

A Small Office on West 24th

MY TIME AS AN INTERN WITH GLOBALAUSTIN

Lauderdale, Chelsea L

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY | CHELSEALAUDERDALE@GMAIL.COM

Introduction

In Fall 2013 I completed an internship with GlobalAustin, a non-profit organization that focuses on bringing together the international community in Austin, Texas. In this report I have outlined what GlobalAustin is, my responsibilities as an intern there, what I've learned during the semester, and how I feel my training as an anthropology student helped me during my internship. I will also discuss how anthropology is relevant in the many different fields I encountered during my internship, such as international nonprofits, education, diplomacy, and business.

I was drawn to the internship at GlobalAustin because I was considering pursuing a career in social non-profit work and I was interested at seeing how these organizations really worked. I had also heard that this particular internship was a fantastic opportunity to meet a variety of people from many different fields and potentially start building my own network of professional contacts. This turned out to be very true, and I am especially grateful to the people at GlobalAustin who assisted me in this by putting me in contact with people who they felt could help me meet my personal goals.

GlobalAustin and International Austin

GlobalAustin is a social non-profit that has a number of programs focused on building the international community in Austin and connecting Austin to the rest of the world. There are two permanent staff members, Executive Director Margie Kidd and Director of Programs Pamela-Jean Mohamed. There is also a volunteer who has worked with GlobalAustin for the past three years focusing on the International Austin Events Calendar Web site. The GlobalAustin board members are also fairly involved with the organization. There are sixteen of them and they typically meet once a month, though many of them stay involved on a more regular basis. The Calendar committee, a group of five members who oversee projects pertaining to International Austin, is very involved and meet twice a month to touch base or address any concerns. Individual members will sometimes also assist with developments such as search engine optimization for the International Austin Web site.

The entire operation is carried out from a small four-room office on the second floor of the Texas International Education Consortium (TIEC) building on West 24th Street. Margie and Pam each have their own office, there is a separate office with a computer for interns, and there is a main room connecting the three offices. Despite being divided into four small rooms, the entire office is very open. Margie's door is always open and even when Pam's is closed, she is almost always available to talk or answer questions. The main room has a small table where Margie takes her in-office meetings and where the board members gather during the Calendar committee meetings. The office environment is relaxed and welcoming, and the openness of the space makes it feel very inclusive as well. Conversations being held in the main room are

easily heard from all three offices, so they regularly turn into group discussions.

Also on the second floor are the TIEC English language classrooms and the student lounge. International students often congregate in the hallways, stairwell, and outside the building's front door. This sometimes results in a very lively atmosphere, as they often play music or make their own. On occasion they will have parties in the lounge and the singing and cheering can be heard across the entire floor. Though it may be distracting at times, it tends to result in an upbeat, animated environment. It's hard to be too stressed out when a group of costumed foreign students are celebrating Halloween in the hallway.

GlobalAustin has many projects besides the International Austin Web site. Pam is responsible for organizing programs under the U.S. Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program, which brings international dignitaries to Austin to visit local businesses and connect with Americans on an informal, personal level. Margie is responsible for organizing many events and programs, including Coffee Mornings, an informal gathering every Wednesday morning for international visitors and their families that is usually centered on sharing an aspect of American culture. Another service provided by GlobalAustin is Friendship Families, which connects international students with host families, or locals willing to take them to dinner or on a tour of Austin.

The project for which I was responsible is the International Austin Events Calendar & Membership Directory, usually referred to as International Austin. It is a service provided by GlobalAustin in partnership with the City of Austin Global Business Recruitment and Expansion Division, formerly the City of Austin International Economic Development Program. It is first and foremost a Web site with a calendar of internationally-focused events occurring in the greater Austin area. It also has a membership directory with information about the 70+ member organizations and will eventually include a detailed Newcomers Guide for international visitors or immigrants to the area. Membership is free, and any organization can join if it is in the greater Austin area and has international members or internationally-focused events. Organizations do not need to be members to post events, but non-member submitted events must be approved before being published.

Responsibilities with International Austin

My main role at GlobalAustin was to maintain and promote the International Austin Web site. The site is important to GlobalAustin as a way to connect with members of the international community, many of whom participate in other GlobalAustin events or programs. There is also a hope that it will eventually function as a way of bringing in income to GlobalAustin by allowing local businesses to purchase space on the International Austin Web site to publish sponsored content. It is a new program that was started about a year before my internship began, so what I mainly focused on was putting the finishing touches on the foundation that the previous interns had built.

I worked twice a week in the office and would start each work day by checking the Web site for updates and problems. I had access to the back end of the Web site, built with Web development software called Accrisoft. By logging in to the Accrisoft site, I could access events, membership profiles, site statistics, and other similar tools. Using these I could add, edit, and remove events and members. The first thing I did each day was to check for newly posted events. Events that did meet the International Austin guidelines were formatted and published. Those that didn't meet the guidelines were removed. These guidelines were set by GlobalAustin in conjunction with the City of Austin, requiring that all published events be in the greater Austin area, have an international focus, and be open to the public. I would also go through existing events periodically to check for spelling errors, broken links, or outdated information.

International Austin has over 70 members who perform various services in the Austin area. Member organizations include language instruction organizations like Cooking Up English, various chambers of commerce, cultural organizations like the Austin Polish Society, and humanitarian nonprofits like the Multicultural Refugee Coalition. To become a member, organizations has to be internationally-focused, have international members, or provide a service to Austin's international community and has to have events that met International Austin's event guidelines. One of my responsibilities was to check if we had any new membership applications by accessing a Google spreadsheet that had been shared with me. When a new application came through, I would look into the organization to make sure they met all the International Austin requirements. If they did, I created a membership page on the International Austin Web site and send them a welcome email. If they did not meet the requirements, I sent them an email explaining why they had not been accepted.

I had two email addresses that I checked daily. One was my personal International Austin email and the other was the general contact email for the Web site. One of my responsibilities was responding to any questions or concerns people had, which usually revolved around members having problems logging in to their International Austin account. Occasionally board members would email me with questions about the calendar or ideas for organizations to contact about becoming members.

Another one of my responsibilities with International Austin was making sure upcoming member events were on the Calendar and that the Calendar had enough events from a variety of categories on it. I did this by checking newsletters from our member organizations, checking a Web site on which we had collected RSS feeds for organization event pages, and searching online for events being held by non-member organizations. This became particularly important when we began sending out a weekly newsletter with upcoming events, as we wanted to be sure to have a good variety of events going out to our subscribers.

The newsletter was a project of one of the GlobalAustin board members and she gave me a considerable amount of creative freedom in putting it together. After it was finalized and approved, I began preparing it every Thursday afternoon and scheduling it to go out that Sunday evening. The entire process was done through MailChimp, an emailing service I became very familiar with. The newsletter includes every event for the upcoming week, where and when it is being held, and a short description typically taken from the International Austin event

page. The events also linked back to the Calendar as a way of hopefully bringing in more visitors to the site.

I had various other duties for International Austin that I did as needed. For big events being held or sponsored by GlobalAustin or the City of Austin Global Business Recruitment and Expansion Division. I would create a small graphic with the date, time, and location and a short description that would be added to the slideshow on the International Austin homepage. It was also my responsibility to remove these slides once the event had occurred. I would also assist in creating and sending out emails to the International Austin mailing list to touch base with our member organizations or thank them for attending GlobalAustin events. On a few occasions I created reports used to update GlobalAustin board members on the Calendar's progress.

Responsibilities with GlobalAustin

As an intern for GlobalAustin, I was able to assist with some other projects not related to the International Austin Events Calendar. I worked with Pam and Margie whenever they needed help with projects they were working on.

Pam works with the U.S. Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program. The program brings foreign diplomats and dignitaries to the United States to connect them with their American counterparts through professional meetings and cultural activities throughout the country. Pam is responsible for organizing the participant's time in Austin, doing everything from finding them hotels to planning their meetings and cultural experiences. GlobalAustin's involvement in the International Visitor Leadership Program connects the city to the international community by fostering relationships between the people of Austin and visitors from a variety of professionals all over the world.

My work with the International Visitor Leadership Program was mostly during the first half of the semester when Pam was organizing last year's programs and making sure all the necessary information was in their files so that she could prepare a discrepancy report to submit to the U.S. State Department. There are five program types, determined by how many visitors there were and from which countries they were traveling from. My responsibility was to go through the files and sort them chronologically, mark down the type of program, and let Pam know if any information was missing. I also typed up the discrepancy report, which consisted of the project number and type, names of the visitors, countries of the visitors, and the name of the organization that sponsored the program. Throughout my internship, I would also assist Pam as-needed by researching Austin businesses or organizations to potentially include in upcoming programs.

Being so connected to the global community means it is very important for GlobalAustin to stay aware of events around the world that could impact international visitors and citizens in Austin. The importance of being aware and sensitive to such issues became very clear in early November 2013 when Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines with devastating force, killing thousands of people and leaving much of the population without homes, power, or supplies.

Pam wanted to reach out to all of the Filipino residents who had participated in Austin's International Visitor Leadership Programs over the years to express her sympathies. To assist with this, I went through all of the programs and pulled their email addresses, and helped Margie draft an email for Pam to send.

The Organization Spreadsheet Project

Austin has an expansive, vibrant community with hundreds of organizations that have an international focus or international members. For an organization like GlobalAustin that is connected to many of them, it can be a challenge to keep track of contacts and other important information for the entire community. It quickly became clear how useful modern office skills and tools can be for a task like this.

When I first started my internship at GlobalAustin, they were using an old Google Documents spreadsheet to keep track of all the international organizations in the greater Austin area that had been contacted or could be contacted to become members of the International Austin Events Calendar & Membership Directory. This spreadsheet had been added on to by many board members and interns without ever being fully updated or old information being removed. As a result, it was extremely difficult to read and almost impossible to sort or organize. I volunteered to remake the spreadsheet from scratch so that everyone could easily use and understand it. Before I could officially copy all the information over from the original spreadsheet, I had to put together my own and show it to Greg and Margie to get their approval and confirm what information was outdated and didn't need to be transferred over.

The first step was to draw up a rough outline of how I wanted to organize the information. The original spreadsheet had contact information, like phone numbers and email addresses, spread all over the page. Some of the organizations were no longer active or had changed their name or location. There had been some attempt to collect information on the organizations' social media presence but it was incomplete and had not been updated in many years in some cases. The organizations were classified as one of four types: non-member, contacted but hadn't applied, member, and contacted or applied but did not become members. However, these types were designated by the color of the background behind the organization name, making it impossible to sort that way.

My new spreadsheet used the same color coordination system but moved it into a separate column and connected each color to the first letter of the word (e.g. Y for yellow) so that the column could be sorted by type. I grouped the types of information into different sections: organization information, contact information, membership information, and social media information. I also verified or updated what contact information I could as I transferred it to the new spreadsheet, along with the Web site URL, the social media information, and their membership status.

The International Austin Networking Event

The main thing GlobalAustin has looked to accomplish with International Austin is to bring together different organizations in Austin's international community. One of the ways they do so is by throwing networking events for segments of the community in which organizations can build and foster working relationships with other individuals in similar fields. The event held during my internship was for the Austin's Asian American organizations and also served to help introduce them to the city's new Asian American Resource Center.

The event was organized by GlobalAustin in partnership with the Japan-American Society of Greater Austin, the Travis County Citizens International Project (TCCIP), and the Austin Immigrant Affairs Committee. In addition, it was attended by representatives from the City of Austin, TIEC, Place for Change, Goodwill Globetrotting, TCCIP, the Austin Immigrant Affairs Committee, and the Indian American Coalition.

The venue was the new Asian American Resource Center, as GlobalAustin and the City of Austin wanted to introduce more of Austin's international organizations to the great new resource. With that in mind, the Center's Culture & Arts Manager Taja Beekley gave all the attendees a tour. She explained that one of the goals was to give every single room access to natural light, so the Center was built around a central courtyard with a Japanese rock garden. Another goal was to provide a variety of resources for the community, so they had constructed a small library, multiple classrooms, meeting halls, and a ballroom all available to the public to rent or reserve. It is a gorgeous building, decorated in warm colors and visual storyboards throughout the hallways describing some notable Asian Americans in Texas.

These storyboards were very detailed and even more informative, illustrating the contributions to Texas history made by people who have been frequently overlooked. They covered prominent individuals from an impressive expanse of time, from early Texas history to current day members of the community. One such individual is local author Irwin Tang, who edited and co-wrote *Asians in Texas: Our Histories and Our Lives*. They also covered a range of different cultures within the Asian American community, encompassing everyone on the Asian continent including parts of Russia and countries in West Asia like Turkey.

International Organizations & Local Communities

The importance of providing new immigrants to the U.S. with a strong social network is undeniable. However, due to the barriers of language and the comfort of familiarity, many international communities in an American city end up separated from each other and the community as a whole. A large part of GlobalAustin's work revolves around bringing these people together in various ways, one of which is the International Austin Web site.

It wasn't until I'd attended some events with GlobalAustin that I realized how important

forging these connections really is. Most of the people who attended these functions were representatives of their organizations who had built a professional network between them. They were also people who were very active in programs that service the local community. However, few of them seemed to be involved with each other's programs or the individual community members who attended them. Even more surprising was the fact that these individual members did not seem to have nearly as the extensive network between them that the people running and organizing these programs do. There was not even much overlap between the programs at GlobalAustin; the people who attended Coffee Mornings were a separate group than those who attended networking events, and both differed from those involved in the International Visitor Leadership Program.

Integration and social networks are important in the international community for a number of reasons. For many of its members, there is a language or cultural barrier that makes assimilation difficult without support from the surrounding community. There are benefits to building a strong network for foreign citizens or immigrants with those who share their ethnic language and culture. A 1998 study of immigrant children found that the ones who did best in school were those with strong emotional support, connection to their ethnic community, and were adept at learning the dominant language and culture.¹ The students who were most vulnerable were those who were alienated without a strong ethnic community or lived somewhere without access to social resources.

It has also been found that some level of acculturation can provide immigrants or other foreign visitors with many benefits. For example, a study done on linguistic isolation found that simply being able to comfortably speak the dominant language of the majority group provides people with both economic and social capital.² Specifically, immigrants to the United States that are able to speak English have more access to the resources they need to be successful and can more easily integrate into the local community.

In all, it is evident that programs like those at GlobalAustin can be very beneficial. By fostering relationships within immigrant or ethnic communities as well as between them and other local communities, GlobalAustin and other similar organizations create social and professional networks that can help their members thrive. Perhaps the next step is to find ways to bring the members of different organizations together more frequently. For a city like Austin that attracts people from all walks of life all over the world, having a strong international community will mean a stronger community overall.

¹ Gibson, Margaret A. "Promoting Academic Success among Immigrant Students: Is Acculturation the Issue?" *Educational Policy* vol. 12.no. 6 (1998): 615-633. Web.

² Nawyn, Stephanie J., Linda Gjoka, DeBrenna LaFa Agbényiga, and Breanne Grace. "Linguistic Isolation, Social Capital, and Immigrant Belonging." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* vol. 41.no. 3 (2012): 255-282. Web.