

Journal of Progress-Alexa Senio

Spring 2015 (499A)

01/05/15

Over winter break I had been brainstorming some ideas for my thesis project. I haven't come up with a definitive topic yet, but I know I would like to do something with El Pueblito, the orphanage I volunteered abroad with last summer. I'd like to do something for the kids and for Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS). I think working with a nonprofit will also give me really valuable experience because I'd like to work with nonprofits in the future.

I reread the research paper that I wrote for my HUMN 201: Intro to Humanitarian Affairs class. It talks about Save the Children, a humanitarian aid agency and identifies, describes, and analyzes different play therapy methods used to help children in disaster situations. I am hoping to involve play therapy in my project somehow because it's a topic I am really interested in.

01/15/15

Right now my creative project thesis idea is to sell my artwork to raise money to build a playground at the orphanage I volunteered at in Costa Rica. I will also analyze and research different strategies used to sell artwork. I will make contacts with local art galleries in my hometown and hopefully sell my art work there. In addition to this, I would also like to host an event or have a stand at an art show.

One main concern I have right now are if I will be able to even build a playground at the orphanage I volunteered at. It is government-run and the rules are relatively strict. I'm planning to contact the local director of the organization I volunteered with over winter break to see if this is even a possibility. If not, I may look into finding another orphanage or cause in the United States.

Another concern I have is whether or not my artwork will sell. I have only taken one drawing class, so I don't have a lot of professional experience in drawing and painting. I think I am also going to try to sell my photography since I have more experience in this area. I might also try to look into getting a grant from the art department so that they can fund some of the paint, drawing, and framing materials I might need.

01/20/15

Looked into CVPA Undergraduate Student Research Grants through the art department.

02/08/15

Changed my thesis idea to one that is more attainable and relatable to my major.

Drafted this note to Juvel:

Hola Juvel!

I hope you are doing well. Thank you so much for giving me such a great trip abroad this summer! I truly found the experience rewarding and life-changing. I am now going into my senior year at college where I will be working on a thesis project through the Honors Program. I will be completing a creative project where I get to come up with a meaningful and extensive project related to my major that I will complete over three semesters. My major is Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication and I have a minor in Humanitarian Affairs.

That being said, I was wondering if I could create a project that is involved with Cross-Cultural Solutions and possibly El Pueblito, where I helped out this summer. I was thinking I could help design a lesson plan book for volunteers who are going to the orphanages or elementary schools. This book would provide them with everything they can expect to see at the orphanage and it will give them ideas for activities to get the children involved. Right now I am trying to get a general idea for what project might be best and we can work out the details later. I am open to suggestions and my goal is for this project to be useful, so let me know what you think!

I was wondering if you could be my primary contact at CCS for the project. Let me know if you have any other suggestions that would be beneficial or helpful to the volunteer program in Costa Rica.

Pura Vida!

Alexa Senio

02/18/15

I am creating Nonprofit Pinterests for my Writing for Nonprofit class. They might help serve as practice for making a Pinterest for CCS. The pins I've posted also have key tips for social media for nonprofits as well as communication between them.

I also sent this final note to Juvel:

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Pura Vida!
Alexa Senio

02/19/15

Juvel replied to my note very quickly! He said it sounds like an amazing project and a good opportunity for CCS to improve their program. He directed me to the CCS Country Director for Costa Rica, Jose. Before I contact Juvel, I want to do more research on his role and what he does.

02/20/15

I think the most important part of this step is to get José excited about my project. According to Juvel, he will probably encourage something like this. I looked up his profile on the CCS site and he hung out around the home base several days while I was there. He is super enthusiastic. I did a little bit more research on him and according to his profile, he's interested in international development and he's committed to eliminating child abuse. This is good since my project will be helping the orphans and the volunteers. I think in order to get him excited, I should try to relate to him and

make connections with my Humanitarian Affairs minor and my work with nonprofits this semester.

02/25/15

Sent this email to Jose:

Hola José!

My name is Alexa Senio and I am a junior at James Madison University. I am currently an Alumni Representative for Cross-Cultural Solutions and I volunteered in Costa Rica this summer. I was truly inspired by my experience in Cartago, specifically at El Pueblito. My service abroad has inspired me to give back to CCS and the volunteer program in Costa Rica.

As I am entering my senior year in college, I will be starting a creative Honors thesis project where I will be partnering with professors to complete an extensive, meaningful project of my choice. Working at the orphanage was a really rewarding experience for me and I would like to devote my project to giving something back. I talked a little bit about my ideas for the project with Juvel and he referred me to you.

I was wondering if I could possibly design a handbook for CCS volunteers entering the program. Juvel mentioned the program could use new guidelines to improve the experience for the volunteers who will be helping out.

As a Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication major who has studied Humanitarian Affairs, I understand the importance of educational and play therapy for children in crisis situations as well as the importance of effective communication. I think creating this handbook could definitely help improve the experience not only for future volunteers, but also for the children. Since I am most familiar with the experience at El Pueblito, I would like to center the handbook around my experience at that placement.

As a volunteer, I wasn't really sure what to expect when I first found out I was volunteering at an orphanage abroad. I think it would be important to have a thorough, detailed introduction to the program in this handbook as well as guidelines to follow while interacting with the children. I would like to also include typical day-to-day expectations for the volunteers. I plan to add lesson plans with educational activities to inspire the volunteers and get the children involved. This would also be a good place to host all of the testimonies CCS has collected from past volunteers as well. I would also like to convert this handbook to an online-accessible document. This way,

volunteers can read up on what they can expect before arriving to Cartago.

In the end, I think this handbook would be a great addition to the volunteer program in Costa Rica. As a past volunteer, I have experience running through the program and using this perspective, I think I will be able to create a handbook that will be beneficial to both volunteers and the children.

Let me know if you think this is something I can do to help out CCS! Pura Vida!
Alexa Senio

02/28/15

While this may not be exactly how I organize the handbook, [this](#) is an interesting example that includes explanations about importance of each section. I would take out the forms section.

While I like how the first part of [this](#) handbook is organized, I want a creative and fun design to get the volunteers excited. It shouldn't seem like work to them. I also have to make sure I keep a consistent brand with CCS.

03/15/15

I'm not really sure if I should be keeping a personal reflection journal just yet, but I am starting to get really excited about my project. When I was still planning on doing the art-based project, I was a little hesitant and nervous, but now I am super excited and I'm working on tackling the next step as soon as I hear from the next person in the contact list. I am more confident that this is the right project for me and I'm hoping José will approve it!

My goals for this project are to demonstrate and develop my design skills as well as my communication skills (particularly with nonprofits). I would like to conduct more research on play therapy and education for children in crisis situations specifically for this handbook. Entering my senior year, I wish I had gotten more involved with design projects (there are probably more of these in SMAD than WRTC and I didn't know that until too late). I also wish I had declared a NPS minor sooner. I am still trying to contact the minor advisor and she has not replied, but it doesn't look like it's possible to complete in two semesters. Now that I know this is what I want to do, I'm hoping this project will fill those gaps in my overall college career and the experience I have developed.

March-April 2015

Met with Sean and discussed plans for next semester. Outlined proposal and picked potential readers. Met with the readers and told them about my project!

04/07/15

Submitted Senior Honors Thesis Proposal:

Introduction

This past summer I was fortunate enough to volunteer abroad with Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS), a nonprofit organization that has been working for over 20 years with over 35,000 volunteers to help address global issues through services provided by international volunteers. My placement was El Pueblito, an orphanage in Cartago, Costa Rica. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to make friends with over 50 children aged 5-16. Getting to know all of these children really impacted my life and it made my day when I saw that my service brought smiles to their faces. Both CCS and El Pueblito gave me such rewarding experiences and I want to give something back to them. I would like to develop a handbook to help volunteers get the most out of their experience as well as develop lesson plans and activities to help improve the experience for the children.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook and website that can be accessed internationally by prospective Cross-Cultural Solutions volunteers at the Costa Rica location. The handbook will establish volunteer expectations and provide a basic understanding of the importance of engagement and education of children at El Pueblito orphanage. A bank of lesson plans will also provide volunteers with quick and easy activities they can refer to.

The objectives of my project include:

- Compile testimonies from past volunteers to help improve volunteer expectations and experiences.
- Research the literature that informs this study, in particular global education, the importance of play therapy, and the developmental stages of children.
- Analyze and evaluate the methodology behind volunteer handbooks and websites from similar institutions.
- Cultivate a better understanding of communication with nonprofits and maintain a close relationship with the clients I am working with. Present materials and implement feedback.
- Develop a handbook that outlines volunteer expectations, the importance of developmental stages of children, the process of developing a lesson plan, the dynamic of classroom and group management, and a bank of activities volunteers can use.

- Convert the handbook to a website that can be accessed by volunteers internationally. The website will include the developed handbook as well as additional links, videos, and infographics that may be helpful to the perspective volunteer.

Tentative Outline

1. Volunteer Expectations

This section will outline a day-to-day schedule of activities as well as rules and guidelines for how to communicate and interact with the children at the orphanage. This might also include tips such as money conversions as well as common phrases to study to help volunteers adapt to this culture change.

2. Developmental Stages of Children

This section will include my HUMN 201 research on play therapy for children in crisis situations. I will also provide statistics from my WRTC 350 proposal about the importance of education in Costa Rica. Since many of the orphans at El Pueblito come from families who have either abused or neglected them, I will include information about interacting with children with these backgrounds. By analyzing developmental stages of children, I will also be able to outline the best strategies for engagement with different age groups.

3. Developing a Lesson Plan

This section will address how to tackle language barriers and adapt activities accordingly. It will also include the important components of a lesson plan and how to choose activities that involve children of all ages. I might research global education and interview professors and representatives from the ELLS program on teaching children whose first language is not English.

4. Classroom and Group Management

By incorporating tips on how to manage a classroom, volunteers will be able to make the most out of their lesson plans as well as properly maintain organized activities. Group management tips will also help volunteers make teams and divide up tasks to complete at the orphanage.

5. Activity Bank

Using Pinterest, as well as other online resources, I will develop an extensive bank of activities volunteers can use for inspiration. This bank will include age-specific activities as well as activities for all age groups. These will be available online so volunteers can plan to bring appropriate supplies before their arrival in Cartago.

Methodology and Timeline

First, I will conduct research on developmental stages in children, global education, and handbooks in similar fields. By looking at volunteer handbooks from organizations like The Peace Corps, Make-A-Wish Foundation, Teach for America, and

other nonprofits that work with children, I will be able to get a better idea of what layout, language, and design is most suitable for CCS. After conducting a needs assessment and researching other volunteer handbooks from similar organizations, I will be able to brainstorm, research, and prototype designs and language to use in my handbook. Using Pinterest, I will be able to compile a variety of activities volunteers can refer to when making their lesson plans. I plan to work closely with the CCS Country Director and representatives in Costa Rica. Since CCS has a summer program, I may also develop a questionnaire for volunteers to complete after they finish the program to get more up-to-date feedback. After analyzing these responses and implementing them into the handbook, I will present prototypes and mockups to the client. Finally, I will make necessary changes and transform the document into a website that can be accessed by volunteers internationally. My timeline will look something like this:

April 2015: Application and Proposal Submission

Spring 2015: Obtain Institutional Review Board Approval

May 2015: Start Journal of Progress/Learning Record

Summer 2015: Conduct Research, Create Surveys, Start Activity Bank

Fall 2015: Meet with Seán Biweekly, Update Readers Monthly

October 2015: Send Mockups and Basic Outline to CCS

November 2015: First Draft of Print Project Due; Send to CCS

December 2015: Meet with Entire Committee to Review Draft

December 2015: Send Final Draft of Print Document to CCS

Spring 2016: Meet with Seán Monthly, Update Readers Monthly

February 2016: First Draft of Web Project Due

March 2016: Meet Committee and Make Final Edits on Print and Web Versions

March 2016: Send Final Project to CCS; Start Reflective Essay

April 2016: Presentation of Project at Honors Symposium

Bibliography

I do not have set sources yet, but I plan to use the research I conducted in my HUMN 201 class on play therapy for children in crisis situations as well as research on education in Costa Rica from my WRTC 350 class. I plan to review other handbooks and take notes on layouts, language, and design, and use these observations to make my handbook. I will also be using Pinterest to compile a bank of activities volunteers can refer to when making lesson plans. After I obtain IRB approval, I will be conducting surveys from past volunteers on how to improve their experience and expectations. I might think about also using the resource center at the library to research global education in addition to interviewing professors about making lesson plans.

06/03/15

Proposal Accepted!

Fall 2015 (499B)

September 2015

Met with Sean. Created syllabus for WRTC 499B. Did more research on other volunteer handbooks. Compiled information CCS has on their website already. Assessed needs with Juvel and Jose. Created an outline of chapters. Made of list of potential contacts for sections on Creating a Lesson Plan and the Developmental Stages of Children.

October 2015

Met with Sean. Discussed template ideas. Starting to also develop additional social media materials for CCS (posters, business cards, logo, etc.) in another one of my classes. May or may not include these with the final product.

November 2015

Developed final templates for the handbook. Sent to CCS for feedback. Started Pinterest Activity Bank. Met with advisory board individually to get initial feedback on the template designs.

December 2015

Met with Lisa Schick from the College of Education. Took the following notes from our meeting:

Create a Lesson Plan:

Sheltered Instruction OP--Lesson Plan (LINK TO THIS); ask Sean about getting permission to use those.

Template 4--

Higher Order of thinking Skills

Classroom/Group Management: Higher level of engagement, always having something to do

active listening

Science--all groups, magnets

bilingual books--animals, vocabulary, how do I say this? to the older kids

themes across ages-kids would like it?

Have kids assist with the learning

ask for help-help you learn

Learn students--making name tags bring materials; wear your name tag

--be comfortable as the adult in the learning experience; be the person they want to listen to

--Think Pair Share; can you say the word snake? partner up, address developmental needs, everybody is engaged.

-Teaching vocabulary to older kids, Frayer Model; modified version for the little kids (put this in the handbook).

-Strategies for Teaching English Learners

--allow students plenty of opportunities for them to use their native language so that they can practice this too--establishes trust and respect, no power.

--clock buddies/partners- blank clock with lines, make an appointment with a partner at each point on the clock, practice these words, mix with each other, minute of movement to find partner, pair the older kids with the younger kids

-colored notecards, matching game; five different colors and write names, stickers, two people have the same sticker, find the person who has your color or your sticker, engagement, purpose for moving and talking--you're in control

--have a bell or whistle to get attention--signal to come back together, not raise a hand because you want them to be engaged, a sound they will hear. maraca?

-total physical response (define this)--teaching colors, hold up two colors, point to the red, ways of getting at seeing if they understand without having them speaking it.

-label materials with both english and spanish--good for the little ones

-experiential--teach about culture- bring props, learn how to make them

-keep things authentic as possible--name relevant objects, keep things common language

-visuals to contextualize learning--emotions drawn on faces, put english words, ask kids to help putting it in spanish--older students can do the writing.

-hook onto what they already know so they transfer to english.

-managing multi-age group: have the older kids make the materials for the lesson; sense of contributing while also learning while they're making materials

-relationship building and establishing yourself as a leader.

-bring enough materials for everyone

-dry erase board responses-seeing everybody is responding, they're writing and listening

-songs; popular english music--break down song and what the words mean

--smile a lot--builds trust and safety--everyone smiles in the same language!

--office hours every day 11-12 Mon-Thurs

Also contacts Kristen Shrewsbury from the English Language Learners Department. She gave me some potentially helpful resources:

[The ESL / ELL Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-to-Use Strategies, Tools, and Activities for Teaching English Language Learners of All Levels 1st Edition](#)

[TESOL.org](#) in the Read & Publish section there are recent publications from all aspects of the discipline

[Between Worlds: Access to Second Language Acquisition, 3rd Edition](#) for skill-specific ideas and general second language acquisition information, though from an ESL (rather than EFL) perspective

Spring 2016 (499C)

January 2016

Tried contacting CCS for images but it took several attempts. Haven't been able to get much feedback from them. I am continuing on with the edits to stick to my time frame. Using their content for the first section since they will have access to this on the website too. Created graphics to accompany their text (packing list, typical schedule, etc).

February 2016

Contacted marketing department at CCS for additional branding materials. Decided on making the handbook an interactive digital handbook instead of doing an Atavist version of the handbook because the platform wouldn't add much to the publication. Pre-submission form turned in. Struggling with balancing the different voices of the organization and my writing.

March 2016

Met with Sarah Paynter from Honors to get a story about my project in the Honors Newsletter. First final draft due to the Advisory Board on March 4. Met the following week for edits. Discussed expectations for Reflective Essay. Picked a date and venue for presentation to WRTC faculty.

April 2016

Second final draft due to the advisory board. Met with them and discussed final edits. Signed completion form. Wrote reflective essay and finished up journal of progress. Presenting my project at WRTC Thesis Day on April 18!