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Inquiry Capstone Project

Passport to Opportunity

Passport to Opportunity emphasizes the importance of travel throughout African-American students through educational activities. In my Capstone project, I had planned to travel to various middle schools in the Philadelphia area, expose them to the benefits of studying abroad, and allow them to research and create their own travel guide about their assigned countries. I came up with the idea to tackle this problem after experiencing what it was like to travel abroad as a teenager of color. At the age of 11, I began teaching myself Japanese. I was not made aware of the Japanese culture through my school but through my own discovery of Japanese entertainment. This newfound determination to teach myself at a young age allowed me to gain crucial learning skills and in the process, I was able to learn about a different lifestyle. After studying abroad, I realized that there was not enough representation in study abroad programs. Although I was young, I understood that if there was no diversity in these programs, then it would not allow other countries to learn about our culture. I chose this project because if students of color can change the statistics, then we can better the relations between cultures through immersion.

Although I wasn't able to fully tackle all of the five core values for this Capstone, I was able to draft how I would do so in the beginning. Starting off with the question, I wanted to answer if through informational activities, would students of color become more enthusiastic about foreign cultures and studying abroad? Through exposure, young children aspire to be

what they find interesting the most. Usually, this concept is proven through hobbies and careers. This question would essentially answer if experiences can also be desired through exposure and would benefit the plan in creating more diversity in abroad programs. For research, I discovered the reason most children of color do not study abroad and the actual percentage of students of color that travel abroad. Although I was not able to take on the rest of the core values, I had planned to collaborate with schools, and parents in order to motivate students to study abroad. Once I would be able to travel to different schools I planned to present my project and allow the students to work on the activity. I prepared before and after surveys for the students to fill out to determine if my activity would motivate them to think about studying abroad. By looking over the data that I would have collected from surveys, I would tackle the core value of reflection.

In order to begin my quest to motivate teens of color to go abroad, I brainstormed possible ways to present my project. At first, I thought about simply inviting various teens to come to the SLA building and I would do the activities there. Although I came to the conclusion this method would only allow me to expose already interested students instead of students who have little to no knowledge on the subject. Then I thought to list multiple neighborhood middle schools and take the time to contact each school to see if I would be able to conduct a one-hour activity in a selected classroom. First, I had to create an activity plan. I decided that the students would first take an introductory survey, break up into groups, be assigned a country, be required to research their country, and come up with a travel guide for the mini abroad fair that would take place after their time is up. The abroad fair would allow the groups to travel around their classrooms and how their peers present their country's

culture, tourist sites, and other information that they came across. Then after the activity, they would take an exit survey. I planned to travel to around eight schools in order to collect data on a wider scale. After coming up with an activity plan, I created a survey to see what schools would be interested to participate in my capstone. I had my mother share the survey on Facebook, and I began drafting email templates to send to the schools' principal and teachers.

While the Coronavirus was the biggest obstacle to my project, I faced some issues trying to lay out my plan for the activity. At first, I was planning on just giving a presentation regarding my experience and discussing the benefits of traveling abroad. I realized through my advisor that it would have to be a little more interactive. Ultimately when coming up with the plan, another problem I had was trying to keep the activity under an hour. To wrap up my project, I had planned an event where students and parents interested in studying abroad would attend to receive information from various companies and from a panel. I initially struggled to research where the event would take place, who to contact, and the logistics of the event. Due to the event being canceled, I could not use any resources. Although to make my logo, I did use PicsArt.

For my Study Abroad Fair, I came to the conclusion that SLA's common area would be the best place for it to be held. The area provided enough space to set up information tables, a stage, and an audience that I believe would be appropriate for the event. I first receive confirmation about using the space from Mr. Lehmann, which would essentially begin my plan to email study abroad programs for this event. For my junior year, I had interned at the Japan-America Society of Greater Philadelphia. During my time there, they had connections

to multiple study abroad programs that I would inquire about since I have good connections with them. After coming into connection with these companies, I would ask if they would be interested in supporting my project by essentially setting up a table at my fair. Alongside the information tables, I would have also contacted various individuals to talk about studying abroad on the panel.

My capstone started off very slow. This was because, for a long time, I pondered over the direction that I could take the project in. I endlessly thought of better ways I could present the project, and present it in a way that would effectively inspire teens of color to travel abroad. Although I wasn't able to start traveling to different schools, I am proud of the plan that I came up with. I believe that my activity plan embodied my mission and also the core values. The activity would have allowed the students to get a peek into the SLA culture. They would research the country, collaborate with their peers, present their findings, and then reflect on what they've learned. I was proud that I was able to come up with a project that would have allowed students to expose themselves to different cultures by themselves, not just by the presentation.

In my experience working on this capstone, I learned that the sooner the better. Although I did have trouble figuring out how I would map the project, I did find myself procrastinating and not making time to work on the Capstone. When planning an event you especially have to work earlier than others if you plan to invite other companies to participate. I found that companies create their schedules in advance, and if you want to be able to grab their presence, then it would be important to contact them months before an event. If you pitch to the company, then all logistics have to be already sorted out. I realized

this fact while I was when I was preparing to travel to other schools while also drafting out my event. The only fault was that it was 4 months before the event date. If it weren't for COVID-19, then I would have found myself in a very tight position, and maybe the companies I had reached out to would not be able to partake in my Study Abroad Fair.

If I could do this project over again, I would have begun brainstorming my capstone way earlier if I had known that it would have taken that long. If I had brainstormed earlier, then I would have rushed the process to contact the companies and schools to have a more spaced-out timeline. SLA is a better place due to my determination to finish. Throughout my 3 years of attending, I have created a safe environment for my peers. I feel like I have aided in helping the students at SLA feel comfortable and laugh. Only through SLA was I able to become my unapologetic self. This has allowed me to represent SLA everywhere I go. I make sure that I keep my head up in any space and tackle any problem head-on.