pattern on overall cancer incidence and mortality, prevention of obesity, type II diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and several neurological diseases. The course will expose students to life and culture in a Mediterranean country with an emphasis on the health-promoting aspects of the Mediterranean diet.

Travel report:

I. In preparation for the trip abroad

When I first proposed this class last September, I never envisioned how easy the whole experience would turn out to be. My initial contact with Suzanne Baker from CHHS was very helpful to find out the process of developing an international course to fulfill the ENS study abroad requirement. My subsequent meeting with Adrienne Richart at the Foundation to discuss logistics answered many of my specific questions about the feasibility of offering this course. The meetings we had with the very responsive staff at CEA clarified additional points. All I all it was a very smooth process. I was thinking that we would be offering this course Summer 15, but was encouraged to fast track everything to offer it Summer 14. With the help of Suzanne and Adrienne, I developed a new course GEN S 450. Food, Nutrition and Culture Abroad which was subsequently approved. The course title was sufficiently broad so that it could be offered anywhere with a different focus depending on location. For Summer 14, the course was offered in Barcelona and covered the Food and Culture of Spain focusing on the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet.
The website advertising the class went live after Thanksgiving. Very little marketing was needed to fill the course with 20 students. I announced it in my Foods and Nutrition Introduction to Food Science labs and posted it on our Facebook page for the SDSU Didactic Program in Dietetics. Students appeared to be very excited about the class and the location and quickly signed up.

I was able to limit it to Foods and Nutrition majors, with the exception of one Kinesiology major who I accepted early on before I realized how popular the course would be among our F&N majors. Having almost all students from the same major was a benefit as the Foods and Nutrition majors have a similar strong science background as well as food science knowledge and skills that proved to be useful. The strong science background allowed me to go into more depth about the phytochemicals, specific fatty acid profile and physiological mechanisms of the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet. The food preparation skills were useful during our culinary demonstrations where students were able to practice food prep techniques specific to the Mediterranean culture.

II. Upon arrival/specific activities

All of the learning activities I specifically requested for the students were included in the in addition to many more that helped round out the cultural experience for my students. I asked for a guided visit to a local market and a discussion about the historical importance and the future of the market culture in Spanish life. I also requested a series of culinary demonstrations targeting the unique regional cuisines of Spain based on their climate, agricultural practices and availability of local products. A major epidemiological study about the Med Diet, the PREDIMED trial was coordinated at the University of Barcelona so I asked if an investigator from that study could speak to our students. In fact, CEA was able to secure Dr. Ramon Estruch, the PI of the study to give a one hour presentation to our students. I requested visits to observe wine and olive oil production. When we ran into a bit of a problem trying to schedule the visits to the winery and olive oil production facility, the staff at CEA worked along with me to make it happen in a way that met my approval. All of the experiences and excursions were arranged by CE and were done first class.

In addition, CEA set up 2 fantastic day trips, one to Girona (a walled Roman city) and Figuera to visit the Salvador Dali museum and a second one to Tarragona (an important Roman center 2000 years ago with incredible ruins) and Santes Creus with its medieval monastery, a tour of La Pedrera, a tour of La Sagrada Familia, a tour of the Picasso Museum a Castellers training session demonstration, a delicious welcome dinner highlighting Catalan regional foods and a farewell luncheon. All of the guides for the excursions were experienced, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable and had wonderful stories and interesting facts to share with the students. They held the students' attention throughout the tours and often kept us much longer than initially planned so they could share more with us. The busses provided were clean and comfortable; the organized meals were delicious in spite of trying to feed 45 of us at once.

The classroom was adequate, air conditioned, equipped with wifi and an internet connected computer and projector for Power Point and video presentations. Students and faculty both had access to a printer.
The students seem very pleased with their living arrangements, both in location and in the quality and facilities of their apartments. My own apartment was spacious and very comfortable and convenient to the building housing the CEA classroom.

III. Conclusion, recommendation, and next steps

I conducted a Survey Monkey questionnaire after the course was completed for student input about many aspects of the program coordination as well as feedback about the various program activities, what they learned and if those particular activities should be included if the course were to be offered again. I also asked what additional activities, learning experiences they would have like to have had. We were able to identify one of the field trips heavily focused on the art and architecture that was not of as much interest to our group as the other SDSU group there at the same time as ours. One of the recurring comments is that students wished they had been able to have a face-to-face orientation before they left for Barcelona. Now that I know what to expect myself, this will be something I would definitely include if the course is offered again. Students would have liked to have met the other students in the course ahead of time and learned more about the kinds of activities scheduled for their time abroad. They also would have liked more information about opportunities to travel before, during and after the program. Having the final syllabus at least a month before they left would have been helpful to set up travel plans earlier.

If possible, allow at least one long weekend for students to travel. Groups of students went to Paris, Rome, Nice, Madrid, Southern Spain and San Sebastian during those weekends. The experience of arranging and navigating their own trips in another country was exciting and the students were able to bring a lot of wonderful stories back into the classroom that we incorporated into classroom discussions about health habits in other cultures.

I have to say how fantastic the CEA staff was throughout. The two staff members specifically assigned to our program went above and beyond the call of duty, often seeming to be more like concierges than just course organizers. They seem to genuinely care about ensuring that students have an optimal experience. They helped with logistics for student weekend travel, set up medical appointments for students when needed, assisted them with lost items, and provided very useful information about safety, getting around in a foreign country, local customs and practical advice to make their stay easier. One of the two was with us at every outside activity and was available during class time for assistance should it be needed. They were both outstanding representatives of CEA.