

# Developing Worldly Students through International Service Learning

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4/28/2017

CSU campuses partner with global communities to increase student engagement on campus and in the real world



Intercambio Program participant speaks to locals at a health fair in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2016. Photo courtesy of Intercambio Program at San Jose State University.

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When Andrew Cheng came back from an international service learning trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, he found that his experience collaborating with the town's locals had transformed him into a stronger student with an increased confidence for leadership at San José State University.

"The Intercambio Program was arguably one of the most impactful experiences of my life," said Cheng. "I returned from Oaxaca with a rejuvenated appreciation for compassion and empathy towards others and recognized the importance of working with under resourced communities back home."

The Intercambio Program is sponsored by SJSU's Associated Students and is one of the numerous international service learning programs offered in the CSU. International service learning programs are a form of study abroad, focusing on contemporary global issues and

emphasizing human connection. Students work with local communities and collaborate across national and cultural borders on regional challenges. Issues such as injustice, inequality and power are some global topics confronted by students.

Cheng recently completed his graduate course at SJSU and is now working as a program coordinator at a non-profit hospital, where he works to address the diversity gap in the healthcare workforce. Through the Intercambio Program, Cheng, along with 20 other SJSU students, hosted health education school presentations, participated in a health fair for local women and children and worked on the reforestation projects in Oaxaca. Students stayed with host families, where they fully immersed in the Mexican culture during the week-long program. The one-of-a-kind experience enhanced Cheng's perspective on global issues while inspiring him to work with developing communities.

"The Intercambio Program was a huge collaboration between two different communities from two different parts of the world," said Cheng. "The thoughtfulness, compassion and respect for each other's culture were ever-present from beginning to end."

Considered as a high-impact practice by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>), service learning programs, sometimes called community-based learning, are an instructional strategy that gives students real-world experience related to their field of study. CSU campuses partner with communities to provide students the opportunity to apply their knowledge to solve issues in a real-world setting. By extending classroom instruction to the community, service learning programs are proven to have direct correlation to student success while also preparing them for work and life post-graduation.



Isis Quan, recent Cal State Fullerton history graduate,

got her start in her career as a public history professional at the Homestead Museum when she participated in a service learning program working with a Berlin delegation. Quan worked with Lange Tafel, a Berlin-based non-profit, to organize Long Table Los Angeles (<https://longtablelosangeles.org/>), an oral history festival. Organizing the festival

sharpened Quan's skills in event planning, public relations and historical preservation. Her experience made her a great candidate for her job now, as she assists with history-themed event planning and history education at the Homestead Museum.

International service learning programs are important to the CSU, with a learn-by-doing approach that supports the university's philosophy to promote student engagement. Students become more connected with what they have learned in the classroom through hands-on practice. In turn, they may develop a clearer sense of direction on their interests and career path, resulting in powerful effects on their time-to-degree.

According to a 2016 international service learning evaluation conducted by San José State, 100 percent of students said that their trip enhanced the skills they need for academic success

and improved their cultural competence, communication skills and problem-solving abilities.

"Students come back with a new sense of purpose, a new sense of community, and new realization of the depth and contributions of cultures and values," said Professor Kathleen Roe of the Health Science and Recreation department at San José State. "They attribute a great deal of their career preparation and academic success to their time serving and learning abroad."

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International service learning programs are a focus of the CSU's Center for Community Engagement. Based on funding and partnerships, each campus varies in program offerings. To learn more, visit <http://www.calstate.edu/cce/> (<http://www.calstate.edu/cce/>).

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