SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA DEAN OF STUDENTS INCLUSION & MULTICULTURAL ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The University of Arizona (UA) is investing in marginalized student populations and low socioeconomic status (SES) in hopes of changing the demographic of study abroad and experiential learning opportunities. In 2017, the UA created a new Global Experiential Learning (GEL) area to provide more cost effective and short-term opportunities to marginalized students. GEL is an area where students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting both domestically and internationally. Students have intercultural engagement through service learning projects that address environmental justice, equitable education, language revitalization efforts, and gender equity in social movements within local communities. These programs are a combination of partnerships with new and existing departments as well as new separate initiatives. Though some of these departments and initiatives may exist on the UA campus, it was found that historically marginalized and low SES students were not taking advantage of global experiential learning opportunities both on the UA campus and nationwide. The issues of cost, time frame, and intentional cultural competency were important factors for students participating in these experiences, so GEL was created to address these issues. Acknowledging this systematic gap in global education for marginalized students, motivated the UA Cultural Centers to create and implement intentional alternative spring break and study abroad programming. The impact and popularity of the programs promoted expansion of the programs and later conversion to the new area of GEL.

Students engage in transformative education through self-reflection, intercultural engagement, intergroup dialogue, and service learning. These experiences provide students a deeper insight and understanding of their own cultural perspectives while building a culturally competent community. GEL challenges students to consider their own ethnocentric perspectives as they learn from and experience global perspectives on issues that can inform the southwest borderlands. The program also cultivates student exploration of parallel identity issues within the host community including, but not limited to the Asian, Indigenous, African, Latinx, and immigrant experiences.

From successful existing programs of Vivir Mexico Study Abroad and Alternative Spring Break (ASB) Hawaii, GEL has expanded to create a stand-alone area that was funded through both the Dean of Students Office and the UA Student Services Fee Grant (SSF). Since the SSF award, GEL has expanded to include an experience in Southeast Asia in the winter session as well as creating experiences domestically in the state of Arizona to highlight the social justice issues that are in the state. The GEL domestic experiences this year will include programs to the Mount Lemmon Japanese Internment Prison Camp to uncover the injustices toward the Japanese Americans, the Mexico border wall to discuss immigration issues, Biosphere 2 to discover natural incarceration, and a stay on a Navajo Nation to experience the Diné culture. All of these experiences have intentional programming for students to receive hands-on experience to learn of these issues and how it affects all communities. GEL Domestic is offered at no cost to students, therefore, it is available for those students that would like to participate but do not have the time or funding.

A component of GEL was an internship program that included many of the students that were participating in the experiences. The students received both credit and a scholarship that went towards their chosen experience. By having this internship, students became more invested and interested in the experiences of GEL. These interns have insight and contribution on the site locations, learning opportunities, and assignments that were established. For some of these students, it was their first time on an airplane or traveling outside of Arizona, so pre-departure orientations were very important in preparing these students.
Expenses are also an issue for the students especially the low SES students. In many of these programs outside of GEL, the expenses for the faculty or staff are added to the students’ fees for the programming. GEL intentionally seeks financial aid through scholarships and grants like the SSF grant for the students to not only assist in their personal expenses, but to cover the expenses of the faculty and staff so it is not incurred on the backs of the participants. It is important for GEL to create a partnership with the UA Financial Aid departments to help navigate the students around the policies of the university.

Many of the established abroad programs require students to be absent from UA for one to two semesters. For marginalized students or low SES students this causes barriers because it is perceived that they will be prolonging their education that is already expensive and a struggle to afford. GEL experiences can last anywhere between one day to one month. These experiences occur in time periods between the semester schedule in winter and summer breaks or when there is no class during spring break. This allows for students to participate in GEL that cannot afford to participate in longer programs. There is opportunity for students to gain between one and six credits that can contribute to their degree completion.

In the past academic year before the SSF award, GEL was only able to complete the ASB Hawaii because of lack of funding. By creating this area and with the help of the SSF grant, it has allowed GEL to expand exponentially. From the 13 students that attended the ASB Hawaii in spring 2017; this fall 2017 semester we have already seen a growth of participation to 35 participants in our one program about the Japanese Internment Prison Camp in Mt. Lemmon, approximately a 160% growth. Most of the fall semester has been utilized for planning and working with our interns, but GEL is ready to launch the winter, spring and summer sessions with an addition of six more programs with an estimate of 130 participants. Through the structure of GEL, the experiences will benefit both the participants going and students that remain on the UA Campus. GEL is also created to bring abroad knowledge as well as cultural competency back to campus when the students return in forms such as symposiums, presentations, and poster sessions. By acknowledging the lack of diversity in these programs and utilizing best practices are steps in the right direction in helping marginalized students enter into participating in both domestic and international experiences.

Student Quotes:

“My unforgettable Hawaii experience cannot be fully expressed through words. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity and support from the cultural centers. I had never visited Hawaii before and it was the best decision I have made. I have always wanted an experience like this, but most programs were too long. I left Hawaii with a new respect for myself and those around me along with rare experiences and sights that could only be captured in person. “

Daryan Singer (Navajo)
Psychological Sciences Major
University of Arizona

“Having the opportunity to be a part of the Vivir Mexico was the first time for me being in another country, away from my family for an entire month, and the first time experiencing another culture. I never thought I could go on study abroad because I did not think it was for me and also the cost. Because of the help and support I was able to receive from my family, the cultural centers, and the staff- we made it a reality. It was really cool to represent the UA and be a Wildcat in another country. I am very grateful that this opportunity was available for me during my undergrad.”

Victoria Thomas (Tohono O'odham, Navajo)
College of Education, Literacy, Learning and Leadership
University of Arizona