BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A MONUMENTAL STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

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Abstract - Providing students with cross-disciplinary study abroad opportunities has long been deemed an important part of business-related curricula (Smith, Hornsby, and Kite, 2000). Yet, resources for faculty members wishing to collaborate in developing meaningful study abroad experiences are scant. This paper seeks to fill this gap by providing insights and blocks for building a cross-disciplinary short-term program that offers students a rich and impactful learning experience. Specifically, two U.S. faculty from differing units (hospitality and retailing) within a state university share the process of how they developed a sustainable model for short-term cross-disciplinary study abroad programs in Europe.

Keywords - Study Abroad, Cross-Disciplinary, University, Global Competence, Higher Education

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY ABROAD

Research confirms that study abroad experiences benefit college students in numerous ways, including increasing intercultural maturity, enhancing self-efficacy, and improving long-term global engagement (Opengart, 2018; Paige, et al., 2009). Notably, formal study abroad programs offered through colleges and universities bring value-added components to students' global competencies that meet or exceed other travel experiences (Stebelton, et al., 2013). In addition, students who study abroad tend to have higher grade point averages, are more likely to complete their degree/certificate, and are generally considered more employable (e.g., Qualitative Regression Results, 2019; Malmgren and Galvin, 2008; O'Rear, et al., 2010). Yet, only about 10% of U.S. college graduates engage in a study abroad program during their academic years (NAFSA, 2018). This may be, in part, due to the majority of faculty members being unfamiliar with the process of developing a study abroad experience, or stemming from concerns about being solely responsible for the oversight of students in a foreign country. We seek to address those potential barriers to increasing student study abroad experiences by providing insight into developing a co-led short-term (less than two weeks) study abroad program.

Each of the authors had a record of study abroad program development when, in 2010, they began collaborating on cross-disciplinary international programs for students at a large public university. Rotating among European destinations (Italy, France, and the U.K.), their 20-student programs focus on the businesses of hospitality (food/beverage and lodging) and retailing/fashion merchandising. With travel during the last two weeks in May, these short-term programs constitute three-credit-hour elective courses which include pre-departure coursework and two to three in-class meetings during the spring semester. Designed for both undergraduate and Master's-level participants, students from any major are encouraged to enroll. To facilitate pre-departure coursework and communications, the university's learning management system, Blackboard, is used.With the guidance and approval of the institution's well-established Study Abroad Office, the leaders carefully plan all aspects of the in-country itinerary, selecting venues and site visits that provide a rich combination of cultural, academic, and discipline-specific experiences. Program fees cover in-country transportation and entry to all scheduled site visits, and generally include shared hotel accommodations, breakfasts, two group meals, and leaders' actual costs. Fees do not cover flight to/from the destination, tuition, optional events during free time, or mandatory insurance.

PLANNING THE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

Working with Institutional Partners

In-country institutional partnerships can add a great deal of depth to a study abroad program. Often these partnerships are already established through the home school's academic unit or their study abroad office. These are in-country established academic and industry partnerships that can contribute to the study abroad agenda, provide class content, provide expertise on a relevant subject, and/or help plan a portion of the program.For example, the program to Italy includes a daytrip to a key industry partner that operates a world-class winery and five-star hotel in the Tuscan hillside. There, students walk through the vineyards, sample olive oil and balsamic vinegars, and tour the hotel and restaurant facilities. To enhance the program and provide insight into

extended (semester or year-long) study abroad opportunities, leaders include at least one group visit to a partner academic institutionduring each study abroad course. Whenever possible, that visit includes an academic component in the form of a lecture, demonstration or other related course objective. The value of these partnerships should not be underestimated. They provide an extraordinary international learning experience for the students that could not be easily duplicated any other way.

DEVELOPING LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS

Learning assignments should facilitate mastery of the course objectives by fostering meaningful and appropriate activities, and they should provide data for student assessment (Santanello and Wolff, 2007-2008). Someof these assignments are presented as pre-departure preparation, whereas other assignments are more meaningful during the study abroad experience.A pre-departure cultural study, for instance, is often useful for students as they prepare to be immersed in another culture during their study abroad experience. A reflective component or journaling is an important way to encourage students to think about their experiences as they are occurring. This type of assignment encourages critical thinking and often results in valuable dialogue among the students as well as between students and faculty.Leaders require students to journal daily. These journals are due in their entirety on the last day of the study abroad experience. This assures that the students keep up with their journals, leaders can read them immediately and provide timely feedback to the students. If the correct questions are asked, journaling can also be used to obtain valuable programmatic feedback that leaders can then use for programmatic assessment.Photo journaling is another valuable assignment that gives the students an opportunity to choose an overall theme for their photos and then allows them to view their experience through their chosen lens. As an added benefit, photo journals are an excellent "souvenir"of their study abroad experience, and with the appropriate permission, leaders can use some of those photos as promotion for future study abroad programs.

PLANNING VENUES AND THE ITINERARY

Cross-disciplinary study abroad programs provide rich learning experiences for students, as they gain insights through faculty and student colleagues from a different, yet related field of study. In terms of site visits, venue selection for each discipline is best left to the corresponding faculty expert, who is often familiar with the location through past experience and/or industry contacts. Early in the program development, leaders should agree upon a pool of potential historic, cultural, and discipline-specific venues that might further the programmatic objectives. As a general rule, leaders should plan no more than two local site visits or one excursion afield per day, and should carefully balance an equitable mix of venues from each discipline. Be aware that some locations of interest will be unable to provide bookings/ticketing more than three months in advance, and date/time restrictions may apply to group bookings. Thus, leaders must be flexible in arranging the itinerary. However, a clearly labeled "sample" itinerary including potential site visits, events, and cities to be visited is a helpful recruiting tool and givesprospective participants a sense of what the trip will entail. Thus the initial itinerary is created nine to 12 months in advance.Closer to departure the itinerary is solidified, housing and other reservations are made, advanced tickets are purchased, and transportation is arranged. When laying out the daily agendas, leaders try to set some concrete goals for each day and lay out a program that helps achieve the instructional objectives. This gives balance to the program and assures that course objectives are accomplished. Often the day is divided into thirds (morning, afternoon and evening) with an early start, in order to make the most of the time in country. One or two prearranged group meals are included, so that the remaining meals student "buddies" can explore on their own and immerse within the culture. Leaders have found balancing program time with free timeis important and makes the students more receptive to group activities that follow (Santanello and Wolf, 2007-2008).

RECRUITING STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Faculty members are the primary recruiters for their own study abroad programs. Thus, program developers should be aware that American college students are most likely to enroll in short-term study abroad programs to countries where English is widely spoken. Not surprisingly, top destinations include the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and France (Institute of International Education, 2018). Students tend to "connect" with energetic, interesting faculty members through the courses they teach, so program leaders can market to students in their courses as one of the primary recruitment tools. Beyond that, marketing a study abroad program is similar to marketing a new product (Lukosius et al., 2013). It should use multiple methods of promotion, last nine to 12 months, and reach its target audience via multiple formats with a consistent message.It is important to select a title that grabs students' attention, and a location that is of interest. "Luxury Management in Florence, Italy"is an example of a unique interesting program in a very popular location. The leaders posted simple and informative flyers and posters within their respective college as well as across campus. They attended campus-wide study abroad fairs, visited classrooms, held an information session with academic advisors, and created a promotional video that was posted on

the college website. Leaders also maintained a list (name, e-mail) of interested students, including any who had inquired by phone, email or in person. Best practices suggests keeping a short waiting list of interested students in case an enrolled student becomes unable to participate. Several follow up emails were sent with program details. It is important to note that the financial breakeven point had been determined before any marketing began so that leaders and administrators were well aware of how many enrolled studentswould be needed in order to offer the program.

STUDENT SAFETY

The health, safety, and security of students is a primary consideration for any study abroad program (Forum on Education Abroad, 2015). In that regard, communicating safety and emergency preparedness issues to students prior to departure is essential. The authors' focus on student well-being is infused into pre-departure activities (both online and in-person) and reinforced through written materials and oral communications throughout the program. Moreover, program leaders make every effort to model best practices for safe travel, and hold students accountable for any policy violations. Prior to travel, participants aregiven an overview of country- or region-specific safety considerations, including any known risks (e.g., pickpocketing, unmarked cabs, alcohol consumption), andrelated institution-based rules or preventative measures. In addition to safety-related discussions during the pre-departure meetings, the leadersassign all students reading materials and a graded quiz on travel safety to assess student learning. Specifically, students are directed to independently view a U.S. State Department video about government-issued travel advisories and alerts (U.S. State Department, 2018), and to peruse the Department'swebpage for students traveling abroad. There, they find important contact information and a "Traveler's Checklist" of information about the host country, required travel documents, and emergency information (U.S. State Department, 2019).

Mobile phones are required during the trip for all participants, and they must add to their phone contact list the program leaders, all participants, hotel information, and emergency contacts numbers from the host country. The program leaders also enroll each participant in the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, advising the local U.S. Embassy or Consulate of the group's whereabouts and contact information for use in event of an emergency or natural disaster. Aside from these and other preparative measures, perhaps the most effectivein-country tool for ensuring student safety is mandating "the buddy system". In short, students are not allowed under any circumstances to go anywhere outside of the host hotel without one or more members of the program. Based on student interests and personality motivators (see "Managing Divergent Personalities", below) students are assigned one "buddy" from the program with whom they will spend the entire in-country time, including scheduled venue visits, free time, and meals. In the event that a participant's "buddy" is not interested in a particular free-time activity, both buddies must find alternate members of the program to accompany, and inform the program leader of the temporary realignment.

LODGING AND TRANSPORTATION

Unless the program includes international flights, lodging is usually the most costly expenditure. Best practices for study abroad call for developers to ensure that programs are funded sufficiently to provide safe, clean, and hospitable student housing (Forum on Education Abroad, 2015). When developing an initial budget, leaders should take extra care in sourcing accommodations, paying special attention to safety ratings, guest feedback (found online or through other avenues), proximity to public transit, key amenities (including elevator/lift, breakfast, and towel supply), and site-specific rules and policies, such as lobby closing times, lost key charges, and local hospitality tax. Although the authors tend to book at locally-owned hotels, alternative housing may be available at student-focused hostels, monasteries, or academic dormitories. Securing in-country transit, including motor-coaches, train tickets, and short flights may best be arranged through a travel agency that serves the destination area. Metro passes may either be obtained upon arrival in-country or secured through the travel agency, if used. Multi-day or weeklong passes are generally most cost efficient.

BUILDING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Research shows that when students encounter two cultures simultaneously, as in the study abroad context, creativity is enhanced by challenging conformity to the student's own cultural norms and ideas (Leung & Chiu, 2010). By purposefully adding culturally-focused learning experiences into short-term international study programs, even greater cultural competence can be realized (Krishnan, et al., 2017). Prior to departure, the authors meet with program participants to discuss and experience the flavor of the host culture. Colleagues from the applicable language departments serve as guest speakers, enabling students practice speaking key phrases in the host country's native language, and become familiar with cultural norms regarding dress, manners, social interactions, and commercial transactions. This also affords an opportunity to sample foods for which the host country is known. At the destination, the programs purposefully include learning about the host country's culture through

activities involving interactions with those native to the country. For example, where tour guides are used in connection with visiting historic sites (e.g., Roman Coliseum), cultural venues (e.g., Uffizi Museum), and pertinent businesses (e.g., luxury retailers/hoteliers), English speaking escorts are selected from a pool of seasoned local guides. This enables students to interact and candidly ask questions about their observations that might otherwise be inappropriate to ask local residents. Similarly, students gain cultural insights through interaction with personnel associated with local academic partners, as they tour those campuses and engage in workshops, lectures, and field excursions.

MANAGING DIVERGENT PERSONALITIES

Beforearranging college students together for small-group activities, helping them understand each other's personality types can enhance the learning experience (Moore, Gardner, and Guenthner, 2008). Those participating in such exercises generally recognize that understanding personalitydifferences has helped them in both their personal andprofessional lives (Ault and Barney, 2007). To facilitate introspection and in-class discussion, the program leaders encourage participants to self-identify their own core motivator(s) based on the Hartman Personality Profile, a generally reliable assessment tool based on the idea that all people possess one of four driving core motives, which are classified into four colors: Red, which includes people who are primarily motivated by power; Blue, for those motivated by discipline and relationships; White, for those motivated by peace; and Yellow, which includes those motivated by fun (Hartman, 1998; Ault, and Barney, 2007). After discussing the strengths, weaknesses, and communication preferences of each type, students are encouraged to request their "buddy" for the in-country portion of the program, or to ask the leaders to make a recommendation based on likely compatibility. Since introducing this exercise, the leaders have noticed marked reductions in inter-student conflict (reds tend to be decisive and are more likely to be perceived as "pushy"),tardiness for scheduled appointments (yellows sometimes lose track of time), and homesickness (knowing others more deeply may help reduce separation anxiety).

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