

# ONPS2186 – Science Project

RMIT University in collaboration with the  
International Student Volunteers

## The Community Development Program Syllabus

### □ 12 Credit Points

#### Description and Key Concepts:

For the purposes of this course, a community is defined as a group of people within a physical location (e.g., a village) linked by bonds of shared interests, common goals, and mutual trust. Community development occurs when people come together to choose and then implement projects that they believe will benefit the majority of the members of the community.

Community development projects may be designed for economic and/or social benefits. Examples of projects designed to produce economic benefits to be shared by the community include constructing a community business like a communally-owned eco-lodge or fish farm, constructing tourist trails through a nearby forest, working for a new or better bus service, or repairing the community school house. Projects for social benefits may include installing floodlights or a drainage system at a community soccer field, constructing a community centre, and operating a day care centre for the children of women who work outside the home.

There is another important aspect of community development. As members of a community begin to work together on projects for mutual benefit, they become closer. Trust between community members increases and the bonds between people strengthen. The quality of ‘community’ increases among the people living in the village. To summarize and to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, community development is development *of* the community, *by* the community, *for* the community.

‘Sustainable development’, in which economic and social development goals are balanced with environmental conservation, is generally thought to be more effectively pursued at the community level. So-called ‘top-down’ initiatives from national governments are rarely effective, especially compared to smaller, local ‘grassroots’ programs that are community-driven. However, communities may choose development projects that are not considered sustainable, or that are implemented without concern for their environmental consequences. This may occur if there is a lack of understanding regarding the implications to the

surrounding environment or perhaps because the community has more immediate concerns with respect to their economic or social situations and therefore give less consideration to the conservation of local ecosystems and the needs of future generations.

Communities that are substantially able to choose their destiny are considered “empowered.” Empowerment reflects direct participation by community members in the decisions that directly affect them. This can only happen if national and provincial governments allow the community a degree of autonomy and provide some resources to help implement the community’s choices. Richer and more educated communities usually are better able to win autonomy and resources from governments and to use them well. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also help communities to increase their autonomy, make wise decisions, and design and administer successful projects. The assistance they provide may include technical knowledge (e.g., from conservation biologists), physical labour, organisational skills, or fund-raising.

This two-week course allows students to look at all aspects of community development in rural areas through international placements, on-site work with selected communities, and exploration of the host country. Students work on community development projects and learn about the host country, its people, culture, and ecosystems. Students can meet with diverse groups within their host community, including local leaders, women’s organisations, environmental NGOs, humanitarian aid groups, community associations, school children, and families. In addition, they will participate in group discussions, and visit and study local heritage sites, protected areas and wildlife reserves. As a result, students are able to see which people and groups are involved and how they interact, and to understand the needs of the host community and the development choices it makes.

### I. Goals

Students will gain a greater understanding of community development in the host country, and globally, through:

- A. On-site introduction to community development challenges and opportunities in the host country.
- B. Participating in community activities and building an understanding of grassroots development initiatives.
- C. Observing the effect of external influences such as NGO’s and their constituent parts (i.e. volunteers) on communities (i.e. cultural effects) and community development.
- D. Learning about the relationship between the people and their political, economic, cultural, and ecological environment and how they can mobilize resources to improve their quality of life.

## II. Tasks

Specific tasks undertaken during the period will vary with individual volunteer work projects and host country and may include any of the following:

- A. Teaching English to children and other community members.
- B. Assisting in construction and/or repair (e.g. houses, community centres) or infrastructure development projects (e.g. providing running water to remote communities).
- C. Preserving ethnic heritage and historic sites.
- D. Caring for orphaned or abandoned infants and children.
- E. Conservation work in support of community development.
- F. Assessing impacts of tourism development on ecosystem and socioeconomic health and resources.

## III. Grading & Evaluation

Students are expected to actively participate in all volunteer work activities undertaken by their host organisation during the volunteer work component of the program. Students will be evaluated based on satisfactory completion of all of the following criteria:

1. Daily journal entries in a field notebook describing student's activities; observations of social and economic interactions and cultural practices within the community; social and economic relations with the world outside; environmental conditions and management practices; and contacts with community representatives (25%).
2. Participation in all regular group discussions during the two-week project, and leadership of one group discussion as directed by the ISV Project Leader (25%).
3. Documentation and evaluation by the ISV on-site Project Leader of results and student performance during the community development work project (10%).
4. A quality professional experience essay describing the student's specific project, and overall cultural and environmental lessons and experiences during the volunteer project (40%).

Please note: On-site grading and evaluation within the host country will be conducted by the ISV Project Leaders. Grading of all essays and the overall assignment of student grades will fall under the responsibility of the ISV Academic Credit Coordinator/Instructor of Record.

Countries of Work Experience: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Thailand, Ecuador.

Instructor of Record: Deanna Mathewson, M.Sc.

## Course work: ONPS2186 – Science Project, Community Development Program

### 1. Write a daily field journal (25% of grade)

Description: During the volunteer project, field journals should outline and detail the daily activities (daily tasks, encounters, experiences, and community development lessons learned), the issues that are presented (social, economic, cultural, and environmental controversies), and reflections that are directly related to the program's goals, challenges and opportunities. Students will be expected to record in-depth information about their specific projects, and should include notes on the cultural history and environmental concerns of the region.

Throughout the volunteer project, students are encouraged to record the group discussion topics and their personal reflections on each topic. Project Leaders will provide further guidance and ideas for journal writing. Students are expected to write at least 1-2 pages (A4) of quality journal entries daily. Field journals will be submitted to the Project Leader for grading twice during the project (once each week). This is an academic journal and **not** a personal diary; any personal reflections or entries that are not related to the academic nature of this journal should be kept in a separate private notebook.

Examples of topics for field journal entries during the two-week program are:

- Project goals and background
- Describe daily project activities, tasks, etc. Why are they necessary or important? How are they beneficial to the community?
- What have you learned about the inhabitants' needs and desires? How do individual needs and desires differ from those of the community? Does the project satisfy individual or community needs or both?
- How is the community governed?
- How do outside (national/regional) governments influence inhabitants' lives?
- How do the community members view the contribution of student volunteers? Are they appreciative or resentful? Do they consider the work of the student volunteers useful?
- How do you view the contribution of the NGO (your host project organisation) and your volunteer efforts to community development and to the members of the local community? Discuss positive and/or negative effects that you may perceive or experience.
- What is the level of involvement of local people in project maintenance? If active participation is low, what appears to be the most salient reason (e.g. lack of community cohesion, poor governance, high demands of private work, etc.?)
- What are the threats to local flora and fauna, habitats, and ecosystems?
- How do local community members perceive the benefits and drawbacks of tourism activities?
- Summaries or further reflections on Group Discussion topics.

## **2. Group discussions (25% of grade)**

Description: There will be a minimum of six group discussions during the volunteer project. Group discussions are scheduled and facilitated by the Project Leader(s) and usually last one to two hours. Discussions are intended to encourage sharing of information and ideas, perspectives, and opinions among students and their ISV Project Leader. It is an open forum for learning that will assist students in accomplishing their personal and academic objectives during the volunteer project.

Discussion topics will cover a broad range of issues relevant to the specific project, host country, activity/location, current events, and sustainable development at local, regional and international scales. Students are required to attend and expected to actively participate in all group discussions and to lead one discussion. Failure to attend will result in a zero mark for that particular discussion and a significant reduction in the overall grade for this portion of the course.

Prior to departing for their ISV program, academic credit students must research and prepare a topic for leading a group discussion during the volunteer project. Students can choose their own discussion topic (relevant to community development issues) but should provide their ISV Project Leader (or the ISV office) with a general outline of the chosen topic no less than one week before departure for the host country. Discussion topics on issues of social community development that are not directly related to the specific project are permissible, though topics should be broad enough in scope so that each member of the group can contribute to the discussion. This task will be coordinated by the ISV Project Leader. Students are not expected to be “experts” in their project or discussion topic, they are only asked to think intuitively, critically, and creatively about the problems at hand and the potential solutions; and then to communicate these ideas and concepts to their peers. Project Leaders will provide input and guidance to students in shaping their discussion.

## **3. Evaluation for Community Development Volunteer Project (10% of grade)**

Description: An evaluation form will be completed on each student by the ISV Project Leader at the completion of the community development volunteer project. Students will be assessed based on their participation, critical thinking, advance preparation, attitude and cooperation during the volunteer project.

## **4. Write a professional experience essay (40% of grade)**

Description: Your term essay assesses the challenges faced by the community you visited, evaluates the goals of the community and of the development project(s) on which you worked, and considers the contribution of the work performed by student volunteers towards those goals. Your essay must be

written in three sections that describe the community and its challenges, describe the projects on which you worked, and discusses what you learned from your experiences. Thus, the essay places your experiences and observations during the program within the context of local community development efforts. It also should draw upon the intellectual resources of the program leaders and independent research from the primary literature (e.g., scholarly books and academic, peer-reviewed journal articles). A minimum of six references from accepted sources (see list below in Tips for Writing a Successful Essay) must be cited appropriately and listed in a bibliography. Other sources may also be included as additional references.

- The essay is due no later than six weeks from the conclusion of the course (42 days from the conclusion of an ISV volunteer program) regardless of the date a student returns home, and deadline extensions will not be granted. Failure to submit your essay will result in an 'F' on your transcript. Essays must be submitted in MS Word format as an attached document via email to: [isvaustralia@isvonline.com](mailto:isvaustralia@isvonline.com).
- The essay should be approximately ten double-spaced pages in length. Section A should make up approximately 40% of the essay; Section B, approximately 50%; and Section C, the remaining 10%.
- The essay should contain appropriate citations, a brief introduction and conclusion, and a bibliography of supporting references.

***Section A: Obstacles and Opportunities in Community Development (40% of the essay)***

- Give a short general description of the community in which you worked and of the sources of income of its members. For example, the principal source of income may be growing crops (e.g., bananas, pineapples, yucca, etc.) for export. You do not need to make a formal survey, but rather base this upon your observations and what you have learned from locals and your Project leader.
- Describe any *physical or geographical* obstacles to community development faced by the community in which you volunteered. These may include its remoteness, its natural environment (e.g., local deforestation that leads to flooding or erosion), poor soil, lack of clean water, lack of infrastructure (poor roads, unreliable power, no telephones, etc.), bad transport services, and so on.
- Describe any *social* obstacles to community development. These can include poverty, lack of education, knowledge or skills, and inadequate government support. Insufficient trust between members of the community can also be an obstacle to development. If members of the community do not trust each other and work together, collective agreement is more difficult to obtain and there will be less effort directed to development projects.

- Describe any natural or social resources, special skills, or capabilities that create unique opportunities and advantages for community development. These might include spectacular local scenery, untouched beaches; primary forests; endangered species; good transportation links to larger communities; an effective community leader; a strong and active community association; a tradition of special artwork, tribal designs, or woodworking; a heritage of fishing and seamanship; or a large amount of communally-owned land.
- Considering the obstacles and opportunities that you have listed above, what would you recommend as a community development strategy (other than those you were working towards) that would provide the greatest benefit to the largest number of community members? Explain your reasoning. Published sources may be helpful to determine ‘best practice’ for development in communities like the one in which you volunteered.

***Section B: Community Development Project Objectives and Experience (50% of essay)***

- Describe the host organisation (NGO) for which you worked.
- Identify and explain the key objectives of the community development project(s) on which you worked?
- Describe what your experiences in community development entailed. How did the work you performed contribute to the project’s objectives? If it did not, why not?
- Explain how the project(s) you worked on did or did not make use of the community’s unique opportunities for development or reduce the obstacles to community development that you identified in section A.
- What were the main resources and/or management tools that were employed to meet the objectives of the project?
- Does the host organisation receive any funding from outside sources? If not, how do they maintain their operations? While more money is always useful, consider the community’s capacity to absorb and effectively use additional funding.
- What are the challenges and opportunities for managers of development projects in the host community? Describe any current conflicts between the host organisation and local communities and discuss the probable motivations of each opposing party. Suggest possible solutions to these conflicts, and address the ramifications for each party if your suggestions were realized.

### ***Section C: Overall Experience and Conclusion (10% of essay)***

- What have you learned about community development from your volunteer experience and related research?
- What have you learned about yourself, your values and your preferences? Identify any changes in attitude and awareness you have taken away with you from this experience.
- Provide a brief synopsis of the two-week program in terms of the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and personal lessons you have learned.

#### Tips for Writing a Quality Essay

- Follow the essay outline (including formatting requirements).
- Use an appropriate (academic) style and tone in your writing.
- Be concise.
- Use appropriate references to support your work (see below).
- Use your field journal as a resource when writing your essay.
- Avoid using direct quotes from references; paraphrase relevant information from the source.
- Citations within the text should include last name of author(s) and year of source publication (note: for three or more authors, use first author and 'et. al.' in citation).
- List references alphabetically in a bibliography. Include full name of author(s), date of publication, article/book title, journal title, journal pages (also publisher and city of publication for books).
- Be sure to spell out any acronyms used for the first time.
- End the essay with a proper conclusion.
- Carefully proof-read your essay for grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, clarity and flow of ideas before submitting it. Do not forget to spell-check!
- Allow yourself enough time to write a well thought-out and organized essay.
- Take advantage of your Project Leader as a resource person during the course and discuss ideas for your essay in advance with him/her.

#### Acceptable sources for **required references** (minimum six):

- Printed or online scholarly books and journal articles (peer reviewed).
- Examples of potentially useful journals include *Ecology and Society* (an on-line journal), *World Development*, *Community Development Journal*, *The International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, and journals on regional economic, political, social or cultural issues.
- University level textbooks.
- Published technical and scientific reports by national governments, international organisations (e.g. World Bank, UNEP, UNESCO etc.), non-governmental organisations (e.g. Social Watch, World

Resources Institute, etc.), or scientific associations or projects (e.g. Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change).

The following may also be used as reference material **in addition** to the required references:

- Non-academic magazines and web-sites.
- Reports from advocacy organisations (e.g. Greenpeace, Sierra Club, etc.).
- Encyclopaedias.
- Newspaper articles.
- Brochures.
- Personal discussions with Project Leaders, project host organisation staff, guides, and other relevant stakeholders.

Website links for more hints and tips on writing style:

A Guide for Writing Research Papers, APA style:

[http://webster.comnet.edu/apa/apa\\_index.htm](http://webster.comnet.edu/apa/apa_index.htm)

Guide to Grammar and Style by Jack Lynch:

<http://newark.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/index.html>