

Candy Hansen-Gage, *Director*
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Dear Ms. Hansen-Gage,

Please extend my appreciation again to the Center for International Trade Development for your support of my recent trip to Spain and Morocco on an International Faculty Development Seminar with the Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE). I am writing to report on a number of valuable learning moments I experienced while participating in the seminar:

1. **The ability to speak multiple languages is an amazing value—one few Americans appreciate to the degree that those from multi-lingual cultures do.** I speak both English and Spanish fluently and am proud to be bilingual. However, when traveling in Morocco I realized how limited my skills are, considering I only speak two languages. Business people in Morocco generally speak at least three and in many cases four or more languages, giving them the advantage of doing business with people from Arabic, French, English, and Spanish-speaking countries as well as enjoying a separate (familiar) language at home. We, in the United States, place value on conducting business transactions primarily in our national language, but when our networks extend to non-English-speaking customers and partners, we have to rely on translators or opt to forego opportunities. We would do well to improve multi-lingualism.
2. **Even English speakers vary in their means of communication.** After interacting with English speakers from Great Britain, Gibraltar, Spain, and Morocco on this trip, as well as with U.S. citizens from various regions of the United States, I was reminded that it takes work to understand one another. This is a powerful cue to me as I teach in an English-only environment (Fresno City College) that learners in my classroom will understand my words differently from one another, depending not only on cultural influences, but also on the means by which they have acquired “standard” English.
3. **Colleges and Universities in the United States are so young!** The lecture portions of the seminar were held at the Universidad de Sevilla, housed in a former refinery, which was once used by Spaniards who imported tobacco from American colonies. Fresno City College may be the second oldest community college in the U.S., but the length of our history still pales in comparison with many European institutions of higher education.
4. **Immigration presents challenges everywhere.** One of the major issues facing the country of Spain is the flow of legal and illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa into Europe. Many people have died trying to get to—and then to cross—the Strait of Gibraltar. My compassion was heightened for the people in our community who have endured similar hardships crossing our southern borders.

5. **There is no easy solution to the challenge of immigration.** One of my fellow participants is an immigration lawyer who suggested promoting open borders. Frankly, I had not considered opening the U.S./Mexico border as a viable option before. The immigration lawyer and I had a healthy conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of implementing an open-border policy in the United States as well as how doing so might impact Spain (and Europe).
6. **Listening well is a key to valuable conversation.** Conversing with academic professionals from all parts of the United States gave me the opportunity to listen to their perspectives without the “weight” of political investment that often makes collegial dialogue difficult at my home institution. I tend to worry about how my reactions will influence my role at FCC when engaging controversial topics, but this seminar allowed me to listen better and to receive new ideas without worry about political correctness in my responses. That freedom made it easier to test my own hypotheses with people who were willing to listen in return and to challenge my ideas without malice or manipulation.
7. **Islam has changed dramatically over time.** I was surprised to discover that Islam has historically been more tolerant than most of the Christian (Protestant and Catholic) faith groups. Only in the last several hundred years has Islam required specific—strict—adherence to religiously based cultural practices for non-Muslims living in Islamic communities.
8. **Modern Islamic women enjoy more freedom than I realized previously.** We heard a speaker discuss the history of laws oriented toward women’s issues in Morocco who demonstrated that, while women continue to struggle with an imbalance in rights and freedoms in Morocco, they are no longer oppressed to the degree that they were even fifty years ago.
9. **Divorced and widowed women have few options for gainful employment in Morocco.** Because I am a single mother (widow), I feel certain tenderness toward the plight of single mothers in Morocco who do not have spouses to advocate for them and who have few options for remarriage (they are no longer virgins, which is highly valued in a Moroccan wife). Without a spouse/advocate, these women are not generally able to find jobs to support their children in Moroccan society. Our group spent time at a co-operative shop where single mothers could pool resources to produce argan oil. The women could then sell the processed oil and share the profits among their community. This co-op inspired me to begin making contacts in the United States to assist their efforts, and perhaps to encourage some of FCC’s entrepreneurship students to take on an importing project with the co-op women.
10. **Cooperative business is good business.** One of the most powerful demonstrations for our group took place when we visited a remote farming community in the hills outside Chefchaouen in Morocco. The farmers we met received little support from the government to produce their products (honey, olives, oil, nuts), but were able to secure quality roads, efficient production equipment, improved water supplies, and considerable profits by forming collaborative ventures and sharing resources. Their model for business is making a tremendous positive difference in the lives of the families in their communities. Even the non-business people (women) have begun to use community resources—ovens—to improve the quality of their lives and interactions with others. It was amazing!

I imagine a number of ways I can make practical application of my IFDS experiences in the classroom. First, this seminar has heightened my sensitivity to international and immigrant students who attend Fresno City College. Not only will I be more sensitive to the issues related to language, culture, and religious diversity that pop up regularly, but I will also work to communicate value for these differences, particularly in the *Job Search and Workplace Skills* class where students seek to recognize skills and background knowledge they can bring to their local job market.

In addition, I intend to pursue partnerships between FCC students and the women's cooperative in Morocco that produces argan oil. I have already made a local contact who is interested in selling the product in her beauty salon, and I intend to pursue several of my colleagues who teach entrepreneurship courses about this enterprise as a potential student project.

Again, thank you for your support of my participation in the International Faculty Development Seminar to Spain and Morocco with the Council on International Education Exchange. I look forward to presenting additional insights (and photographs) for my colleagues at the upcoming Fresno City College fall flex day.

Sincerely,

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