

Celebrating Student Ownership in Learning: Utilizing Student Contracts to Develop Global Citizenship in an International Immersion Experience

Description



The goals of the Spanish for Agriculture capstone course are to gain conversational Spanish skills and to learn about tropical agriculture.

While in-country students live with host families, attend Spanish school, and participate in a variety of group activities including farm tours.

Students are required to develop personal learning goals before the immersion trip. The purpose of the learning goals is to shift the onus of learning onto the students. It allows them to focus on their interests instead of pre-established outcomes.

What is a learning contract?



A learning contract is a collaboratively written agreement between a student and a faculty member that delineates what is to be learned, how it will be learned, and how that learning will be evaluated.

The learning goals within the contract must be specific, attainable and result in a visible output product.

Examples from Immersion in Costa Rica

Global Citizenship - Sample Learning Goal

Goal: Learn how to cook a traditional Costa Rican meal.

Action: Students worked in a pair to planned to cook a traditional meal with one of their host mothers. They wrote down the recipe, recorded the entire cooking process, and recreated the meal again at home for family and friends.

Outputs: YouTube video showing the step-by-step cooking process and a blog post with the recipe and a description of how the student and host mother connected through food.

Limitations: Our very full schedule made it hard for students to be home early enough to help cook dinner.



Academic - Sample Learning Goal

Goal: To learn fifty Spanish vocabulary words related to agriculture.

Action: Student took note of new vocabulary words during farm tours, Spanish class and when talking to native speakers.

Output: "Top 50 Agriculture Vocabulary Words" document that was shared on the class blog.

Limitations: Some vocabulary words are specific to Costa Rica, which limits their usefulness in other contexts.



Outcomes



- Learning goals helped students stay on-track with the learning objectives while in-country.
- Contracts made expectations clear in advance.
- Helped students focus on farm tours, Spanish class and group activities.
- Encouraged students to make the most of their time and resources available in-country.

Challenges



- Requires expensive equipment
- Limited internet access
- Student procrastination
- Time constraints
- Extra baggage



Why Use a Learning Contract?



Differentiate Instruction

This pedagogical approach shifts responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student, but at the same time offers an incentive by ensuring success under known conditions.

Recognize Language Gains

Students are often overwhelmed in the foreign language context. Having a specific learning goal to work towards helps to focus students on achieving a specific task, and helps them recognize the language skills they developed.

Teach Global Citizenship

An increase in global awareness and intercultural competence is often an assumed side effect of international travel; the global learning contract represents a systematic approach to guide students toward these goals.