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, 200__  March, 2009

Purpose of Grant:

Learn about the history and politics of Iran.

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

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

The biggest change in instruction will be in PS 201 Comparative Government. This course examines politics as it is practiced in various countries throughout the world while comparing and contrasting these practices. I have often covered Iran in this course in the past. But of all of the countries that I cover in this course, Iran was the one country that I had not visited. This grant allowed me to go there and view what is happening first hand. I now have pictures and stories to help bring this country to life for my students.

In PS 202 International Relations, my experiences in Iran will provide excellent examples for nationalism and an inside look at a state sponsor of terrorism.

Iranians have immense pride in their history and culture. They see themselves as a great regional power and civilization. They don’t see their state as an historical aggressor in foreign affairs and are puzzled as to why they can’t have nuclear weapons. I could see the Natanz nuclear fuel processing facility on the drive back to Tehran. It was heavily guarded and we were not allowed to take pictures. I learned that Iran would likely continue a nuclear weapons program even if it were a democracy.
2. How will the grant-funded activity result in an impact on student learning and enhancements to student success?

I have much to share with my students precisely because my experience impacted my own learning. I was most surprised by how welcomed we Americans were made to feel. I had never experienced that much devotion from people elsewhere in the Middle East. In fact, it is hard to think of any place else where that feeling is as deep; I didn’t even experience it in Europe. It is almost surreal, no doubt heightened by the forbidden nature of America. Iranians have lost faith in their government and in their political system. They look to America as a source of salvation from their own unpopular leaders. Iranians love American culture and I was stunned by how many spoke English and had travelled to America. I predict that the current regime is too unpopular with its own people to last for very long. If not a revolution, I predict at least a coup d’etat. The disillusionment in their government and political system is far too deep for it to continue in the long run.

Despite religious law being imposed on them, most Iranians are very secular. Few go to mosque on Friday and every Iranian woman I saw on the flight leaving Tehran took their scarf off the minute they were own the plane. This is absolutely forbidden under the current government, but many young women were pushing the limit of the rule, wearing it high and back to show as much hair as possible.

Among other misconceptions about Iran was the treatment of their Jewish minority. I visited a synagogue in Esfahan. Even the American Jews in our group were surprised that there was no metal detectors or body searches when entering. I saw Muslims visiting Jewish shops in the market. Iranian Jews are definitely discriminated against and are shut out of certain jobs for the government, but they don’t live in fear of their neighbors which is more than can be said for the Jews in Turkey where the equivalent of an airport screening was required to enter a synagogue. Iranian Jews did not even keep a low profile, but freely wore their yarmulke in public.

These personal experiences will be invaluable in the classroom. I am using the digital photographs that I have taken as well as my seminar notes to supplement my course lecture with that of the textbook. The feedback in the past from students has been very positive, and I believe that their increased interest in the subject matter has resulted in better performance on class assignments.

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

Assessing the impact of my international seminars is a difficult task. What I have done in the past is compare the results in classes where I have given my presentation with those in which I have not. My observations are that the classes that witness my photos and personal stories are more engaged and more interested. The photos seem to accompany an increase in questions on the part of the students. Some students express a desire to go there themselves. Unless they are Iranian ethnicity, I would encourage any American tourist to go to Iran. They would be very welcomed and would not have any problem.

I also may be able to compare test scores with past classes in order to see if there has been improvement over similar exams given in previous courses.

Revised 2/07
4. How are you engaging others in the learning process and disseminating activity results with the wider campus community? NOTE: If shared learning activities have not yet taken place, an addendum to this report must be filed with the Grants Office describing shared learning activities prior to applying for another IIPD grant, as required by IIPD Guidelines.

I am planning on giving presentations on Iran this year at GRCC. I also plan to give a presentation to the United Nations Association of Grand Rapids and the World Affairs Council of West Michigan. In the past, I have done a promotional video for the GRCC Foundation stressing the importance of Professional Development grants like this. I would certainly be willing to do so again.

I have also spoken to local Rotary Clubs about my travels. Sharing my photos and what I have learned has met with very positive feedback. I am frequently complimented on my presentations and how it is helpful to bring these distant places to West Michigan. However, audiences are most interested in hearing about the people and their cultural differences with the US. This always leaves more of an impact than political and historical descriptions.

5. Describe how the grant-funded activity is supporting the objectives of your department and your existing job responsibilities.

I am sharing my knowledge that I have gained with my department through scheduled presentations on campus. Video taped presentations of these talks will be broadcast on channel 28 promoting this college and the GRCC Foundation’s work. I am even open to speaking to other classes on campus. Previous presentations that I have done on Jordan and Israel have been posted on YouTube. While available to anyone, my students have been assigned to watch this in subsequent semesters. GRCC has been nationally recognized for having the most college content on YouTube and I am proud to be a part of that effort.

Currently, I am working with Dean Ric Underhill in the Learning Academy to help internationalize the curriculum here at GRCC. Ric is forming a Community of Scholars to help facilitate this on which I plan to serve.

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

My credibility in teaching International Relations and Comparative Government depends on my having traveled to many of the places that I talk about in class. Iran was the last country covered in my Comparative Government class that I had not been to. This could leave a negative impression on students who might similarly dismiss a nursing instructor who had not been to a hospital in years. In addition, my personal stories and photographs bring to life the countries that I have traveled to for my students. They also provide a unique opportunity to engage the larger community and help make this a college of distinction.