1. PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Goals and Objectives

Appalachian State University’s International Alternative Service Experiences (iASE’s) provide opportunities for students to increase their knowledge of global issues while developing attitudes that cultivate global citizenship. To improve the efficacy of these programs, it is vital to equip students with tools to learn and use the language of the host country. For this reason, through the support of the QEP, an intensive language learning program was incorporated into iASE’s, creating a model that can be translated throughout Higher Education. This program directly addressed two principal goals of the QEP: to cultivate intercultural competencies and to foster globally competent citizenship. These goals were achieved through offering a uniquely global experience for students at home, a Spanish Language Immersion Opportunity, preparing them for their abroad experiences and promoting critical thinking about international service.

To cultivate intercultural competencies, knowledge of other cultures and countries must be applied. Students participating on iASE programs are extensively prepared in the realm of historical and cultural knowledge of the country they are traveling to, but they often lack training in a key element of intercultural competence: language. To address this, the Department of Languages, Literatures, Cultures (LLC) and the Appalachian and the Community Together (ACT) Office collaborated to create an effective Spanish program catered to the needs of iASE students. This planning came to fruition through two Spanish language immersion days, focusing on direct language instruction, conversational activities, and vocabulary practice. These days revolved around the goal to provide students with the tools necessary to converse with the local community in a deeper manner.

In addition to improving students’ intercultural competencies, the immersion days helped students develop attitudes that cultivate global citizenship by demonstrating the importance of language in international experiences. Firstly, the immersion experiences allowed students to better understand the global interconnectedness and interdependencies relevant to their iASE. The collaborations between Appalachian State and international NGOs are dependent on effective communication across cultural boundaries. To understand the needs, interests, and goals of the community and how the students’ service fits within this community, one must be able to effectively interact between the two groups. Language is the bridge between these constituencies. For many students, though, the relevance of effective communication in is not realized until during or after an international experience. Additionally, the immersion experience allowed students to identify some of the moral and ethical questions that underlie a given transaction between countries, particularly that of international service and language. Ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship between Appalachian State and partner NGOs is of key concern for ACT. So not to expend too many resources from the local community, participate in service work as effectively as possible, and to regard the customs of the community, it is paramount for program participants to learn the native tongue of the country and to respect this key aspect of the local culture. To address these concerns, the immersion program simulated an international experience and prepared students with the tools necessary to better communicate with the community, regardless of Spanish level.

Key Evaluations

The funded proposal allowed ACT and the LLC to plan and incorporate language learning into the iASE programs in a unique way. Two five-hour immersion days were planned at Broadstone Camp, with 10-15 students participating each day. The students ranged in Spanish
proficiency from beginners to advanced, with approximately five students per proficiency group per day. Two full-time LLC faculty helped facilitate both days, providing direct language instruction. Five graduate students studying Spanish Higher Education participated, creating and facilitating engaging activities during the day that were focused on communication and vocabulary skills. Three international students that are Spanish speakers were also involved in both days, ensuring that the students were able to interact with native speakers. The two ACT staff helped with logistics and planning.

One-third of the total iASE participants took part in the Spanish Language Immersion experience. As the first language experience connected to all iASEs, we were very pleased with the turnout of interested students. These students completed a Sign-Up Questionnaire, Post Immersion Day Questionnaire, and a Post-iASE Questionnaire, which provided helpful insight into the efficacy of the immersion days in meeting the goals and objectives of the QEP project.

In the Sign-Up Questionnaire, in addition to gauging students Spanish proficiency level, we asked all students what they were hoping to gain from the immersion experience and what their biggest concerns relating to using Spanish in-country were. 80% of students said they hoped to be able to communicate better and to be able to practice their language skills. The predominant concern was listed as not being able to connect or communicate with the local community. Based on this questionnaire, we were able to address the needs and concerns of the students in the planning of the immersion day activities.

After the two immersion days, to ensure that we accomplished our goals and objectives, we re-surveyed the students. 89% of the participants said they felt better prepared to live in a Spanish speaking country during their iASE. 100% of the students were more motivated to learn (or continue learning) Spanish after the immersion day and were planning on continuing their practice before the iASE. 100% of the students felt that Spanish learning was relevant for their iASE experience. Those whose concerns were not eased by the immersion experience said it made them realize how difficult it could be to be somewhere that does not speak your native language, therefore reiterating the need to know the local language. For us, this reinforced that the immersion experience was addressing how important the language component is when doing international service-learning.

After the iASE programs returned, we opened up a survey to all students that participated, whether or not they had taken part in the immersion experiences. We had an equal response from students who did and did not participate in the immersion day. All students that took part in the immersion day found the tools provided useful while in country. Those who did not participate wished they had.

2. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES
Successes and Challenges Related to Project

The successes of the iASE Spanish Language Immersion Project were broad and diverse. Firstly, none of the outcomes would have been possible without the collaboration of various campus stakeholders: the ACT Office, the LLC Department, the QEP, and OIED. Without this collaboration, the necessary resources and expertise to plan effective immersion days could not have been gathered and utilized. With this being said, the greatest success related to our project was the number of students that participated, as this was the first year this type of program was created and it received immense interest and support. This success is likely due to the nature of the language activities. The immersion day focused on creating a safe, fun, and inviting space to practice Spanish for students of all levels, incorporating games, cooking, and simulated conversation into the day. Students reiterated that the environment of the
immersion days were engaging, encouraging, and useful. Lastly, the findings from the immersion days and the various questionnaires were encouraging. They reiterated that our goals and outcomes were met. Students expressed the desire for more language learning in the future. When sharing the results of our project at two conferences, The Gulf South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement through Higher Education and the Appalachian State Celebration of Student Research and Creative Endeavors, it became evident that our project was unique and offered provocative implications for all international partnerships and the role of language in these partnerships.

In addition to the many successes of the project, there were also distinct challenges faced. The greatest challenges faced was making students realize the relevance of language learning before they embarked on their programs. It would have been helpful to offer CLAC credit for the immersion experiences or to make the immersion days mandatory, but for the first year doing such a program, it was hard to find this balance.

**Successes and Challenges Related Grant Funds**

In general, the process of receiving the grant funds was very successful. The majority of our funding went directly to supplies, facility costs, and stipends for the planners. The purchasing of supplies and the payment of facility costs were a simple process. The payment of individual graduate students and faculty members was a bit more complicated, but with the help of Ms. Sonya Long and Ms. Terri Lockwood, I was easily able to complete the process.

**3. LESSONS LEARNED**

As previously mentioned, the biggest lesson learned in the planning of the immersion days was the importance of collaboration. Our campus has incredible resources related to language learning, historical and cultural preparation, and service-learning. Only by connecting different departments and offices, were we able to provide students with this valuable experience. This collaboration will be continued into the future to ensure that effective language preparation remains a key aspect of iASE’s.

Additionally, we hope that our program will inspire other campus groups participating in international travel to incorporate language training into their pre-departure preparation. Through the planning and implementation of our immersion days, we learned the relevance of this program for all international travel (iASE’s, study abroad semesters, international internships, and short term faculty led programs). We hope that our program provided an example on the necessity and feasibility for cross campus collaboration for international experiences.

Lastly, we learned the importance of starting a dialogue on language learning in international service that can be continued long into the future. As the first program of this kind for iASEs, we strove to interest students, engage various campus stakeholders, and meet our objectives. Now that we have successfully completed the project, we are excited to see where the program can grow and change. We look forward to enhancing the program and exploring different opportunities such as providing local service work in Spanish for students pre-iASE, offering CLAC or Spanish language credit for participants, and making language learning a necessary part of pre-departure preparation for all iASE participants. We are enthused that we found the support to start this dialogue and look forward to seeing how it develops.

**4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Attached, you will find the PowerPoint related to the project that was shared at various conferences containing key information on our findings and pictures from the two immersion days.