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**DESIGNING STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP GLOBAL
COMPETENCIES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
ORGANIZATION**

Abstract:

The 2011 QS Global Employer Survey of over 10,000 recruiters worldwide indicates that employers actively seek and give preference to college graduates who had studied abroad. Six out of ten employers said they give "extra credit" for a student's international experience and more than 80 percent said they actively seek graduates who had studied abroad. The value employers place on a student's study abroad experience grows significantly as program length increases. Though this study suggests there is a connection in employers' minds between overseas study and the development of certain interpersonal skills, students who participate in short-term programs need to make an extra effort to describe their experience in such a manner that convinces prospective employers their time abroad developed the intercultural competence employers expect. Today's students must be prepared to interact with people and cultural situations that may differ significantly from their life experiences to date. The multi-cultural work environment within the United States reflects a microcosm of the global community, so intercultural competence not only prepares an individual for the global economy of the twenty-first century, it also provides skills for managing a more diverse workforce at home. In the same study in which employers said they value personal intercultural and global competencies, recruiters indicated they are not strongly convinced that many study abroad programs enhance these skills. Students must learn to express how the study abroad experience enhanced their knowledge and ability to work effectively in a global society. Intercultural sensitivity has long been recognized as a necessary skill for effective intercultural competence. To develop the intercultural sensitivity needed for global interactions, one must learn to understand, respect, and appreciate both surface and deep-level cultural differences and then also be able to adapt one's behavior as appropriate. Short-term programs, even those with advance academic work to learn about the culture(s) being visited, seldom go beyond the first step of developing intercultural sensitivity, that of increasing knowledge of other cultures. Because of the "island" or "bubble" syndrome of many short-term study abroad programs, students are often not faced with challenging interpersonal situations or the need to adapt their behavior. It is especially important, therefore, that faculty members leading short-term study abroad programs design them to be more than travel and tour experiences and include exercises that encourage students to articulate how their study abroad experience has affected the areas of personal growth that leads intercultural competence.

Keywords:

Study abroad, global business, cultural competence

JEL Classification: M53, A22, I21

Introduction

International study for college students has long been about broadening one's world knowledge. Increasingly, taking part in a study abroad program is also important in positioning graduates for future career success.¹ The results of a study by the Council for International Educational Exchange (CIEE, 2006) provides significant support for the belief that employers value study abroad in hiring recent college and university graduates, particularly among certain classes of employers. Research published in Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad on employer attitudes toward international study also provides evidence that employers place value on study abroad when compared to a variety of other educational experiences (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2008). The 2011 QS Global Employer Survey of over 10,000 recruiters worldwide (Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011) indicates that employers actively seek and give preference to college graduates who had studied abroad. Six out of ten employers said they give "extra credit" for a student's international experience and more than 80 percent said they actively seek graduates who had studied abroad.²

What skills are these employers expecting students to gain from their international studies? They must have concluded that a study abroad experience is a marker for the acquisition or development of certain knowledge or personal skills, but what are they? Though for some employers the study abroad experience is seen as important for language acquisition, particularly among companies screening international applicants for their aptitude in English, the findings of these studies suggest there is an important connection in employers' minds between international study and the development of certain interpersonal skills. In particular, the development of a student's "intercultural sensitivity" is a high priority for employers. Today's students must be prepared to interact with people and cultural situations that may differ significantly from their life experiences to date. Further, the multi-cultural work environment within the United States and most developed economies reflects a microcosm of the global community, so intercultural sensitivity not only prepares an individual for the changing global environment of the twenty-first century, it also provides skills for managing a more diverse workforce at home.

Learning Objectives for Study Abroad Programs

In addition to the academic learning objectives that are a priority for any educational experience, including international education, there are many interpersonal and cultural learning objectives to be considered when designing or participating in a study abroad program. Several attributes employers seek that study abroad programs can help develop were identified in research conducted for the Collegiate Employment Research

¹ Though the focus of this paper is designing study abroad programs to position students for career success, the author does not mean to imply that career preparation is – or should be – the goal of all study abroad programs. There are many other worthy educational goals to be achieved through study abroad.

² The QS Global Employer Survey Report 2011 sampled employers in 116 countries on five continents.

Institute (Gardner, Steglitz, & Gross, 2008). Specifically, this study reports that employers see study abroad experience as demonstration of certain attitudes and abilities that are desired in their employees. A student's time studying abroad is interpreted as:

- Evidence of a student's ability to work independently.
- Demonstration of a student's willingness to undertake unfamiliar tasks.
- An inclination for taking risks rather than "playing it safe."
- The ability to apply information in new contexts.
- Skill in identifying new problems or new solutions to problems.
- Development of a capability for working effectively in a stressful situation.

Other studies have identified certain personal qualities valued by employers that are derived from intercultural or global educational learning objectives (Trooboff et al., 2008). These qualities include:

- The ability to listen and observe well.
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt well in different situations and the willingness to take risks.
- Curiosity – an indication that the student wants to discover more and is eager to learn new things.
- Evidence that a student is non-judgmental toward other world views.
- A level of open-mindedness that the student is prepared to recognize that his or her own world view is not universal.

Interestingly, in the same study in which employers said they value certain personal intercultural and global competencies, employers indicated they are not strongly convinced that study abroad enhances these skills (Trooboff et al., 2008). The onus will be on the student to translate his or her study abroad experience into a framework recognizable to employers as the skills they value...to go beyond "It was great! I had such a good time!!" when describing their time abroad.

Since simply going abroad does not guarantee that the skills and competencies employers are looking for were developed in an individual, students must learn to express how the international study experience enhanced their knowledge of and skill in working effectively in a global society. Therefore, students should be prepared to:

- Exhibit the new knowledge gained from the experience.
- Show their understanding of cultural differences, especially as evidenced in the workplace.
- Explain how they interacted with people who held different interests, values, or perspectives.

- Give examples of how they adapted to challenging situations.

Intercultural sensitivity has long been recognized as a necessary skill for effective intercultural competence (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cushner, 1989). However, recognizing cultural differences is only the first step toward achieving success when working in international business situations. To develop the intercultural sensitivity needed for global interactions, one must learn to understand, respect, and appreciate both surface-level and deep cultural differences – and then also be able to adapt one's own behavior as appropriate.

Developing the intercultural competence necessary to work effectively in a global environment includes three different domains of learning: cognition, affect, and behavior (Bhawuk & Sakuda, 2009).

- Cognition involves recognizing cultural differences and is the first step in intercultural competence, that of gaining new knowledge about other cultures.
- The second area of learning in gaining intercultural sensitivity, affect, involves development of positive emotional responses to cultural differences. This involves both exhibiting a deep understanding of the underlying causes of dissimilarities as well as acceptance of those differences. Many people express an interest in experiencing other cultures, but their interest often wanes when confronted with the realities of intercultural adversity. Inter-culturally sensitive individuals develop the ability to persist, despite setbacks and misunderstandings. Those with low intercultural sensitivity instinctively recoil from differences that challenge their core values and beliefs, while those with high intercultural sensitivity refrain from reflexive judgment and seek to learn more about the underlying causes of the cultural difference.
- After cognitive recognition and affective acceptance of a cultural difference, one must still be able to formulate a culturally appropriate response. So the third step in becoming inter-culturally sensitive involves behavior: the ability to adapt how one reacts to challenging situations. To emphasize the importance (and perhaps also the difficulty) of moving from knowing about something to actually being able to do something with that knowledge, some refer to this step as a separate capability, that of "cultural intelligence" (Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2009).

Experiential learning is defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). To help ensure that a student's time engaged in international study is a true experiential learning opportunity, study abroad professionals and faculty members leading these programs should pay attention to the desired learning outcomes in designing study abroad programs for students. This will often require adding "directed learning" activities to what would otherwise be an independent study abroad experience. If students want their study abroad experience to

be one that enhances their employability in the workplace of the twenty-first century, then the educational goals for a study abroad program should include ones that lead to the marketable skill of intercultural sensitivity. The learning outcomes designed to address these goals should, therefore, include (Sachau, Brasher, & Fee, 2010):

1. Increasing knowledge of other cultures.³
2. Shaping an attitude of open-mindedness.
3. Building flexibility and confidence to appropriately adapt behavior to new and different situations.

Study abroad programs can play a major role in accomplishing these three educational goals of intercultural competence (Salisbury, 2011). Noted management author Peter Senge says in his work on developing learning organizations that true learning doesn't take place until behavior changes (Senge, 1990), reinforcing the point that simply gaining knowledge about other cultures (Step 1 above, cognition) is not enough to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Kurt Lewin's theory of change management teaches us that the first step in bringing about true and lasting change in behavior is to "unfreeze" current, comfortable behaviors. This cannot happen by simply reading about and studying another culture in the classroom. The disorientation that enables the "unfreezing" of one's current approach to everyday situations happens when one is immersed in the experience of living and working in another culture that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. When one's normal approach to situations, including problem-solving, no longer work, then the groundwork for behavior change has been laid.

Study abroad programs should involve academic work that increases students' knowledge of other cultures. However, to achieve all three intercultural sensitivity educational goals, including the domains of affect and behavior, such programs must also include experiences that require students to exercise open-mindedness and flexibility in adapting to new and different – often challenging – situations. Particularly difficult for students – as well as for seasoned managers – is recognizing when it is *not* appropriate to make concessions in adapting behavior and then to figure out how to explain one's position without giving offense in order to maintain a productive working relationship. Such situations require true intercultural intelligence.

The Ability of Short-Term Study Abroad Programs to Achieve Intercultural Sensitivity Learning Objectives

The term "international experience" was not defined in the QS Employers' Survey that indicated preference for applicants who had participated in a study abroad program while in college. Traditionally, a study abroad experience was understood to be a semester or

³ Knowledge goals will usually also include specific educational themes, such as the transition from socialism to a free market economy, the role of the EU, or differences in operating a joint venture vs. a wholly-owned foreign enterprise in China.

year of study at a university outside the home country. In the Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman study, responding employers showed two significant preferences for study abroad experiences (Trooboff et al., 2008): the longer the program, the more value it had; and employers placed relatively higher value on experiential learning – programs that featured internships or service learning opportunities.⁴ Increasingly, however, students in the United States are expressing a preference for short-term study abroad experiences of eight weeks or less. According to the Institute of International Education's 2012 Open Doors report, more than half (58.1 percent) of all American students who studied abroad in the 2010/11 academic year participated in short-term programs. This statistic is especially notable because it is a relatively new phenomenon: During the 1996/97 academic year, only 3.3 percent of students studying abroad participated in short-term programs (International Institute of Education, 2012).

If short-term study abroad programs continue to be preferred by students, how are faculty members and international education administrators to design these programs to accomplish the educational goals for developing intercultural sensitivity? Too often short-term programs are seen as “travel and tour” experiences that students enjoy (the “it was great” phenomenon) but do little to develop the intercultural sensitivity skills desired by future employers. Short-term programs, even those with advance academic work to learn about the culture(s) being visited, seldom go beyond the first step of intercultural sensitivity, that of increasing knowledge of other cultures. Though short-term programs can accomplish some level of open-mindedness, they often accomplish little in the area of actual behavior change. Because of the “island” or “bubble” syndrome⁵ of many short-term study abroad programs, students are not usually faced with challenging interpersonal situations or the need to adapt their behavior. Students often do not encounter situations that provide the disorientation or discomfort (other than jet-lag) that brings about the need to change current behavior, nor do they find themselves in circumstances where they need to develop personal responses of new or changed behavior.

Since the value employers place on a study abroad experience grows significantly as program length increases (Trooboff et al., 2008), students who have participated in short-term programs will need to be able to describe their experience in such a manner that will convince prospective employers that their time abroad has prepared them in other ways. It is especially important that faculty members leading short-term study abroad programs design them to include exercises, such as journaling, group discussions, reflection papers, etc., that encourage students to articulate how their study abroad experience has

⁴ The most valued study abroad program by employers responding to this study was a semester-long internship.

⁵ The island or bubble syndrome results when students from the home institution travel together in a group, stay in hotels and go from site to site - often on a chartered bus - seldom interacting one-on-one with people from the host country.

affected the areas of personal growth employers expect international study to develop. Students should learn to express not only their developing knowledge of another culture, but also how their experiences have led to intercultural open-mindedness but also provide examples of their flexibility in adapting behavior in challenging situations. Since employers also show a strong preference for study abroad programs that feature service learning or internships, the design of a short-term program should seek to provide students with well-structured opportunities to engage with organizations and working environments while abroad.

There is a growing body of knowledge around best practices for short-term study abroad programs (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Mills, Deviney, & Ball, 2010; Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2008; Sachau et al., 2010; Smith, 2002; Vander Broek, Selezneva, Veiga, Bloem, & TenHaken, 2013). Following is a description of the suggested practices and program design gleaned from these studies and others that will enable students participating in short-term study abroad programs to achieve the intercultural sensitivity learning objectives valued by employers.

Pre-departure curriculum:

- Structure a pre-departure curriculum that includes learning about the culture of the program's host country in addition to strong academic content.
 - It is best to require readings be completed before the program begins, especially for programs on the shorter end of the spectrum.
 - One technique used to achieve the educational goal of cultural knowledge is to have students perform a "culture scan"⁶ at three different points: before students travel, while they are in the host country, and also when they return. This technique sensitizes students to subtle differences between cultures they might not otherwise recognize.
 - In addition to cultural learning and necessary logistical travel information these pre-departure sessions should contain academic content appropriate to the course's other educational goals. This can create an issue for both faculty members and students when home institutions do not assign credit for work that takes place during the term that precedes the short-term session. Though the ideal solution may be to make the pre-departure curriculum a one-credit course, this issue could also be addressed by adjusting the credits earned for the program itself beyond what the time abroad would normally indicate. For instance, if your school's off-campus May Term courses are typically assigned four credits for four weeks abroad, the program could be designed with the equivalent of one credit of

⁶ One such cultural scanning technique was developed by Phillips and Boyacigiller (2004) as a tool to examine the dimensions along which cultures differ. Students assess a culture in the seven categories of Free Will, Sources of Truth, Time, Human nature, Relationships, Purpose of Work, and Communications.

coursework in the term prior to departure and the study abroad program could either be adjusted to earn five credits or stay at four credits but run for three weeks instead of four.

Faculty leaders:

- Select faculty members to accompany the students on a short-term program who are competent in experiential teaching. Course leaders should be able to integrate knowledge of the unique features of the site abroad into the academic material to ensure students make connections and have authentic learning experiences.
 - If the faculty member does not have in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of the historical/cultural sites visited, a guide should be hired to focus students' attention on important educational learning points.
 - Faculty should be trained or experienced in guided reflective group discussion as well as in directed, critical-thinking journaling.

Program schedule:

- Pack the itinerary. For very short programs, it may be possible to fit in three modules per day.
 - Try to do at least one historical/cultural activity and one course-related academic activity each day.
 - Give students the opportunity for input on activities before the program begins and, if possible, have students plan some of the modules for additional learning.

Engage with the local community:

- Ensure interaction with local people. Students should not simply go from hotel to site visits with their group from the home university on a chartered bus. Even though short-term programs provide only brief exposure to the values, beliefs, and behaviors of people in the host country, there are ways to facilitate meaningful contact. Integrate one or more of the following into your program:
 - House students on a college or university campus during their stay in the host country.
 - Include a home stay with local families over a weekend.
 - Pair students with students or mentors from the host country.
 - Engage local students who want to practice their English as translators.
 - Plan stops in small towns less visited by tourists.
 - Arrange for participation in local, traditional, social activities.
 - Have students conduct interviews with local people on a research question related to the academic content of the program.

Schedule time for individual exploration:

- Do not do everything as a group or make all arrangements for the students. To accomplish the intercultural educational goals in a short-term program, students must explore and figure things out on their own, or at least in small groups.
 - Building flexibility and confidence in students' ability to adapt to new and challenging situations cannot be accomplished if students are not expected to develop their own navigation skills or if they never have to interact independently with people in the host country. Students should finish the trip confident in their ability to engage another culture on their own in the future.
 - Scavenger hunts or similar activities scheduled early in the time abroad gets students out of their comfort zone quickly and also builds their confidence in navigating in a new place on their own.
 - Build in time for independent or small group exploration later in the trip.

Partner with a university in the host country:

- Findings in a recent, well-researched study (Stebleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013) indicate that studying abroad through other colleges and universities is associated with higher increases in global and intercultural competencies than studying abroad solely through the home institution.
 - Set up lectures with professors from the host country institution.
 - Invite students from the university in the host country to participate in your courses and field trips.
 - Use social networking tools to facilitate online exchanges with students in the host country. These not only help students get to know each other, but can be used to maintain relationships after the program has ended.

Experiential learning:

- Include a field placement, internship, job-shadowing, or service learning component in the time abroad. However brief, it is important to have an experiential component that puts students in contact with the everyday working world of the host community.
 - Pre-planned structure of such an experience is necessary for students to fully benefit from a work-learning opportunity: Program directors should be deliberate about identifying what they want students to learn from the interaction as well as how the work-learning experience will enhance the overall academic value of the program.
 - Arrange for students to follow up their participation in short-term programs (particularly those of four weeks or less) with an internship or job-shadowing experience. A week or two of such independent experiential learning in the country can be an invaluable contribution to the student's learning.

Learning through food:

- Food and beverages can provide important links to a culture. It has been said that food reflects the true history of a place,⁷ so use meal times and other activities to explore this aspect of cultural learning.
 - Discussions and debriefs of the day's activities during communal meals are a great way to build group cohesion while learning about a new culture.
 - Cooking classes, visits to grocery stores, farmers markets – any opportunity where students have the opportunity to interact with chefs, growers, and food processors can help them understand the historical and contemporary importance of food traditions in a culture.
 - Understanding the cultural impact of food will also provide insights into the potential clash between globalization and local customs.

Directed learning:

- Require ongoing reflection by individual students and the group as a whole. Experience integrated with rigorous critical thinking will help students learn more holistically as well as prepare them to talk about their experience in specific terms upon their return.
 - Students should keep structured journals of their study abroad experience, using guided reflection practices to help them process and understand their experiences.
 - The group should regularly engage in debriefing discussions about the learning garnered from the day's experiences.

Post-trip work:

- Whenever possible, include return activities involving both individual and group reflection.
 - Requiring individual papers to be submitted within a month after the short-term study abroad experience provides the discipline for students to reflect on their learning in a deliberate, academic manner.
 - Scheduled student sessions with the school's career services office regarding how to describe their study abroad experience in terms of the learning outcomes valued by employers are particularly helpful.
 - Social media can enable students to keep in touch with their study group even when they are not returning to the home campus.

⁷ For instance, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* from the University of California Press describes its mission as “using food as an important source of knowledge about different cultures and societies, provoking discussion and encouraging thoughtful reflection on the history, literature, representation, and cultural impact of food.”

Discussion

It is the thesis of this paper that a well-designed short-term study abroad program can accomplish the intercultural sensitivity and global educational goals employers want students to achieve in a study abroad experience. Further, discussion is also warranted to explore the hypothesis that it may be possible for students to develop a greater level of intercultural intelligence through multiple short-term study abroad programs than through a single, longer-term study abroad experience. Participation in a semester- or year-long program in one country requires a student to develop the skills to adjust to that particular culture. If the educational objective of studying abroad is mainly one of acquiring language skills, then longer term programs are likely still the best option. However, English is widely considered the international language of business (Neely, 2012) and in most global businesses today managers are required to work with people from many different cultures. Therefore, it is possible that taking part in more than one short-term study abroad program in order to experience and adapt to several different cultures might actually better prepare students in developing the intercultural sensitivity skills employers seek than would participation in a single longer-term study abroad experience. However, if we want students to develop true intercultural intelligence through participation in short-term or longer-term study abroad programs, care must be taken to specifically design these programs to achieve the global educational goals of intercultural sensitivity.

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