Grand Rapids Community College Foundation
Instructional Improvement and Professional Development (IIPD) Grant
Report Form

IIPD guidelines require that any individual who receives an IIPD grant must submit a report on their activities within 60 days of completion of the activities. This report must be received by the GRCC Grants and Resource Development Officer in order to be considered eligible for an IIPD grant in a subsequent year. Submit your report to the Grants and Resource Development Officer, mezzanine level, College Park Plaza Building.

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Date of IIPD Award (insert year award was received):

October, 2006  March, 2007

Purpose of Grant:

Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented Society conference and geographical fieldwork in South Africa

Please respond to the following questions related to the activity for which you received grant funding and attach your report to this form.

1. **How is the grant-funded activity resulting in an impact on student learning and enhancements to student success?**

   Student learning has been tremendously enhanced by this grant-funded activity in a number of ways, which contributes substantially to their success. The conference participation was enlightening in several respects; however, the matter that was seemingly most significant related to the knowledge I gained concerning the empowerment of women in Subsaharan Africa. With women’s empowerment, particularly through economic means by way of microfinancing, poverty is often alleviated and the opportunities for economic development increase. When students in the cultural geography and world regional geography classrooms are able to compare their lifeways with the people of Subsaharan Africa, they realize their good fortune and begin to develop a broader understanding of Third World issues and problems. They begin to realize that “their” problems are “our” problems, and the matter of women in Less Developed Countries is a case in point.

   Incidentally, I was so struck by this issue, I incorporated my field studies in South Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia into a faculty salon presentation on Third World Women, and I also wrote a paper on the subject, which will be presented at a Women’s Studies Conference.

   The fieldwork part of this experience in the South African Bushveld also creates a significant impact. Through my photographs, students are able to understand the character of natural landscapes, which is especially important to those in the physical geography classes. Moreover, through my storytelling, they’re able to gain insight into the way of life in an undeveloped place.

   When I tell them that I was in a village where electricity was received only a few months prior to my arrival, they become markedly aware of the benefits public utilities bring to enhancing development. When I show them photos of Shangani schoolchildren singing to me “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”
and “If You’re Happy and You Know it,” they realize that though things are so different, so many things are the same. Children are children everywhere, and everywhere children bring beauty to the cultural landscape.

Essentially, the photos serve as a sound conduit to spark dialogue, and they foster student retention of the material discussed in class, and that just by itself, fuels student success.

2. What steps are you taking to assess the impact of this activity on student learning?

The impact of this activity on student learning is being assessed both objectively and subjectively. In an objective manner, students are examined with regard to these topics, as continual revision of lectures and examinations has become an essentiality in some geography courses, and part of that revision is based upon knowledge gained by attending conferences and engaging in foreign fieldwork. This is particularly the case in World Regional Geography, which happens to be one of the highest demand courses because of its requirement for a number of undergraduate degrees at GVSU, Ferris, MSU, Davenport, Western, and others. In addition to examinations, however, I find through surveying students, they believe they are better able to understand more about particular places and problems associated with them, when they are able to relate various facts to my stories and photographs.

3. Describe the new avenues of instruction, including changes in curriculum, teaching strategies or other changes that are resulting from your grant-funded activity.

Students appreciate my tales (and photos) of direct contact with people from all walks of life in both the “Have” and “Have-not” countries of the world, and these stories facilitate their understanding of matters geographic. This is the type of knowledge gained by conducting fieldwork in foreign areas that is related to students in such a manner as to foster retention and develop greater abilities in problem solving and decision making. In terms of course content, though I have always devoted some material to gender issues, I find that my increased knowledge in this area, taken form both conference participation and fieldwork, leads me to elaborate on women’s issues even more, especially in the Third World because I have come to the conclusion that women’s empowerment, despite cultural traditions, is an imperative for sustainable development.

4. How are you engaging others in the learning process and disseminating activity results with the wider campus community?

I have engaged in dialogue about these things with colleagues in the Social Sciences Department and beyond. I also facilitated a Faculty Salon presentation on the subject of Women in the Third World, which placed some of my fieldwork experience in South Africa within the context of field studies I conducted throughout other parts of the Third World (Mexico, India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia). This was illustrated by photos of not only women in various countries, but also the Shangani children of South Africa’s Bushveld.
5. Describe how the grant-funded activity is supporting the objectives of your department and your existing job responsibilities.

My pledge to provide “a Harvard education at a K-Mart price” has not been challenged, and it is imperative that I keep this goal in focus, for the Social Sciences Department is committed to providing the best quality education that can be offered, and students are not short-changed. My duties are principally devoted to teaching geography, and performing this task in an era of globalization requires continual professional development in the form of conference participation and world travel. When my C-3 funds were exhausted, I used my own funds to engage in research in Mexico several times, as well as India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Singapore. I also used my own funds to participate in conferences throughout the U.S. This is the type of activity I am compelled to engage in, in order to maintain an extraordinary level of teaching effectiveness, and that is a principal goal I continue to pursue.

6. How has this grant helped in fostering your professional development goals?

My own professional development goals have developed considerably as a result of taking part in this activity. As GRCC’s only geographer, I am tasked with learning all about the world and everything in it, and because my education and research experience cover both the realms of physical and human geography, confronting people and places face-to-face enhances my understanding and ability to determine “the why of where.” The more I learn about different parts of the world, the more I realize what little I know. My FGIP refers to conference presentations and international travel with the intention of engaging in foreign fieldwork as being essential for professional development. I am convinced these goals are sound, and my efforts to achieve them have been realized at great benefit to the campus community and myself.

This grant in particular, however, has opened my eyes more to two things: 1) Third World Women. I have begun to actively pursue research in this area, particularly with regard to the necessity of providing education and microfinancing opportunities to women in Less Developed Countries, and I have become more sensitive to gender issues across the globe. 2) Study Abroad. The Social Sciences Department last year approved new study abroad geography courses under the framework of Sustainability in the Face of Globalization. Southern Africa was one of the regions we discussed as a prospective destination (others include Chiapas in southern Mexico, the north island of New Zealand, and the island of Bali in Indonesia). Future fieldwork in southern Africa is essential to seal the connections and develop a cogent plan for the course, and if it takes place some time within the next year, a geography course in southern Africa might take place as early as Spring Break 2009.