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

Report Form

IIPD grant recipients must report on grant-funded activities in order to remain eligible for future IIPD grant program consideration. All grant recipients are required to submit a summary report of the completed project or activity to the Grants Office at the time that they submit their IIPD Reimbursement Form.

Name: Mike DeVivo

Job Title/Department: Associate Professor of Geography

Phone: 616 234 4410

Email Address: mdevivo@grcc.edu

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

March ___ 2011 ___ year

Purpose of Grant:

To participate in the Society of South African Geographers Biennial Conference and conduct geographical fieldwork in southern Africa (the purpose of the fieldwork is threefold: 1) to study the changing urban geography of the Johannesburg metropolitan area, 2) to assess the impact of globalization on the indigenous people of South Africa, with special reference to the highly rural areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, and 3) to examine the human impact on African wildlife in relation to sustainable development).

Please answer the following questions. Attach additional documentation if necessary:

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

New avenues of instruction have resulted from this grant activity in the enhancement of three already existing courses: Physical Geography, World Regional Geography, and Sustainability in the Face of Globalization: Southern Africa Lands and Peoples. Cultures, societies, and natural environments on the African continent have undergone changes at a remarkable pace during this era marked by globalization. For example, HIV-AIDS continues to diffuse wildly as Africa’s Less Developed economies grow at higher rates than those in Europe and North America. This has fueled rural-to-urban migration, which has led to the expansion of metropolitan settlements into hinterlands once characterized by natural vegetation and an abundance of wildlife. Moreover, conflict is generated in traditionally patriarchal societies, as girls and women seek educational opportunities that spark questions about their subordinate status to men. Additionally, examination of natural resource management, with particular reference to wildlife, as a catalyst for sustainable development vis-à-vis sustainable and responsible tourism is imperative.

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The enrichment of content in each of these courses has come through fieldwork and dialogues with talented educators and ecologists, as well as ordinary people eking out an existence on the land. For example, I was able to gain insight into the development of Johannesburg as the continent's financial center; this has had significant ramifications on the city's urban morphology. The important nature of sustainable tourism in the Timbavati Reserve and Siana Conservancy, especially as a means for practicing sound wildlife management, has been examined. Moreover, interviews with educators and people living in rural villages offer evidence of the impact of globalization on indigenous people in these areas.

The Physical Geography course addresses study of the natural phenomena, and enhancement of the course comes with photos that prompt discussion of the natural environment. Although the World Regional Geography course discusses certain aspects of the natural environment as well, it serves as an important forum for examining social issues. Here my interviews with people leading relatively primitive lifeways --- perhaps best exemplified by those residing in small dwellings fabricated from a combination of mud, bovine feces and urine --- enable me to develop a firm grasp of societies largely unwilling to accept changes that may lead to the empowerment of women. All these things are examined in the Sustainability in the Face of Globalization: Southern Africa Lands and Peoples study abroad course.

2. How will the grant-funded activity result in an impact on student learning and enhancements to student success?

This activity results in a positive impact on student learning and facilitates student success. Through illustrated lectures in the existing geography courses, students have shown a greater ability to contextualize their learning and develop a greater sense of geographical awareness. As textbooks in geography have included an increasing number of "field notes" and accounts of field experiences, so have my lectures and class discussions. Students find these stories fascinating and they show an eagerness to learn more as they seek to understand the why of where.

Another way in which student success will be facilitated is through the study abroad experience. Not only does this activity provide students with a once-in-a-lifetime experience to explore one of the most fascinating parts of the world, their retention of knowledge is enhanced by "doing geography." For example, this past year marks the second time the course has been offered; students explored and studied southern Africa in great detail. Their capstone assignment was essentially an assessment of interviews they conducted with women throughout different regions traveled, which reveals much about the hardships girls and women face throughout southern Africa. This work is substantive, and plans are for the students to make a presentation at an academic conference in Spring 2012. These students are on track to complete the Geography B.A. and gain fully-funded assistantships for graduate studies. In essence, the study abroad course requires the types of knowledge gained from this type of activity to generate success.

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

Impact assessment is accomplished in four ways. 1) Anecdotal evidence comes from students' oral comments concerning the value of the instructional strategies employed; students continue to ask for more illustrated lectures and more stories, and these instructional strategies appear to have a positive impact on their retention of geographical knowledge, as they seem to be better able to relate them to a

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broad spectrum of geographical phenomena. This is particularly the case with regard to the study of Africa. 2) Student evaluations will be taken to capture students’ views of their own success and how instructional strategies implemented as a result of this grant-funded activity have influenced their success. Previous evaluations show evidence, through students’ comments, that this type of activity facilitates student success. 3) Exam scores have been traditionally used as a means of impact assessment, and although the percentage of students awarded grades of “C” or better has not risen, the proportion of students awarded grades of “B” and “A” has increased, and this appears to be correlated with the impact of this activity. Thus, it appears that although no evidence indicates whether or not unsuccessful students are affected by this activity, successful students are succeeding at higher levels, and the numbers declaring Geography as a major has been increasing. 4) Not only are more students declaring Geography as a major, more and more GRCC alumni are gaining funding to pursue graduate studies. Geography students from GRCC have gone on to pursue M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at Ohio University, University of Missouri, University of Texas, and Syracuse University under fully-funded assistantships. This is in no small part attributed to the high level of professional activity I’ve engaged in, which has been funded by IIPD awards. There is no reason to believe that this long-term impact on students will wane.

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 returned from Africa the day before yesterday and shared learning activities have yet to take place; however, plans are in place for this activity to be shared in a presentation at the GRCC Race and Ethnicity Conference, which is scheduled in March 2012.

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

This activity has supported the objectives of the department and my existing job responsibilities in a variety of ways. Given that the department is devoted to providing an exemplary education in the Social Sciences, this experience enables me to better achieve that goal by gaining geographical knowledge and passing it on to students so that they will become knowledgeable public citizens, skilled in sound decision-making and critical analysis. As the only geographer at GRCC responsible for the instruction of all geography courses, maintaining a high level of expertise in these areas is an essentiality. This is particularly important as I am the sponsor of the only community college chapter of the International Geographical Honor Society and working relentlessly to assist in the placement of students in transfer institutions and (after achievement of the B.A.) graduate programs with funding.

In essence, the GRCC Geography program is considered among the best in American community colleges, and our alumni have achieved high levels of success. This is partly attributable to the IIPD opportunities I’ve experienced, for these opportunities fueled the attainment of knowledge that was related in the classroom and in the field, which often captivated promising students seeking to achieve their dreams.
6. How has this grant helped in fostering your professional development goals?

My professional development goals have been fostered in three ways: 1) through sharing my knowledge with special reference to the empowerment of women as a means to facilitate development in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2) through directing a forum on transformational leadership, and 3) gaining knowledge via geographical fieldwork, with regard to examining the impact of globalization on indigenous people as well as wildlife conservation efforts in relation to sustainable development.

I intend to engage in further research and analysis, which complements the fieldwork, and develop a paper that is suitable for publication subsequent to its presentation at an academic conference. During the past year, I have seen two of my papers turn into articles in refereed international journals, so I am confident a publication will be forthcoming.

7. Please add any other comments you would like to include in this report.

As a practicing geographer, and the only one at GRCC, I am compelled to provide geographical knowledge about all the world and everything in it to students, colleagues, and the community, and this requires extensive travel and field research abroad in addition to participation in various academic conferences. Although my familiarity with Latin America, Australia, Europe, and Southeast Asia is significant, it is the continent of Africa in the midst of globalization that has a compelling need for careful study. Relatively few geographers in the U.S. claim the regional specialty accorded to Africa; I am one of the few, and I have developed a reputation in the geographical community as a solid Africanist.

This reputation goes a long way for the GRCC Geography program and our students. For the first time, in 2012, our program will be entered in the prestigious Association of American Geographers Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas. Our students are successful. The IIPD awards in the past, and this one in particular, contribute to that success.

Geography Lives!

MSD

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