

Team Monterey 2007 Evaluation Report

Prepared by Yuniya Khan
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Background

The concept of the Team Monterey program was created by Yuniya Khan, a GSIPS student who spent the summer of 2006 in El Salvador as an intern with La Coordinadora. Recognizing that La Coordinadora's projects and philosophy were closely aligned with MIIS's programs, she conceived the idea of MIIS students going to El Salvador to work with La Coordinadora in areas that would enhance their programs of study. In addition, this concept called for the integration of all of MIIS's schools and programs, creating a team of students with varying backgrounds and fields of study.

At the beginning of the fall 2006 semester, the idea was pitched to Ed Laurance, Dean of GSIPS, who immediately embraced it and set it in motion. It was decided that the January 2007 winterim term—January 1 – 22, 2007—would be the goal for the inauguration of the program. Per Dean Laurance's request, Ms. Khan wrote a concept paper (see Appendix) outlining the objectives and goals of the program, and also created a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the benefits to the MIIS community as well as to La Coordinadora. The basic goals and objectives were outlined as follows:

- Program goal: MIIS students' knowledge and skill base is expanded through international experiential learning
 - Objective 1: Students develop and enhance practical skills, such as grant-writing, evaluation practices and teaching English, in the context of La Coordinadora's existing projects
 - Objective 2: Students perform needed services that help to expand La Coordinadora's development work in the communities
 - Objective 3: Build and encourage teamwork, particularly across MIIS schools and programs
 - Objective 4: Create a prototype for future programs of this scope and purpose
- Highlights of projected outcomes are as follows:
 - Students develop and enhance marketable skills
 - A solid relationship with La Coordinadora is built, creating the foundation for future teams and goals
 - MIIS's name and reputation grows in stature

With these goals and objectives in mind, Ms. Khan began conversations with the Foundation for Self-Sufficiency in Central America (FSSCA), a US-based non-governmental organization that partners with and funds many of La Coordinadora's projects. In addition, FSSCA handles all the logistics related to US delegations and volunteers visiting and working with La Coordinadora's projects.

The program took place January 2 – 22, 2007, with 14 students and two faculty, including Dean Laurance who stayed for the first four days, and Adele Negro, an adjunct T&I professor who arrived two days before Dean Laurance's departure, and stayed for the remainder of Team Monterey's time in El Salvador. The original concept of the faculty member's role was to provide leadership and guidance for the team as a whole, and to foster cooperation and teamwork in the group. (See Faculty Job Description in the Appendix). However, as Professor Negro

reported, this was a challenging task to accomplish, as the job description did not necessarily fit with the realities and dynamics of this first group of Team Monterey participants. This theme of expectations versus reality was common in the Team Monterey experience, as the evaluation report will demonstrate.

Purpose of Evaluation and Report

Because this endeavor was the first of its kind for the Monterey Institute, and because the intent is to establish it as a permanent offering for students, it was necessary to conduct an evaluation to identify the areas of strength and weakness in the program, aspects worth keeping and those that should be discarded, and recommendations for future teams working with La Coordinadora in El Salvador. The Team Monterey program holds great potential for the Monterey Institute, its students, and La Coordinadora. A thorough and comprehensive evaluation process can play a crucial role in helping Team Monterey to evolve into the most dynamic and rewarding program possible.

This evaluation seeks to capture the positive and negative experiences of the Team Monterey participants, particularly with regard to living and working arrangements, pre-departure preparation, working with La Coordinadora, and the personal and professional value of the experience. This report will summarize these experiences and offer recommendations for the continued growth and expansion of the Team Monterey program.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

As the purpose of the evaluation was to capture the range of experiences of each of the participants and to determine the aspects that worked well and those that did not, a two-tiered procedure was used. First, a survey was administered via the "surveymonkey" website. This survey contained 47 questions covering pre-departure training and preparation, housing arrangements, living conditions, project activities, overall experience, teamwork, and personal and professional benefits. Ten participants, or two-thirds of the group, completed the survey.

Additionally, participants were given an opportunity to verbally express their thoughts and feelings about the experience through a focus group. Due to issues related to time and availability, it was not possible to conduct one focus group with all the participants. Instead, it was split into two sessions, with about half of the group attending each session, and led by two different facilitators. This was not an ideal setup for the purposes of gathering the most accurate data possible. However, no other options were available. Each focus group facilitator, both Monterey Institute students with no connection to the Team Monterey program, was given the same set of questions, and coached on the types of information to extract from the group. In addition, one note-taker/co-facilitator was employed for both groups, adding an element of consistency and continuity to the reports. Professor Negro and the two co-directors of the program, Yuniya Khan and Heather Van Nurden, participated in these focus group discussions. However, they were asked to leave the session before the group addressed questions related to program leadership.

It should be noted that this evaluation is, by necessity, a one-sided process in the sense that it only evaluates the Team Monterey participants' experience, and not that of La Coordinadora or the communities in which the team worked and lived. In the future, plans should be made to include the feedback of the program's partners and constituents in El Salvador, as this is an important aspect in the development and re-creation of the Team Monterey program and vision.

Findings

The results of the surveys and focus groups are summarized here under the following general headings:

- Pre-departure training and preparation
- Housing arrangements
- Living conditions
- Project activities
- Teamwork
- Overall experience
- Personal/professional value
- Overall summary: what worked, and what did not work
- Recommendations

The descriptions and summaries in each section are based on the combined results from both survey and focus groups.

SECTION I: PRE-DEPARTURE

Incentives: Why Go?

The Team Monterey program was a new initiative at the Monterey Institute, and therefore carried with it a number of unknowns. Despite this, 14 students applied to the program. What were the incentives for these students? What drew them to this concept in the first place?

There were a number of common themes with regard to incentives. First, the very fact that this was a new experience—something different—emerged as a primary motivation for students. The unknown was seen to be enticing, as was the fact that this was a pilot program and an opportunity to work in a developing country. The second most cited reason was the opportunity to work in and practice Spanish. Other attractions cited by students were:

- The opportunity receive credit/waiver for Spanish
- Putting classroom concepts into practice in a real-life setting
- The opportunity to practice and hone translation and interpretation skills
- Acquiring solid field experience; enhance professional experience
- Enhancing DPPI – Ecuador experience
- The chance to work with a local NGO, as opposed to an international NGO in the field
- Gaining IPS elective credit

Expectations: What would the experience be like?

Several team meetings were held before departure, and the issue of expectations was addressed in all of them. The Dean and directors of the program described the nature of the projects—in as detailed a manner as was possible at the time—as well as the living conditions that the team would face. But was this enough? Did students feel they were sufficiently prepared for this endeavor? Were their expectations closely aligned with reality?

A few students reported that they did not know what to expect, or arrived in-country without any expectations at all. On the other hand, most of the participants stated that they had expected more efficient organization, and better communication between Team Monterey as a group and La Coordinadora. One person expressed that, considering how much each student paid to participate, the program should have been better organized. It was also expressed that, because of the lack of clear communication between the two organizations, everything related to project activities felt as if it were being started from scratch, as if no prior communication had occurred. Other expectations included:

- More work and project-related activities in general, i.e., the team did not work all the time, as was expected
- A landscape similar to the American countryside

Training and Preparation: Was the pre-departure training sufficient?

During the team meetings and information sessions, efforts were made to build a sense of team spirit among the participants, provide information and training on El Salvador's culture, and expectations about working with La Coordinadora and living in rural communities. The team also worked on creating its own mission statement and developing a corporate image of the desired outcomes of this endeavor. But did the team feel sufficiently prepared before departure? In retrospect, was there enough information beforehand to help the team to live and work effectively and efficiently once in-country? Were the goals and objectives of the program even clear prior to departure?

The survey showed that most students did not feel sufficiently prepared. While 28% responded "Not sure" to statements about the effectiveness of the pre-departure training, 48% disagreed completely. In other words, more than three-quarters of the group felt that the results of the training were either inconclusive at best, or ineffective at worst. One quarter of the group, however, completely agreed that the training was effective and did help to prepare them to live and work in El Salvador. These findings imply that the training provided did not go a long enough way in preparing most students. The following issues and questions arise from these findings:

- What caused the difference between students who did not feel prepared and those who did?
- Is this difference a reflection of individual levels of flexibility in the face of uncertainty and unknown terrain?
- To what extent could the training have been improved, considering the fact that this was Team Monterey's first experience?

Pre-knowledge: What did students wish they had known before departure?

In the survey, participants were asked to list the top three facts they wished they had known before arriving in El Salvador. The most commonly listed points were as follows:

- Projects – students reported that they would have liked to have had more information regarding La Coordinadora’s projects, and those with which the Team Monterey participants would be involved.
- Team Members – more indepth information about team members’ individual core competencies, skills and personality traits would have been very helpful in facilitating more efficient teamwork.
- Information about El Salvador and its communities – understanding, for example, how the civil war impacted communities, and the role of the FMLN in community development

Pre-knowledge: Which sources of information were most helpful?

Much of the information about Team Monterey

Summary of PRE-DEPARTURE Section

The first participants of the Team Monterey program chose to get involved for a number of reasons. Most common was to gain field experience, practice and work in Spanish, and participate in a brand new MIIS endeavor. Students, for the most part, however, did not feel sufficiently prepared for this undertaking. They also expected more organization and communication, and less confusion with regard to project areas and processes. The fact that this was all new territory for MIIS and for Team Monterey played a significant role in these developments.

II: LIVING IN EL SALVADOR

Team Monterey participants lived with local families in the community of San Hilario, in Tierra Blanca. These families were hand-chosen by FSSCA and trained in the tasks and activities involved in caring for American visitors. This was the first time that San Hilario had hosted a group of this size, and many families went out of their way to make room for the team. Most families hosted two members, but some had enough space for three and four team members. The families provided three meals per day for each of their guests, and also took care of laundry needs when necessary.

The community of San Hilario is located in one of the poorest regions of El Salvador. Off the beaten track and surrounded by dirt roads, it is about five miles of dusty, pothole-filled road to the closest paved street. Most of the families live on under \$100 per month, and all raise some form of livestock or animal: cows, chickens, turkeys, pigs, etc.

This section examines the experience that Team Monterey participants had living with families in an under-resourced community.

Arrival and Culture shock: What were some of the biggest surprises?

Despite the “warnings” and other descriptions about the types of communities in which the team would be living, there were still many surprises that the team members encountered. These surprises fell into two general categories: living conditions and group/team dynamics.

With regard to the living conditions, the reality of the latrines, for example, came as one of the biggest initial shocks. Even though the use of latrines was stressed in pre-departure discussions, actually seeing and using them was quite a jolt for some. In addition, the remoteness of the community was surprising for some team members, as was its small size. Other surprising and unpleasant factors: cockroaches in the latrines; livestock and other animals roaming inside and outside the houses; chickens (“I would pen them up”); the heat (“...my power to turn down the sun unfortunately does not translate south of the Rio Grande...”).

Participants acknowledged that the living conditions made it challenging to work efficiently and to maintain a positive attitude at times. However, according to many, this also contributed to a growing understanding of the realities of working in “less than adequate” conditions, and thus was an integral part of the learning experience. The importance of living under the same conditions as the people with whom they were working, made this experience all the more real. Other comments related to the living conditions included:

- The surroundings bring poverty and post-conflict effects into stark reality
- “It was a very effective wake-up call about how the rest of the world lives—absolutely critical for anyone working in this field.”
- “Excellent way to understand the people when we live like them.”

The aspects of the living conditions that team members found the most agreeable were:

- Neighbors – other community members in the area
- The culture
- Hammocks

Housing: What was it like to live with families?

According to the survey report, all the participants found that the housing arrangements were an important element in the overall experience. One hundred percent of the respondents completely agreed with this statement. For some, the the homestays served as a welcome daily diversion: “If it had not been for the homestay as a respite from heat, brain drain, and the group dynamic, Team Monterey may have been unbearable for me.” The specific aspects of the housing arrangements that the team members found the most agreeable are as follows, in order of agreeability:

- Living with family members
- Having meals provided

- Sharing sleeping quarters with other team members
- The food
- Laundry service

One aspect of the housing arrangements that team members found the most challenging was the perceived inconvenience of the team's daily schedule. Some members slept in the same room as their host families, or were required to walk through the family sleeping quarters to get to theirs. On most days, however, team members arrived at their houses late in the evening, for reasons related to the schedule and project activities, and had to pass by sleeping family members to access their own sleeping area. This felt intrusive and disrespectful from some participants' point of view.

Improvements to the housing arrangements that team members would implement include:

- Grouping students in closer proximity to one another, rather than clusters set far apart from each other.
- Provide more scheduled time for building relationships with family members. This may help to minimize the feeling of constant imposition that some team members experienced.
- Provide fans for everyone

PROJECT AREAS AND ACTIVITIES

Despite some initial confusion over project areas, the members of Team Monterey participated in and completed a number of projects under La Coordinadora. The entire group was involved in conducting a census of the community of San Hilario, which required going from house to house to interview residents about socioeconomic issues. The group also worked on creating a map of the community, which involved measuring streets and lots with tape measures and lengths of rope. Besides these two all-inclusive projects, several others were conducted in smaller teams, with some overlap in student participation:

- Environmental assessment of mangrove reforestation project
- Project design and documentation Handbook
- Assessment of community and organizational English learning needs
- Spanish/English translation and interpretation assignments
- Development of business plan for local shrimp farm cooperative
- Assessment of La Coordinadora's conflict resolution projects and impact

For more details about these projects, please refer to the Team Monterey Comprehensive Report.

Project Outcomes: Were projects completed to satisfaction?

Most of the team reported feeling high levels of satisfaction with the outcome of the three projects on which they each worked the most. (57% agreed with these statements, and 37% strongly agreed). However, 7% answered "Not sure" to statements about satisfaction. In addition,

most participants felt satisfied with their own performance in these project areas: 57% agreed with similar statements, while 40% strongly agreed.

A number of factors contributed to the overall sense of satisfaction among the team members. They include:

- Working with other team members
- Availability of transportation
- Language abilities
- “Availability of other stakeholders. Namely, directors, teachers and students at the school [where the English learning needs assessment was conducted].”
- “Guidance from on-site linguist specialist,” (read: Professor Adele Negro)
- Assistance from community members

Just as there were factors that contributed to the overall success of the projects, there were also a number that detracted from them. The most cited included:

- Cultural differences
- Miscommunication and misunderstandings
- Working with other team members
- Shortage of laptops, as well as insufficient wireless access points at the La Coordinadora headquarters
- Getting a late start on projects, due to the initial confusion, which may have negatively impacted the team’s ability to work efficiently

Along the same lines, participants related some of the factors they found most frustrating about working on the projects:

- General group dynamics
- Cultural differences and expectations
- Other people’s concept of time
- Working with other team members

Issues relating to computer equipment and internet access, and sufficient office space in which to work, were also some of the common areas of improvement that team members put forward most fervently.

As the group began to adjust to the difficult realities, some members reported that they were taken aback at the level of complaining that took place in the group, as well as the “lack of professionalism” on the part of team members. The primary source of complaint, apart from some aspects of the living conditions, was the inability to begin work on projects soon enough, and the lack of clarity surrounding project areas and tasks.

At this point in the focus group, the subject of the first week’s activities came into question. For many, the number of seemingly unrelated field trips and activities came as an enormous surprise, and, based on the comments, did not make sense within the context and purpose of Team Monterey. These “extra” activities included trips to San Salvador with Chencho Alas, the

founder of FSSCA, and “solidarity projects” such as planting mangroves in Isla de Mendez. As some members mentioned, the team seemed to be following the general trajectory of a “traditional” delegation, and as such, some of the activities were “inappropriate,” and seemed to fit more with a “tourist schedule.” Because most of the team had expected to begin working on projects right away, all these activities detracted from the team’s sense of mission and purpose. One person commented that FSSCA may have significantly influenced the first week’s itinerary, since they were more accustomed to working with traditional delegations, and were therefore treating the team as such. Still other team members reflected that the issue was not the activities in themselves, but rather, the timing and placement within the schedule. Some of the trips were helpful in terms of learning about the country of El Salvador and its history and culture, but they would have been more effective had they been more spread out over the three weeks, rather than concentrated in the first week. In addition to the activities, some participants felt that the amount of meetings during the first week were excessive, especially since most of them did not seem to yield much besides a growing frustration and anger.

Another salient issue that arose in the focus group discussion concerning the non-project-related activities was that of the solidarity projects. Some participants expressed surprise at the nature of these projects, as they had expected them to be activities conducted in conjunction and in partnership with local community members. Instead, they were activities performed solely by the Team Monterey participants; the community members either were not present, or simply looked on while the Team worked. This caused some of the members to feel as if they were “on display.” Some participants also felt that the term “solidarity” was very misleading, as in reality, the activity did not directly involve any of the local residents. Therefore, most of the team did not experience the “solidarity” that they expected from the solidarity projects.

Working with La Coordinadora: What were the strengths and areas for improvement?

Not only was the Team Monterey experience in El Salvador a brand new undertaking for the Monterey Institute, but it was also a new experience for La Coordinadora. Venturing into this new territory was not without its share of challenges and complexities, and the participants of Team Monterey had much to say about this. It should be reiterated once again here that an evaluation of La Coordinadora’s experience with Team Monterey has not been done; this is therefore a largely one-sided report. As a result, the reading of this report, and the following sections, should be done with this fact in mind.

One of the most common and salient sentiments shared by the team members was that FSSCA, and by extension, La Coordinadora, did not treat them as skilled and experienced professionals who were there to conduct professional work. According to comments made in the survey and focus groups, the team struggled to a significant degree with the feeling that they were just another “delegation,” and that they were being received and treated as such. Participants made comments such as, “They didn’t know what to expect from a group like this,” “They didn’t have the cultural/linguistic points of reference to deal with us,” and, “They didn’t really know how to communicate with the group.”

Other drawbacks to working with La Coordinadora included:

- Disorganization – many team members cited this as a major drawback in working with La Coordinadora. This included:
 - Lack of documentation about projects, which could have been extremely helpful in facilitating activities and tasks
 - Having to wait for a long time in between meetings with them. “The La Coordinadora body has people that, once we started talking to them, were helpful in identifying needs, but it was a long process getting to these people.”
 - La Coordinadora was very slow in responding to and initiating with the team
- Poor communication – for many, this was a particularly frustrating aspect of working with La Coordinadora. This lack of communication took on a number of forms:
 - General unavailability of key players in the organization to provide clear direction and guidance to the team
 - “There was a major miscommunication about our role there so it took them time to figure us out and let us know how they wanted to form a working relationship.”
 - La Coordinadora did not communicate their existing knowledge about issues related to specific projects initiated by the team. When the team encountered multiple setbacks, and discovered that La Coordinadora had been aware of and anticipating them all along, these team members experienced extreme frustration and a sense of futility with regard to their project. In the words of one participant, “They did not tell us that they knew about the problems with our projects until the end of our staying there. We could have helped the community with another project. It felt like we wasted our time.” Another participant noted, “They should have helped us rather than waiting to see if we fail.”

In addition, two participants questioned the continued choice of La Coordinadora as Team Monterey’s primary partner in El Salvador. The option of working with other organizations was suggested, partly because, as one participant put it, “[La Coordinadora] has extremely poor relations with the government, which prevents the region from getting support on a larger scale. Working too closely with La Coordinadora could prevent some future groups from working on other non-La Coordinadora-related projects in the region that might be better suited to the interests and abilities of MIIS students.”

Still other participants offered comments in defense of La Coordinadora. One participant stated, “It is false that all American or large international NGOs perform at the same level. It’s unfair, and unrealistic to assume that La Coordinadora would follow all best practices in the administration and documentation of their projects. It would be great if MPAers provided some capacity building assistance to La Coordinadora. However, this should be done in a participatory fashion, not an accusatory or imposing manner.”

There were also definite benefits to working with La Coordinadora. The most commonly cited benefit was the fact that La Coordinadora knew their communities well, and some participants were able to access networks and groups through La Coordinadora, which helped them in the execution of their projects. In addition, the fact that an established infrastructure already existed allowed some participants to structure their projects accordingly. All in all, however, the connection to the communities was the most important benefit of working with La Coordinadora.

TEAMWORK

Did Team Monterey exhibit teamwork and cooperation?

The response to statements about teamwork and cooperation was mixed. Some participants expressed an overall positive experience, while others expressed frustration and impatience with the group. Seventy percent of survey respondents agreed that Team Monterey exhibited teamwork and cooperation, and that their experience as a member of the team was a good one. However, 30% expressed uncertainty or complete disagreement with these statements.

Despite these mixed responses, participants agreed on certain assets the team possessed:

- **Diversity:** the experiences and backgrounds of each participant was seen as a great asset to the team as a whole. In addition, the diversity of programs, interests, specializations and knowledge represented in the group was considered a significant benefit to the group.
- **Persistence:** the team's desire to hit the ground running was a definite asset, as it allowed the group to complete their projects—once they achieved a clear understanding of the tasks—in a very short period of time. Some participants remarked on the team's ability to “buckle down” and get to work, even amidst the initial confusion.
- **Skills:** “We had a plethora of talented students and knowledge to do it.” Language abilities and previous international experience were also seen as benefits.

There were many factors, however, that team members considered liabilities. These included:

- **Complaining:** this was the most common criticism that the participants stated about the team. “Some people could not stop complaining. They knew that the conditions would be difficult but they kept complaining and sometimes insulted the locals.” “The complaining and inability to suck it up and do the work at hand.” Bad attitudes and immaturity were also cited as common liabilities.
- **Lack of team cohesiveness:** Some members stated that the fact that they did not know each other well before working together contributed to the challenging team dynamics and “bickering” that occurred in the group. This was also due to the fact that, “many of us were not used to each other's personalities prior to seeing ‘the worst’ of each other in such a difficult environment.” Similarly, “our inability to be flexible and make allowances for each other, and our unwillingness to accept each other's weaknesses, concepts of time, and personal choices about when/where/how to work” acted as major setbacks for the group.
- **Insensitivity/inflexibility:** “Team members with little to no NGO experience expecting the textbook definitions of program administration. Team members that were culturally insensitive and at times offensive, bordering on racist.” Again, “people being unprofessional” was a major contributing factor.

Based on these responses, participants felt that the team did exhibit a notable level of cooperation and teamwork, especially in light of the challenging circumstances. The fact that they were able to complete all their projects within the assigned time period was considered proof of this fact. On the other hand, however, the team's liabilities and shortcomings were quite significant, some of which seemed to stem from the team's lack of intimate knowledge of one another.

LEADERSHIP

Did the Team Monterey leaders provide sound leadership and guidance?

The team struggled with locating the one person/place from which to receive relevant and specific direction. According to some, this factor also contributed to the team's sense of instability and insecurity while traversing through this new territory. Several team members spoke of the need for a faculty "go-to" person, someone like Dean Laurance, to help with decision-making and group processing. The perceived lack of a strong authority figure caused some to feel adrift and somewhat lost, particularly in the days immediately following Dean Laurance's departure. Because of this, some members felt that it was a "bad decision" for the Dean to leave when he did.

In general, however, the factor that students felt the most strongly about was the need for more sharply defined leadership and faculty roles. The lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities caused a significant amount of confusion within the team. In addition, some participants commented that the leaders—particularly those who were students—did not exhibit sufficient enough leadership skills. These participants remarked that future student leaders should adhere to a stricter application process, and should have management experience as a condition for taking on this responsibility.

Other comments about the leadership performance in Team Monterey include:

- The leaders did not create enough personal space within which team members could relax and relieve stress; participants said they felt "restricted by the leaders" during free time. "Some conflicts could have been prevented with a little bit of alone time."
- Team members said they sometimes felt they were being treated like children.
- There was a lack of "cohesion" between the two student leaders, which led to some confusion as to who, exactly, was the leader. One student leader was able to be more firm with the team than the other, which helped to provide some badly-needed structure in light of all the uncertainty. As one participant put it, "We needed someone to tell us FIRMLY what to do." The differences in approach of the two student leaders, and the perceived "disconnect" between the two, caused the "softer" of the two to be "ostracized" by the team, and therefore difficult to follow.

The faculty member present also reported experiencing uncertainty and ambiguity. The Faculty Member Job Description proved to be unrealistic and irrelevant, particularly due to the lack of sufficient prior knowledge about general expectations and projects. As it turned out, "I did not feel that I had the adequate authority to make decisions, since [the team members] were my peers and colleagues, figuring things out together. Though I had 'official' authority, I didn't feel like I had the role of an authority figure. Without much history, I felt handicapped." In addition, this faculty member's role evolved into more of a role for language development, than for "sticking up for the group or leadership."

In summary, the Team Monterey leaders' performance was inconsistent at best, and ineffective at worst. This definitely contributed to the team's overall sense of confusion and uncertainty.

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PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL VALUE

Did the Team Monterey program contribute to the participants' educational and career goals?

The majority of survey respondents (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that their overall knowledge, skills and abilities improved as a result of this program. This was particularly the case in the following areas:

- Language abilities
- Evaluation (data generation) skills
- Knowledge of development work
- Cross-cultural communication skills
- Knowledge of the culture of El Salvador

In addition, 80% strongly agreed that the program was a worthwhile experience, and 70% agreed that the program was successful, overall. Forty percent strongly agreed and 40% agreed that the Team Monterey experience helped them to refine their career goals.

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

What worked well in this first Team Monterey experience?

Despite the significant challenges that participants faced during the Team Monterey experience, there were a number of factors that worked well and that made the overall experience worthwhile. Team members' sense of humor helped to diffuse some of the tension and conflict, and the ability to learn and develop patience also helped to create a more positive environment. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the team at times suffered from conflictual relationships, some members expressed appreciation for the chance to get to know and work with other members. This experience served to generate higher levels of respect for one another and for MIIS.

Other factors that participants felt worked well included:

- The “natural lab in learning the language”
- Developing skills that can be used in the future, such as conducting needs assessments.
- “There was something for everyone to take away from this experience.”
- Putting El Salvador on one's internal map, with real people and real communities, making that part of the world a reality.
- Being able to put skills learned in translation/interpretation into real practice
- Generating a “nice foundation” for future groups to expand upon
- “It was frustrating, and it took time, but everyone came out with a project”
- The Team Monterey presentation at MIIS—“It was amazing to see what everybody had done, and it is impressive to see what came out of it”
- Learning how to respond when things don't happen according to plan, and learning to let things happen as they do particularly since it is impossible to control everything.
- Working as part of a smaller group—apart from the large group—which helped participants to be more focused and efficient.

- Figuring out the group's Salvadoran counterparts. "The essence is to identify these counterparts so that we could expeditiously work together and they could designate projects, goals, etc."

What were some specific and personal difficulties or low points?

Participants were given an opportunity to highlight some of the challenges that were personal to them. These were some of the factors that offer insight into the personal experiences of each participant. They included:

- Trash day – a failed attempt to conduct a community clean-up day in San Hilario. "Trash day was frustrating because many people in the community didn't help and spent the time watching us."
- Being pulled into the politics of the group:
 - "I was unhappy that I allowed myself to get sucked into the complaining about the latrine situation. Although it was unpleasant at times, I knew I would survive and should not have gone along with the amount of complaining that was occurring."
 - "Because of the high amount of complaints, I stopped caring when people were sick. I did not know who was just complaining and who was really sick. I hate feeling this way, but unfortunately, I did."
- Poor health: "Getting so sick kind of cast a negative light on the whole experience, and made me feel like I couldn't accomplish as much as I wanted to by being a better/more positive team member."
- Being unable to discuss the challenging situations and group dynamics in a constructive way.

What were some specific and personal highlights?

Most of the highlights that participants noted were realized after the fact. That is, once all the projects were completed and Team Monterey 2007 was history, it was much easier to look back and notice the successes. Some of the highlights cited by team members included:

- Releasing newly hatched sea turtles into the ocean
- "Seeing the end results (reports and presentation) after seeing the possibility of it all crashing."
- Interacting on a daily basis with community members.
- Improvement in Spanish language skills, and the presence of fluent team members to provide encouragement and acknowledgement of language growth.
- "Knowing that our project established a very solid foundation for future relationships/projects in El Salvador specifically, and other countries in general."
- The trip to Perquin, home to El Salvador's only civil war museum. This trip was "very sad but useful to understand the culture."
- Even though Trash Day was a major low point for many, one person stated that it was encouraging to see many little children chipping in and picking up trash bags bigger than themselves. "It was hopeful to see them taking steps to improve their own community."
- "Seeing the completion of all the projects, especially after we had such a hard time getting started."

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What were the most valuable lessons learned as a result of the Team Monterey program?

The focus groups occurred approximately one month after returning to the US. With some space now existing between the Team Monterey experience and the time of the focus groups, participants were asked to describe their thoughts and emotions about the experience from the perspective of some distance. In general, members stated that they felt very good about the experience, and had developed a stronger sense of self-confidence. Two members who were considering the Peace Corps stated that they felt more confident in their ability to overcome challenges and perform well under difficult circumstances. The experience created an “I can do it!” attitude for those considering the Peace Corps. According to one participant, “I had no idea how I would fare, but I came out better than I thought.”

Participants also commented that they learned more than they expected about the culture of El Salvador, about field work and about living in a developing country. In addition, of great value were the lessons about how to be more patient, and “how to live like most of the people on the planet.”

What could be done differently to improve the Team Monterey experience?

In response to this question, the majority of team members stated “more research” as something they would do differently. Most felt that this would have prepared them better for the realities and conditions of living and working in El Salvador, and with La Coordinadora. Secondly, participants said that they would work on achieving more clarity around project areas and activities before arriving in El Salvador. This could be accomplished through brainstorming activities through which specific ideas for projects would be developed for presentation to La Coordinadora.

Other related comments included:

- Spend some time exploring La Coordinadora’s website
- Conduct more research on the communities in which the team would be living and working
- Do as much organizing and planning of project activities beforehand as possible
- Work to develop more realistic expectations among the team members, and make sure that they are clearly communicated to one another

Along these lines, the need for more clarity with regard to *process* was also stressed. Participants emphasized the need to understand how to go about initiating projects, setting up meetings with La Coordinadora, etc. Having a solid grasp of the “how” would go a very long way. In addition, the academic requirements—both during and after the program—should be spelled out more clearly. In one participant’s words, “The IPS and Language departments must come up with a consensus regarding requirements for credits... There was no consistency.” In other words, students need to understand what is required of them in as specific terms as possible. This would add to a greater sense of organization within the team.

Some participants also expressed that the ratio of women to men (12:2) created an unhealthy dynamic in the group, and that every effort should be made to form a more balanced group in the future.

Other recommendations for future teams included factors related to building relationships and community:

- Allot more time for relationship building, as relationships are so central in Latin American culture
- The first week should be dedicated to spending time with families, communities and La Coordinadora members, instead of being gone so much on other trips and activities. This would allow more time to bond with families, which would help to alleviate some of the feelings of intrusion and imposition with which some members struggled.
- The first day's meetings should consist of dialogues and informal conversations, rather than formal presentations.

CONCLUSION

This Team Monterey endeavor was the first of its kind at the Monterey Institute. For many of the participants, it was a bittersweet experience through which they learned a great deal about themselves, about teamwork, about the realities of development work and about working in a cross-cultural setting. These are the so-called "soft skills" that are crucial to effective development work, and therefore should not be underestimated.