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: Keith St. Clair  
Job Title/Department: Social Science

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Date of IIPD Award (insert year award was received): October  
March 2012 year

Purpose of Grant:

Learn about the history, culture, and politics of Cuba.

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.

The biggest impact on my teaching will be in my PS 202 International Relations and PS 201 Comparative Government courses when I discuss development in the post-communist world. Eastern Europe and Russia have already experienced this transition. Russia is a government that I cover in my Comparative Government course. I was unable to travel there before the fall of communism. Therefore, I can only describe to students the way Russia is now. I was not similarly late in traveling to Cuba.

By traveling to Cuba now, I am able to have a much better idea of the kind of deprivations suffered by people in a communist state. Cuba is still ruled by the Castro regime, although Raul Castro is starting to institute some capitalist reforms. Expectations are that over the next 10 years Cuba will embark on a full transition to a capitalist society. It is fortunate that I was able to travel to Cuba now before much of these changes occurred. It will provide an interesting contrast to the changes to come.

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

The greatest impact will be in describing what a communist state is like. I learned that everyone in Cuba is guaranteed a job, but that no one receives enough pay to live on. So everyone has to supplement his income by being "creative." This includes doctors having to use their car after hours as a taxi just to

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earn hard currency. Many people in Havana open their homes as a restaurant to tourists in the evening. We also saw young women and men serving as escorts for foreign visitors.

After Castro’s 1959 revolution, no one was allowed to own a car or a home. Still, whatever they had before the revolution they were allowed to keep. So people strove to nurse the automobiles they had. That is why to this day there are a lot of 1940s and 1950s American made automobiles still on the road. The Cubans have done whatever is necessary to keep them going. And foreigners love to be driven around in them as taxis. Up until recently Cubans could not buy a home. They could only trade one that they had for another. The result is that many generations end up living in the same house. Some of these were once mansions prior to 1959 and are now in a dilapidated state. Much of the architecture that we saw dated back to before 1959. Much of it is in disrepair. Only now is the government starting to spruce ups some of the old buildings in the tourist areas.

With Cuba’s ancient sugar industry completely uncompetitive now, Cuba is rediscovering tourism as an industry in which it has a comparative advantage. It is joining this fall back position typical of the Caribbean as the only reliable way to get foreign currency. Europeans have seen these advantages and already have investments in this industry. American firms are locked out by the US foreign policy embargo. This embargo, which Cubans call a blockade, has had a devastating impact on what Cubans are able to buy. Consequently, everything is in demand and this was exemplified by the request that we leave behind anything that we could not use, from soap to shampoo. The Cubans will wash out plastic bags in order to reuse them. Nothing can go to waste; such is their plight. Cuban expatriates in the US and elsewhere have helped their families to survive by sending back money and supplies to their relatives. These stories and the photos to support them will be invaluable to my students.

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

Assessing the impact of my international seminar 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 students. Some students express a desire to go there themselves. Most Americans don’t have an exemption granted by the US government to break the embargo. Therefore, most Americans who do go to Cuba have to fly either to Canada or Mexico first and violate US law by spending money in Cuba. Our seminar was unique in that we had a US government exemption for educational purposes allowing us to travel directly from Miami to Havana on a chartered Delta flight.

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.

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 a presentation on Cuba 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.

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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 helpful it is 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 also 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.

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

It was very important that I was able to visit one of the few states in the world that is still practicing communism. Even if this proves to be in its closing days, it was enlightening to see a communist system first hand, and thereby witness some of the reasons for its ultimate implosion.

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. Not doing so 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.