

GLOBALIZATION AS AN EXTENDED EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

The benefits and planning considerations of short term Study Abroad Programs

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ABSEL since its inception in the early 1970's has been very interested in the educational process. We have focused on two significant areas of pedagogy: Experiential Learning and Simulation Gaming. We have looked at many specific exercises and simulations; we have made efforts to measure outcomes and have done our best to improve the educational usage of these techniques.

Our general interest has been in the area of experiential learning. We simply define this as learning by doing. In the late 1970's the authors became interested in the idea of developing full emersion programs in the general area of cultural differences and international business. We both developed short-term study abroad programs for our students. We have worked together on this for over 15 years.

We view the short-term study abroad option as an extended experiential learning exercise. The typical experiential exercise may last one or two hours in total. Researchers have seen results in such limited time periods. Our extended exercise lasts for 25 days of full emersion in several different foreign cultures. We have not done any significant outcome measures except for the self-report kind.

As professors, we have seen significant growth in personal confidence and in acceptance of differences in our participants. The typical feedback received from the student self reports is that this was perhaps the most significant educational experience that they have ever had in their lives.

We have seen a significant impact in four general areas. They have learned about foreign cultures, they have seen a range of international organizations and met with their decision makers, they have dealt with the foreign currency market on a day-to-day basis and they have had some unique sociological experiences as a result of traveling as a group for an extended period of time.

BENEFITS OF STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES

Even a cursory review of the curriculum of most U.S. colleges of business reveals the underlying premise that knowledge about international business operations and strategies is considered by administrators and faculty to be a critical component of their students' education. The trend to add new courses in international business and/or international components to existing courses cuts across all business disciplines. The increasing numbers of students enrolling in international business courses and seeking "certificates" and graduate degrees in international business provide further evidence of the perceived value of such knowledge. The accelerating pace of business expanding into international markets, with the corresponding demand for employees with global perspectives, provides validity to the perceived value of international business skills. Participation in study abroad experiences adds value to the international skill sets developed in classroom setting and enhances the career success potential of student participants in a number of ways. Students who participate in study abroad programs have a greater opportunity than their campus-bound counterparts to learn about 1) the influence of culture on business strategies; 2) the complexity of managing international business operations and; 3) the importance of developing international relationships. Study abroad experiences benefit participating universities by allowing them to: 1) provide their business constituents with globally aware employees, and 2) develop better-informed world citizens.

The value to students of the cultural emersion provided by study abroad experiences cannot be overstated. The vast majority of U.S. college students have never traveled beyond our borders. They may have received some exposure to other cultures in the classrooms, or through interpersonal relationships with persons from other countries, but this limited exposure pales in comparison to actually living in a foreign culture for even a brief period of time. Consider the

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difficulty of developing students' appreciation of the following cultural nuances in a classroom setting:

- British sense of humor
- French appreciation for the value of food presentation
- Swiss concern for their environment
- German fetish with schedules
- Italian disdain for schedules
- Dutch liberalism

will formulate government policy over the next several decades.

These are just a few of the thousands of cultural components more easily understood and appreciated by actually being in the culture. The ability to avoid many of the past business mistakes resulting from ethnocentric strategies is greatly enhanced by spending time in the culture. Students who have been surrounded by different cultures are less likely to assume that home country strategies are applicable worldwide.

Study abroad experiences also allow students to interact with executives from other countries. This interaction allows them to learn first-hand, from the actual decision-makers, about the complexity of formulating and implementing international business strategies. The relationships developed with these corporate executives also provide career opportunities for students and partnership possibilities for their universities that would be far more difficult to establish on a long distance basis. Personal interaction with business people from other countries helps students to understand the importance of non-verbal cues to relationship development in a way not possible in the classroom. The reality of face-to-face communication is best understood with face-to-face interaction.

Many universities depend heavily on private sources of funds for future growth and development. Continually satisfying the needs of important constituent groups is a vital component in these fund-raising efforts. Universities heavily invested in study abroad experiences for their students are better able than those without such initiatives to satisfy the demands from their business partners for globally knowledgeable employees. Students who participate in study abroad programs have already demonstrated their ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations and surroundings and are likely to be better prepared, more rapidly, for overseas assignments than those who have not traveled abroad.

Study abroad participants are not only more globally aware by virtue of their overseas experiences, in most cases; they are far more tolerant and appreciative of cultural differences. The sensitivity and understanding of other cultures developed while living abroad serves them well as they return to their campuses and in their later career lives. The importance of appreciating and understanding diverse cultural values has never been more important than it is today. Students who have lived study abroad experiences are more likely to be more sensitive and open to cultural differences than those who have not. Living abroad is excellent preparation for the generation of our citizens who