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Faculty/Rank:
Fielden: lecturer
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Proposal title: Mexicali Experience for Spring Break

Country/ies visited: Mexico

Institution(s) visited: Via International

Dates of travel: 4/20/13-5/4/14

Number of SDSU student participants: 18

Number of non-student participants: 1

Proposal Abstract (75 word maximum):
The proposal was for faculty travel and lodging funds in support of two intensive, five-day study in residence programs 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 and involves students and faculty from the Liberal Studies program, which since 2011 has required an international experience.

Travel report:

1. **Overview of intentions/activity** The Liberal Studies Program established an International Experience requirement starting in the 2011-2012 catalog year. The program has 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. Dr. Roeder led our first trip to Mexicali with Bruce Harley of the Honors Program in January 2012. The experience provided by Via International was everything hoped for: varied activities, thought-provoking experiences, Mexican food, and a very plain "dorm" or home.
II. Chris Kjonaas, Associate Director, International Engagement for the Division of Undergraduate Studies (ckjonaas@mail.sdsu.edu), and I worked with Via International ~ Los Ninos, 717 Third Avenue, Chula Vista, CA 91910. Rigo Reyes (rigo@viainternational.org), Regional Program Director

Chris 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. I worked with Phoebe Roeder to consider ways to achieve greater interaction between the SD and IV students during evenings and slow period. All of us—Chris, Dr. Roeder, Kate, and I—contributed to the two pre-meeting events.

Alonzo, the leader in Mexicali had his team—a translator, cook, and bus driver—organized to provide the activities and food. Some students commented about the quality of the translation but some of our students were able to pitch in and help translate, especially during the spring trip when half of the group were from the Calexico campus and were potentially better translators. Being courteous and flexible in such a situation is a part of the learning experience.

III. Upon arrival/specific activity

Alonzo met the groups on the US side of the border and led them to the bus on the Mexicali side. We first visited the Caritas Organization to learn about their work with deported migrants. We went to another departed migrant shelter that provides immediate short-term help to deportees and to see a dormitory where immigrants can stay up to 4 nights with a meal, shower, bed, and laundry facilities.

At the UABC Museum, the students 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.

The group was able to practice speaking English with those students from the local university who were learning English as a second language. Our students found that activity a wonderful experience.

The primary activities were again with people who had been working with Los Ninos for many years. (See the Jan 2012 report.) They put on “bee-keeping suits” and saw how another group of women care for bee hives and collect and sell the honey. We were able to visit the cactus farm and help weed the cactus for future watering; we visited a tortilla “factory” and saw how tortillas are made and their importance in the Mexican diet. We also made a quick, impromptu trip to a Mexican bakery which will hopefully lead to another project next year. Service learning is supposed to be a key part of two activities. This group was able to mix and lay cement at a local school, play soccer with the local young adults/children, and participate in Mexican culture by learning/singing folk songs and eating dinner with the families that gathered. Via was very punctual this for this trip and all went as planned.

During the evenings, the student did their chores, wrote in their journals, and played get-to-know-you games. Happily, the weather was perfect for this group.
IV. Conclusion, recommendation, and next step?

We are continuing to refine the experience. We noticed that this group (Spring Break 2014) had all but 2 students as a Liberal studies major. Two were men. I have found that the trip is much more enriching when the majors are different. Future leaders will have to work hard to make sure the SDSU main campus students mix well with the Imperial Valley campus students. We will have the IV students come to SD for both pre-meetings rather than let them do the second pre-meeting via distance ed. We will also continue to work on ways to help students mix during the evenings. Leaders will have to make sure a chore chart is in place and that all participate in completing the dorm chores such as, washing/drying/putting away dishes, cleaning the bathrooms, dorm area and main area.

We saw a lot of poverty. The Via leader and promatora’s talked about the reasons for this but I recommend that the group also see the more prosperous side of Mexicali--find out and discuss the reasons for the disparity.

We also only got one side of the migrant story in their efforts to cross into the US. I recommend that we find out more about border issues, perhaps with the help of the US Border patrol or from our own SDSU ISCOR majors.

This program has continued potential. 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. The biggest challenge will be to recruit additional faculty who are willing to lead trips so that no one faculty member feels compelled to be a leader year after year. Ideally, I would like to continue to find a second faculty member or support person to go on each trip so that two leaders can take turns; the trip is a very intense experience.