Overview

This evaluation report is organized according to the originally stated project Goals and Objectives. Data sources for each objective are identified and summarized. Some sources were unavailable prior to the report deadline. As applicable, those will be addressed in future reports. All findings for year three relate only to the US students studying abroad, as available information for the non-US students was very limited. Relevant comparative commentary pertaining to the previous year findings is included in this report. At the end of each goal section, recommendations to the project team are made with regard to future actions and data collection related to that goal. At the end of the report, some broad recommendations are also included.

This year, three students from Portland State University participated in the program at the University of Nottingham and five students at the University of Bologna (three from the University of Denver and two from Portland State University). Findings for Nottingham and Bologna are presented separately within each goal and objective. Because the number of participants remains very small, these findings must be reviewed with care. The total number of participants over the two years of the project stands at ten (seven at the University of Bologna and three at the University of Nottingham). Students at both Portland State and Denver were given checklists of materials and assessments which they were responsible for submitting, but compliance was somewhat inconsistent. The findings summarized here are based only on the materials which were provided to the external evaluator. Narrative reviews and other qualitative data are the primary data sources, so no statistical summaries or comparisons were calculated.

Goal 1: Students will develop an understanding of at least 3 of the 5 thematic challenges confronting contemporary cities.

Objective 1A: Students will gain knowledge of the urban challenges facing the two cities in which they study.

Nottingham

In their application essays, students articulated an interest in studying the challenges facing an urban city with a long and rich history. Once at the University of Nottingham, however, students enrolled in four or five course modules unrelated to this theme, with one in common: Belief, Spirituality and Religion. The three students were placed in different departments, and one commented that

"...modules offered were in the Sociology department and in the Culture, Media, and Film department. None of the classes offered to us as exchange students reflected an urban focus."
In their reflections about the experience, students did comment about their exposure to the culture and geography of Nottingham through their social interactions with other students, but there was no commentary regarding the challenges facing contemporary urban areas.

**Bologna**

While the students who studied in Bologna had varying academic majors ranging from Sociology to International Business, in their application essays each of them commented explicitly on the theme of urban challenges. This commentary included reference to immigration issues, economic conditions, historical influences, and aesthetics. Such pre-departure perspectives likely facilitated the experiences each of the students sought while studying in Italy.

Just as during the 2009-10 academic year, the Exploring Bologna course was required for all of the U.S. students. The course themes included postwar and cultural history, music, film, and literature. Several structured excursions to piazzas and various other city venues (including one principally focused on city planning) enhanced the in-class portion of the course, and students were encouraged to explore the city on their own as well. It appears, however, that the course emphasis was more focused on history and culture than the urban challenges identified by city leaders and community members.

Student reflections about this course were mixed with some appreciative of the overview but others looking for more experiential learning opportunities rather than so many classroom sessions.

Just as in the previous year, the courses available to the Atlantis Programme students were not known for quite some time after their arrival and there were limited options offered in English. This resulted in a similar disjoint as the previous year between the students’ academic experiences and the grant’s theme of urban challenges. Several students described the graffiti, pollution, and lack of green space they witnessed on their individual travels through the city as potential issues facing the city, but these were described through the lens of their experiences in the U.S. rather than a perspective derived from a true understanding of why these situations existed in Bologna.

In summing up the experience, one student commented that

> I can say with absolute surety that the city itself has been the most informative classroom of all.

Just as in 2009-10, no evaluative information related to these students’ academic work in Bologna was provided. It would appear that the desire to obtain such is rooted in the U.S. approach to evaluating student work and was not sensitive to the cultural differences between the education systems. At this point, it appears unlikely that such data will be obtained in future grant years either.

**Objective 1B:** Students will identify and describe appropriate theories, methods and models for studying the urban challenges facing the two cities in which they study.

**Nottingham**

Since students were not enrolled in courses applicable to these themes, no evidence of their ability to identify or describe these theories, methods or models is available.
Bologna

Since students were not enrolled in courses applicable to these themes, no evidence of their ability to identify or describe these theories, methods or models is available. This repeats the experience from 2009-10.

Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 1

It appears that the US students at both the University of Nottingham and the University of Bologna were enrolled in coursework not particularly applicable to the grant theme of contemporary urban challenges. However, it also appears that in both cities, students took advantage of their social interactions and daily travels to gain some knowledge about these challenges, but it was not grounded in any theoretical or methodological foundation.

Given that the same issues arose regarding limitations of available, applicable coursework two years in a row in Bologna and in the inaugural year in Nottingham, it would appear that the cultural and education system differences between these locations and the U.S. have limited the potential for this grant to achieve this goal. However, a number of other unanticipated and unarticulated goals are emerging, as discussed later in this report.

Goal 2: Students will develop an understanding of issues surrounding urban sustainability through community based learning.

Objective 2A: Through interdisciplinary perspectives and their practical experience, students will compare and evaluate proposed solutions to urban challenges.

Nottingham

There is no evidence of the Portland State students who studied at the University of Nottingham explicitly conducting this type of comparison or evaluation. The desired evidence would have been through their academic coursework, but given that the coursework in which the students participated was not addressed toward urban challenges such was not available.

Bologna

There is no evidence of the students who studied at the University of Bologna explicitly conducting this type of comparison or evaluation. The desired evidence would have been through their academic coursework, but given that the coursework in which the students participated was not addressed toward urban challenges such was not available. The same situation occurred in the previous year.

Objective 2B: Students will apply their knowledge of urban challenges to the lived experiences of community members with whom they interact as they evaluate the feasibility of possible solutions to those challenges.

Nottingham

Students from Portland State who attended the University of Nottingham were unable to participate in a community service experience due to the limited time of their stay. Apparently
unbeknownst to the grant organizers, the community based learning experience would be considered work and the work visa requirement in England is limited to those who stay at least 6 months. Therefore, no evidence is available to document how students may have applied their knowledge of urban challenges to the lived experience of community members in evaluating possible solutions to those challenges.

One student did comment, however, that

…there was a lot of discussion about community involvement in some of my classes and how we can apply what we are learning in class to the community.

And another indicated that

…the experience felt very engaged with the local community and university, even to a greater extent than my usual habits in Portland.

**Bologna**

Of the five students studying at the University of Bologna, two were involved in credit-bearing internship experiences with the city of Bologna. One other student was scheduled to work in the Department of Family Services but his contact person became ill and was only able to meet a few times and offer him brochures to research various programs. One of the remaining students volunteered at a festival for children for a six-hour period and the other had no volunteer or internship experiences. As with the coursework, it appears that structured community based learning experiences are different in Italy than in the U.S. given that the two which did happen were only initiated after the students had been in Bologna for almost three months rather than prior to their arrival. These students did comment favorably on their experiences, however.

In reflecting on his overall experience related to the grant’s theme of urban challenges, the student who worked in the Communication and Promotions department stated that

The internship actually brought me into the city where I could meet people and see the culture of Bologna.

The student who worked in the city Tourism department remarked

What I learned from this experience was the following: 1) it takes more than one person to complete even the smallest of tasks when dealing with urban challenges and 2) small, prep work is an essential component when looking to implement and complete large goals or ideas impacting a city.

**Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 2**

A recommendation from year two was that planning for year three should integrate specific experiences for domestic students studying in Bologna related to the lived experiences of local citizens. It is unclear what access the U.S. faculty partners on the project team have for developing relevant opportunities for students involved in this exchange, but enhancing the relationship with the official city office would appear to be beneficial.
As with year two, the students’ understanding of issues surrounding urban sustainability was likely derived from their day-to-day experiences which exposed them to issues and challenges in the local communities but there was little intentionality or coordination of these experiences.

**Goal 3: Students’ non-native language skills will improve.**

**Objective 3A.** Students will increase their ability to communicate in a non-native language, both orally and in writing.

**Nottingham**

Given that students who studied at the University of Nottingham did not use a non-native language, this goal and objective does not apply.

One student did comment, however, that

> One of the biggest things I learned while living in England and studying at university is that although we speak the same language, it is a whole different ball game. It wasn’t necessarily culture shock that caught me off guard it was how differently everything, or so it seemed, was done.

**Bologna**

Of the five students who studied in Bologna, only two had studied Italian and the other three had studied Spanish. The students who had studied Spanish each commented on their hope that those studies would assist them in speaking Italian, but later reflected that it was of little assistance. Language tests for one student were not available at the time of this report writing and those for the other student were essentially unchanged between the pre- and post-tests. While both students participated in the CILTA course, the lack of opportunity to write in Italian limited their growth potential in this area. In addition, since most coursework was conducted in English, the majority of verbal interactions were informal and related to day-to-day living rather than academic pursuits.

**Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 3**

Since improvement in non-native language skills is an explicitly articulated goal, consideration should be given to requiring that all students who participate in the University of Bologna program be required to have a minimum threshold of Italian language ability. One student commented that the Exploring Bologna course and related excursions would have been more relevant and productive if taught in Italian.

**Additional Commentary and Recommendations**

Even though the courses in which the students at the University of Nottingham participated were not related to the urban challenges themes of the grant, all three students commented on the value of the coursework in which they were involved. While initially frustrated with navigating the different educational system, they also all three made positive reference to the large amount of reading and independent work required of them and the benefit they saw in the lecture/seminar approach. While not an explicitly articulated goal of this grant, it appears that
much was gained through the students’ exposure to an education model with which they were not accustomed. Of note is the fact that one of the three students who studied at Nottingham chose to stay an additional semester and another applied to graduate programs at Nottingham and two other English universities.

In 2009-10, students expressed concern about their lack of knowledge regarding the housing arrangements and educational system and a recommendation was made that future students be made aware of the differences in these structures abroad as compared to in the U.S. While 2010-11 participants commented about some frustrations regarding these differences, none expressed the depth of concern which was articulated by previous students so it appears that pre-departure information has improved.

While the desire for transformational learning and experiences was not an explicitly articulated goal of this project, all participants described the kinds of experiences which could be classified as such. They successfully navigated social, cultural and educational systems much different from their own and each individual remarked on the personal growth derived from these events. In retrospect, perhaps the initial grant themes and proposed goals were too idealistic and were not informed by awareness of the same cultural and educational system differences the students are experiencing. Nonetheless, it is clear that student participants have gained much from their participation in the Atlantis Programme.

As one University of Bologna student expressed

    I will never regret accepting the FIPSE grant because it allowed me to learn in a new way. Rather than listening to lectures, I was forced to combine reality with my intrinsic thoughts to develop both my knowledge and maturity as a student.

And one University of Nottingham student echoed

    Juggling coursework, new friends, new country, and extracurricular activities was not always easy but was definitely worth it. There is nothing that would stop me from going again.