



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Student Affairs & Enrollment Management Academic Initiatives & Student Success

Program Overview

Vivir Mexico: Culture, History & People is a 5-week credit bearing (6 units) study abroad course that includes face-to-face sessions before students depart to Mexico, content and activities in an online learning management system, abroad service-learning projects, along with other enriching in-country experiences led by a faculty expert. This program is a result of collaborations between Student Affairs, Mexican American Studies, and the College of Education and is a form of experiential learning that intentionally recruits racial/ethnic minorities and low-income students, who are least likely to participate in study abroad programs. It familiarizes undergraduate students with the history, culture, and society of Mexico and dissects the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. through intensive study and direct personal experiences in Mexico. The class also explores parallel identity issues within the Mexican experience, including but not limited to the Asian-Mexican, Indigenous-Mexican, African-Mexican and the emigrant Mexican experience.

Students prepare for the in-country experience through reading, writing and discussions focused on Mexico's culture, history and current political issues. In Mexico City and Guanajuato, students participate in lectures and discussions with faculty at El Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología (CIESA) and staff from the U.S. Embassy and the Mexican Senate. Students also visit museums and historical sites, which include presentations and discussions.

Program Schedule

- Week 1: On-campus and Online
- Week 2: Mexico City
- Week 3: Guanajuato
- Week 4: Guanajuato
- Week 5: On-campus and Online



Participants



16 students ● 10 females ● 6 males ● 4 freshmen ● 5 sophomores ● 6 juniors ● 1 senior

12 Hispanic/Latinos ● 3 Asian American/Pacific Islander ● 1 African American/Black

Data Sources

9

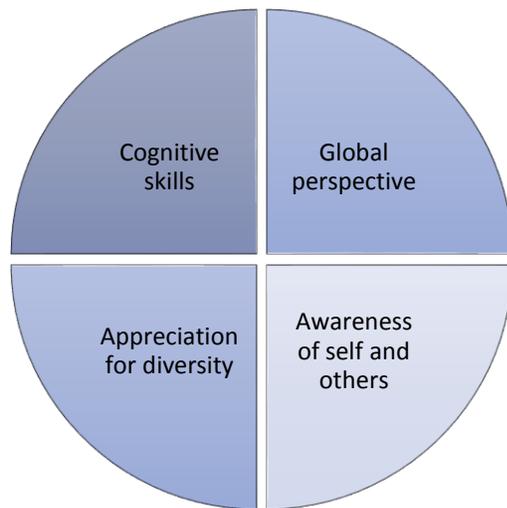
- Program applications ● Daily reflections ● Video commercials ● Voice thread ● Photos
- Closed Facebook group ● Pre-post assessment ● Service project curriculum ● Reflective essays

Methodology

Data was analyzed using a codes to assertions model of qualitative inquiry, which included (1) coding data, (2) creating categories based on codes, (3) developing themes and concepts based on emerging categories, and (4) making evidence-based assertions regarding student learning (Saldana, 2013). Data analysis was conducted by two Assessment and Research staff (non-participants) and member-check occurred with program staff (participants).

Evidence-Based Assertions

Data revealed students experienced gains in the following four domains. The following section includes descriptions of the four domains and supporting evidence from students' written reflections.



Cognitive Skills

Gains in students' cognitive skills development manifested as the development of new knowledge, heightened intellectual curiosity, emergence of higher order cognitive thinking, making connections to previous knowledge, and students' ability to connect program experiences to prior coursework, academic major, and future career aspirations.

"Before the Mexican Consulate visit, I had not been aware of the country's vast amount of trade and economic power. Often times there is the misconception of México as an underdeveloped country, yet everything changes according to perspective. Learning about México's recent innovations in renewable energy, engineering and education stressed to me the importance of forming strong international relations between countries."

"Visiting the axolote conservatory helped strengthen the information on México's biodiversity and scientific research presented by the Mexican Consulate. The location was humble, but also very beautiful. It's educational marketing on recycling and axolotes was creative and also made it inclusive for the general public to understand. Dr. Flores had so much energy and passion during his lecture. All of the information he offered to us helped me connect to some indigenous concepts I learned through my MAS classes. One of which is the concept of "In Lak 'Ech", which is similar to the Golden Rule, but it goes beyond that. It's not just treating each other as brothers and sisters, but all living things on this earth with respect. Flores and his colleagues' efforts to save the axolote, an important species, reflects this concept."

Global Perspective

Expansion of a global perspective developed among students and was reported as an increased understanding of the acculturation process that occurs in the U.S., consciousness of global conflicts, awareness and understanding of the implications of appropriation, communism, and colonization, enhanced perspective of global affairs and policies, and increased understanding of historical connections between the U.S. and Mexico.

"The opportunity to visit the US Embassy today helped me learn more about the impact of international relations and how it plays a role in our world today. I was not previously aware of the different committees woven into the organization. It was interesting to get perspectives from a variety of areas. Two themes that captured my attention were education and immigration."

"Some of the major messages that I took away from the Mexican Senate is that Mexico is undergoing huge reforms that will allow it to increase the country's development and make it more competitive in today's global market. The government hopes to achieve this by privatizing the oil industry, improving the quality of education, and improving communication across Mexico."

Appreciation for Diversity

Students expressed awareness of and appreciation for language diversity, gender diversity, cultural practices and symbolism, feminist ideals, and the effects of linguistic prejudice and oppression.

"I learned that when confronted with an unfamiliar or difficult situation I really do try my best to succeed and make it the best experience possible. For example, today I worked with a girl who was deaf. This was a barrier that at first I had no idea how to surpass. My first thought was to assign someone else to help her, but I decided to conquer my fear. At first we communicated through writing, but as the class period carried on she began to teach me some basic sign language. I thought that this was truly a unique and awesome experience."

"Another mural that I really enjoyed by Diego Rivera was the one that represented the Day of the Dead. Diego did a really good job capturing the traditions of that celebration, such as having mass, celebrating at the tombs and the celebration at home. All of his work was something to admire. [Ever] since the 5th grade I have learned about him and Frida and now getting the chance to see their work was an honor."

Awareness of Self and Others

Students reported gains in both interpersonal and intrapersonal development, including experiences that led to self-discovery, a deepened sense of connection to the community, heightened understanding of the importance and benefits of community service, and students' ability to understand their position in the world relative to others.

"What I have discovered about my own reactions and willingness is that even though situations can get hard or stressful, I still try my best to do what I am supposed to do, especially in a situation that I am not used to being in. Since I am studying to work with children, I need to be able to handle situations like these. For example, I need to learn how to communicate with children who are different ages. I need to learn how to manage a group of 20 or more children. I also need to try to stay calm when things do not go as planned. This entire summer camp has helped with all of the things I mentioned above, but I know I need to keep improving on things."

"Having the opportunity to live with a host mom was definitely an integral part of my experience abroad. It allowed me to have a more intimate relationship with my surroundings. It helped remove some of that unfamiliarity that comes with being a tourist and made me feel like I truly found a home in Guanajuato."

"Overall Guanajuato is a beautiful city, with lots of traditions and history. One reason why I love it here is because I am getting to know where my family comes from, which is something very important to me. When we were learning about the mines, all I could do is remember some of my past ancestors. According to my parents, some of my family members were miners during the revolutionary war."

Recommendations

- Use findings to further refine the program curriculum prior to the next cohort (i.e., coordinate daily reflection prompts to eliminate duplication, refine student learning outcomes, ensure that curriculum and assessment align well with the learning outcomes, etc.)
- Consider adopting the Cultural Experiences Abroad Program Learning Model to provide additional structure to the design, implementation and assessment of the program
- Develop plans to conduct longitudinal assessment, enabling the monitoring and reporting of long-term program impact and its relationship to student success outcomes (i.e., GPA, retention and graduation rates, etc.)

