

Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development

VOLUME I

Martin Tillman, Editor

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For Foreign Study

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Introduction

by **William L. Gertz**

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We are pleased to publish “Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development,” Volume I, a collection of essays by experts in the field of international education.

For many years, sponsors of study abroad programs and on-campus advisors alike have touted the many benefits of a study abroad experience in broadening a student’s resume and making the student “marketable” in the “real” world after graduation.

Yet is it time we go beyond our intuitive belief that study abroad helps a students’ job search and point out what specif-

ic transferable skills a student gains from an overseas experience.

Language competency and specific business skills gained at an internship abroad are some examples, but there are others. How do we guide the student in presenting the intangible or “soft” benefits to future employers? And how do we get American businesses to recognize these skills and thus begin to look for students with study abroad experience?

Special thanks go to Martin Tillman for suggesting this topic and bringing together all the authors.

Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development

Preface

by **Martin Tillman, Editor**

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In this first of two volumes, an exceptionally diverse group of international educators from two- and four-year higher education institutions and non-profit organizations discuss the impact of education abroad on student career development. In Volume II, the companion publication in this series, five community college educators address this topic through case studies illustrating their unique approaches to integrating education abroad programs with the vocational career goals of their students.

We live in a challenging era with increased pressures on our workforce due to globalization and the demands of complex political, social and economic forces. At the same time, students have an unprecedented range of opportunities available to broaden their world view and deepen their understanding of global issues—whether through formal study abroad programs, non-credit experiential learning programs, volunteer projects or work abroad. However, as several authors point out, students too frequently accumulate international experiences in an ad hoc fashion, absent any clear relationship to their curricular choices and unrelated to their career goals. In addition, even with the best of intentions, students have difficulty articulating—in resumes and job interviews—how their travel, study or work abroad experience informs their overall career decision-making.

Campuses are increasingly recognizing the need to actively assist students in articulating how their overseas experience(s) has provided greater clarity about their future career goals, and strengthened particular skill areas of importance to the employers for whom they hope to work. The essays in this volume describe innovative campus programs to foster increased cooperation and collaboration between career services and study abroad offices; describe the highly positive outcomes of overseas programs in relation to both curricular and career choices of students upon their return to campus; review current research which supports the value of both experiential and formal sojourns abroad; provide examples of best practices on campuses for advising students on how to assess the “fit” of particular experiences to their career goals and objectives; discuss how to effectively “market” the value-added skills developed from overseas experiences to employers; and finally, discuss the importance of education abroad for students with disabilities (a community which is vastly underserved in all forms of education abroad).

The research and references cited by the authors will support international educators who seek to effectively integrate education abroad experiences with the important career development tasks facing undergraduate students.

Effective Marketing of International Experiences to Employers

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The key to understanding how employers view a student's international experience—and in turn, how best to market that experience when job searching—is understanding what the term “global workplace” really means. Despite their romantic visions of jetting from country to country, the fact is that most new graduates will join the ranks of the so-called “domestic internationals,” employees whose international careers are based in their home countries. In a global workplace, most employees will continue to live and work at home, but will use technology to customize products and services for clients worldwide, communicate with suppliers, and collaborate on projects with overseas offices. New graduates will be immersed in many foreign cultures as part of their jobs—without ever setting foot overseas.

More than a decade ago, the Rand Corporation and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (then the College Placement Council) conducted one of the first studies to consider the implications of the global economy for new college graduates. According to the report, hiring managers sought out new graduates, who demonstrated “domain knowledge” or expertise in a specific field; who possessed interpersonal skills, including problem solving, decision-making, and communications skills; and previous work experience. Of course, these are the same attributes companies have required of their employees since the dawn of the human resources department. The managers, however, cited a critical new requirement: cross-cultural competency, defined as an ability to work in a multicultural environment that may or may not be located in the U.S. Interestingly, hiring managers did not place value on the particular international experience of the student, as much as they valued the skills that the student had developed in order to adapt to a new culture. In other words, employers were interested in the personal as well as professional skills that a student employed to successfully adapt to living, studying or working in France, because they could be applied, for example, to working with a multinational team based in Latin America.

So why, in a global economy, then, do many campus recruiters rank studying abroad so low in the list of experiences that they seek among new graduates? Very few companies specifically set out to hire students with international study, work, or volunteer experience, for example, although it seems they should be the group best prepared for the demands of a multinational and multiethnic work force. The attitudes of hiring managers regarding foreign language skills, expressed in the 2003 Rand Corporation study, “What Makes a Successful Career

Professional in an International Organization,” helps explain this seeming contradiction. The Rand researchers asked hiring managers to rank nineteen different qualifications in terms of their importance for their organization. The managers ranked language fluency last (nineteenth), while cross-cultural competence, defined as an ability to work well in different cultures and with people of different origins, placed fifth. Related competencies such as “interpersonal and relationship skills” and “ambiguity tolerance and adaptability” ranked second and third, respectively. This study did not conclude that foreign language skills were not important—not least because fluency in a foreign language was considered a predictor of cross-cultural competency. Rather, the respondents made clear that a foreign language acquired in an academic setting, which usually emphasizes literary rather than applied uses of a language, was by itself not sufficient to produce cross-cultural competency. Further, the managers leveled criticisms at study abroad programs in which students lived with other Americans, took courses from U.S. professors and socialized mostly among themselves. What the managers in this study did value, were programs in which students had substantial and meaningful “real world experience” with another culture.

The implication for the college job seeker is clear. It is simply not enough to seek an international experience—the experience itself has little value for an employer. The savvy job seeker must be able to speak about this experience in terms of the transferable skills that he or she developed while abroad and how they can be applied to the workplace. For many students, this can be an enormous challenge.

The 2003 Rand report concluded that, to effectively exercise leadership in the global workplace, employees must demonstrate the following: a “multidimensional and well-integrated” repertoire of skills that includes substantial professional or technical knowledge related to the organization's core business; managerial ability that includes effective interpersonal and teamwork skills; a strategic understanding of their organization and industry in a global context; and, once again, cross-cultural experience.

Advisors can help prepare students to articulate how their time spent studying, working, or volunteering abroad prepared them with these skills by asking them to identify specific examples that they might use to illustrate to an employer what they learned. The following is a check list of specific competencies that may be developed by international experiences, and is a good starting place for students to identify their transferable skills.

Advisors can ask students to identify an experience that would demonstrate that they can:

- Creatively solve problems by applying familiar concepts to unfamiliar situations
- Contribute to an ethnically diverse team
- Be self-confident, yet able to listen and learn from people whose value systems are different
- Take personal risks and act independently
- Be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations
- Have a basic command of the local language, and be able to use it in practical situations or
- Imagine, forecast, analyze or address business situations from a different cultural frame of reference.

This simple exercise is a critical first step for helping students to make their international experience relevant to employers. The students' next task is to determine how to present their transferable skills via the traditional job search marketing tools: the resume and the job interview.

A well-designed resume is not simply a laundry list of experiences, but a thoughtfully designed document that markets a student's best experiences. The nature of the international experience will determine how a student presents it on his or her resume. Most students will include time spent studying abroad in the "Education" block on their resume, listing it just after their primary institution. An international internship or job will be included in the "Work Experience" block. Yet students, especially those who held jobs that are not related to their academic major, should be encouraged to think in terms of transferable skills, rather than simply listing their job duties. An adviser, for example, can ask a student, "What is it about your experience as a bartender in London that a future employer will find valuable?" This question can help students shift from writing about serving beer to describing their role in negotiating cultural differences, training new employees, and trouble shooting customer complaints. Students who are pursuing an international career may also choose to create a separate block on their resume called "International Experience," and include within it all relevant information about their work abroad, study abroad and foreign language experiences.

To effectively present an international experience on his or her resume, students should ask themselves the following questions:

- What am I trying to communicate to a potential employer about my international experience? About its relationship to my academic major?

- What skills did I learn abroad? What cross-cultural competencies did I develop?
- How much detail do I need to provide on my resume to ensure that this experience has meaning to a potential employer?
- Where should I include this experience on my resume so that it will have the most impact and support what I am trying to communicate?

The second place that students will present their international experience to employers is during the job interview. Most college recruiters use behavioral interview questions, which assume that how a student handled a situation in the past predicts how he or she will handle a similar situation in the future. For example, a very common behavioral interview question is, "Tell me about your most challenging situation while in college and how you handled it." Employers using behavior interview questions attempt to get students to tell a story about themselves and relate it to the job for which they are applying. The behavioral interview presents a very good venue in which a student can make his or her international experience relevant for the employer. A student who is able to discuss what he or she learned from a particular challenge associated with studying or working abroad will, in this example, demonstrate to the employer how the experience helped develop his or her problem solving skills.

Most career centers have materials that include typical job interview questions, and it is a useful exercise for students to prepare answers using experiences from their time abroad as examples. As a starting place, students who are preparing for interviews should ask themselves the following questions:

- What key competencies is the employer seeking for this position?
- Aside from technical skills, what are the other interpersonal qualities the company desires? An ability to work in teams? Flexibility? Creative problem solving?
- What are the two or three best stories from my time abroad that will illustrate that I have these qualities? Can I tell this story in a compelling manner? How will I relate this experience to the job for which I am applying?

Students who have spent time abroad should have an advantage when looking for jobs in the global job market. Their ability to capitalize on that advantage depends on how well they make their international experience meaningful to the manager who makes the final hiring decision.

A World of Possibilities and the World of Work: Study Abroad Returnees Get Down to Business

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U.S. higher education opens its doors to many students who would be on the outside looking in if they lived in a country with a more restrictive and elitist system. Compared with others, the system is a forgiving one that offers students countless second chances and chances for remediation; failure is but a temporary detour on the road to success. Students are encouraged to explore, get involved, broaden their horizons, and dream. Our culture tells us loud and clear that the sky is the limit and that anything is possible. “Conceive – believe – achieve” as the slogan goes.

Realizing one’s potential is largely an individual undertaking with few signs, markers and instructions along the way. U.S. schools and institutions of higher education are adept at offering diverse learning opportunities and meeting the needs of diverse student populations. They are not as skilled at providing career counseling that helps students get from point A to point B. If I study what I am most interested in, what will I be able to do with it? What career opportunities will be available to me? How many jobs will there be in my field and at what salary? What are the future prospects for people in my field(s)?

Freedom of action is always a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can enable individuals to discover their interest and talents and pursue them. On the other hand, it can lead to a lack of direction, focus and a tendency to shoot in the dark. The end result is inefficiency, wasted time and resources, dashed hopes and disillusionment. I think back on my own undergraduate experience and see students today who are still struggling to find their way in an education system and culture that says “go for it,” mixing like oil and water with the stark reality of a labor market that has its own needs, constraints and rewards.

Too often, students, including prospective Fulbright applicants from the University’s honors program, come into my office and say things like, “I want to become a foreign service officer.” When I ask them if they know what that entails, what the assignments consist of, what the limitations and opportunities are, *what foreign service officers really do*, they usually mumble a few generalities. I proceed to guide them to information (i.e., the U.S. State Department), and to suggest other career possibilities that are not limited to public service.

Students should have access to accurate information from career services offices, academic advisers and faculty about what they can expect to “do” with major X after they gradu-

ate, rather than just assuming that, like a cat dropped from a five-story building, they will land on their feet and everything will work out for the best. This is like a high stakes game in which too much is left to chance and fate. Too many students are unrealistic about what they are being prepared to do and what type of education, experiences, skills, and aptitude they will need to achieve their career goal(s).

While career counseling will never be an exact science, nor should it be, it can help students to become more focused and to make career development less of a “hit or miss” proposition than is currently the case. Just as a course syllabus is akin to a legal contract and students have a right to know what they will learn or what skill they will acquire from course X if they perform at a certain level, it is the institution’s obligation to help students “get real” about what awaits them in the world of work.

Now, you ask, what does all of this have to do with the theme of this volume, study abroad and career development? In a feature article that appeared in the spring 2004 issue of *International Educator* magazine, devoted to global work force development, I made the empirically verifiable claim that foreign language study and, to an even greater extent, education abroad, are the domain of the select few, worthwhile but essentially elitist undertakings. The unfortunate fact is that, even with record increases, students who study abroad constitute a mere one percent of all students attending U.S. colleges and universities, more than half of whom study in the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, and France and 91 percent of whom go for a semester or less—some for just a few weeks.

That’s the bad news; the good news is that the relatively small numbers of study abroad participants make it possible for universities and colleges to devote more time and resources to providing quality career counseling to students before they go abroad and after they return. So, while we should do everything in our power to increase the numbers of students going abroad and quality of programs in which they are participating, we should also pay close attention to the needs of those we are sending overseas before they go and after they return.

The Duke University Study Abroad Programs office notes in the “Study Abroad and Your Future” section of its online handbook (www.aas.duke.edu/study_abroad/dahandbook/chapt10.html) that, “for many students the study abroad experience stimulates not just a new way of looking at themselves and the world, but new ideas about what comes after

they graduate, which is to say: jobs and a career. Many express regret afterward that they didn't do more to prepare for the working world before and during their time away—something echoed by campus career advisers.” To that end it advises students to consider some type of non-credit work project, volunteer service, etc. in the community in which they will be studying, as well as a checklist that includes what students can do before, during and after their study abroad experience to “maximize its career-enhancing potential.”

What about after they return? The MIT Careers Office asks that students “stop in at the Career Office to let us know you are back and to share your experiences with us. We will ask you to complete an evaluation form on your outside institution which will be put on file for the use of other MIT students contemplating application to the same university” (<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/students/studyabroad.html>).

This use of study abroad returnees as resources is common and often part of an overall strategy to facilitate their readjustment and reintegration. It is also quite limited in scope and vision.

The University of California at Berkeley takes it one step further and presents ways in which study abroad returnees can translate their study abroad experience to the job or fellowship interview. The goal for students is to “identify the skills and strengths that you have gained that are relevant to the job or fellowship and organize your stories so that you focus on the most relevant elements of your experiences.” As the article proclaims, “You spent an incredible, unforgettable, life-changing year (or at least a semester) studying abroad. Wondering how you can incorporate your study abroad experience in a job or a fellowship interview?” (<http://career.berkeley.edu/Article/041008a-cl.stm>).

Aside from the usual debriefings, get-togethers and opportunities to share their newfound experience, insights, knowledge and contagious enthusiasm with fellow students and others, students should be given systematic guidance about which aspects of their study abroad experience will be of greatest value in the world of work, be it the public, private or non-profit sector. Just as internships and volunteer experiences, and of course, the degree should be viewed as an integral part of a student's career development, so should study abroad, which is too often seen as a form of enrichment.

Study abroad returnees should have the opportunity—either through their study abroad or career services offices (or ideally both working in cooperation)—to tap into a network of study abroad alumni with real world professional experience

and who can also act as mentors. In addition, these offices should provide students with the most up-to-date information about employer expectations for those who wish to enter international fields. For example, in the 2003 Rand Corporation report, *New Challenges for International Leadership: Lessons from Organizations with Global Missions*, which included the private and non-profit sectors, the authors conclude that what is needed to exercise leadership effectively is “a multidimensional and well-integrated set of competencies,” including substantive depth (professional or technical knowledge) related to the organization's primary business processes, managerial ability, with an emphasis on teamwork and interpersonal skills, strategic international understanding, and cross-cultural experience. In a related survey on “What Makes a Successful Career Professional in an International Organization” as part of the same study, foreign language fluency ranked dead last (nineteenth) while cross-cultural competence, defined as *the ability to work well in different cultures and with people of different origins*, placed a very respectable fifth. Related items such as “interpersonal and relationship skills” and “ambiguity tolerance and adaptivity” ranked second and third, respectively.

Study abroad coordinators need to work closely with their colleagues in the career services office to ensure that study abroad returnees get the attention and have the resources they deserve to help them view their study abroad experience as a key element of their career development. Students will be better equipped to capitalize on the valuable awareness, knowledge and skills that they acquired as a result of studying overseas. “Conceive – believe – achieve”, yes, but with students' feet planted firmly on the ground and with a realistic knowledge of what is possible and what is not.

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Collaboration Between International Education and Career Development Professionals to Improve the Quality and Impact of Work Abroad Experiences

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Probably for many of us, the experience of doing the work that we do can be traced back to a situation in which we first encountered someone who did such a job and we began to think about the appeal of such an occupation. We were attracted to something about that job as fitting or meaningful and we believed that doing such work would make us happy. In John Holland's (1992) theory, this occupation would fulfill specific personality needs; perhaps providing contact with people, or an opportunity for us to express our creative side. Even before we identified the career that each of us has chosen, we very likely entertained a series of fantasy jobs that we carry in our heads until this day, for example, an athlete, performer, president or Nobel Prize winner.

Donald Super (1981) describes a growth stage of career development in which we have these notions that are wonderful daydreams but not based in the reality of talent, experience, education and hard work that are necessary for career development and a successful career. A second stage that Super described is the exploration phase. Here, as young people, we learn more about the world of work. Examples of such exploration are, Take your Daughter to Work Day, shadowing a professional for a day or learning about the career of teacher or participating in an internship outside the U.S.

The work abroad experience is also part of this exploration stage. For many of the persons I have known who have studied and/or worked abroad, this experience has had a profound effect on their career development. In many cases it has broadened their perspectives about career and made them aware of how a career can take on an international perspective. Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver and Weaver (1992) note that students returning from overseas educational experiences reported increases in awareness of career options. My research (Hannigan, 1998, 2001) on the effects of work abroad provides evidence for increased clarity about career decisions after participating in a work abroad experience, but it also provides the international educator with several additional, important findings. Of the 52 students who participated in overseas work experiences in a variety of countries (Australia, Ecuador, France, Great Britain, Jamaica, the Philippines, the People's Republic of China and Spain), 75 percent of the participants described the experience as satisfying or very satisfying and 54 percent described the experience as important or very important in achieving their career goals. Forty-six percent of the participants perceived their supervision on the job to be ade-

quate or nearly adequate. These findings are important for counselors and international educators because they justify the encouragement of students interested in working abroad because they are likely to have positive experiences in this working environment. The majority of students participating in such experiences feel that the overseas work is an important factor in their career development. The numbers also suggest that participants need to be cautioned about the unstructured nature of some work abroad experiences and that students expecting a great deal of structure in their overseas work environments may be disappointed. Some discussion about managing this potential frustration is in order to prepare students during their pre-departure orientation.

Research results suggest that students will return from work abroad experiences with a clearer idea of their career goals. The pre-departure orientation should encourage students to be thinking about this and working toward this important goal. Collaborating with the career development counselor on the above and a number of other areas will promote a more focused and goal-oriented work abroad experience. It also makes the efforts of the Career Services office on campus more visible and shows that they are not just working with the students on the local campus, but also hand in hand with students who are learning through international experiences. In this sense, collaboration between the International Education and the Career Services offices on campus is a win-win situation.

With the career counselor, it will be possible to identify what instruments would be appropriate for measuring differences in career development prior to leaving and after returning from the overseas sojourn. The career counselor can also address what career services can be provided from the career services office prior to, during, and after the sojourn. The semester or summer preceding the work abroad experience is an excellent time for the student to take career development inventory in order to begin thinking about breaking the log-jam of career indecisiveness; about the international dimension of career goals and how it fits into their overall study plans; and more specifically, about the career development issues that are related to working overseas.

Other tasks include encouraging the student to consider answers to the following questions and how getting these answers are part of the task of the work abroad experience:

Did the overseas work experience clarify and confirm the student's career goal(s)?

Did it eliminate a possible career goal previously under consideration?

Did it develop a set of career options that the student had not considered prior to the sojourn?

By focusing the student's thinking on a career development component of their work abroad experience, we increase the likelihood of an even more valuable experience overseas. In order for this to occur, the international educator should strive to have a career development component in every work abroad experience that is offered to students. In collaboration with Career Services, the following recommendations can strengthen efforts to integrate international education and career development objectives:

1. Students might complete brief writing assignments that respond to questions about why they are going to work overseas. Stimulus questions might include:

- What questions regarding your career plans do you hope to have answered by working overseas? List them.
- Are there specific factors that come into play regarding the type of internship you will participate in overseas that will make a unique contribution to your career development?
- What career development issues could be answered as easily by participation in a local internship?

2. Work with the Career Services office to do outreach at the midpoint of the work abroad experience, probing for:

- Is the work abroad student on track in getting answers to the career development questions originally asked during the pre-departure career development process? Have these questions become irrelevant? What are the current career development questions that now should be answered?
- What barriers to getting information about these questions are causing difficulties for the student?
- Can the career counselor facilitate getting answers or is there an on-site resource person who can assist?

3. Upon completion of the work abroad experience, a debriefing session is helpful to deal with issues such as re-entry shock and assisting the student with making the next steps along their career development path.

4. Another means of collaborating across offices is to support each others' goals in working with students through written materials that are available in the Study Abroad Office and the Career Development Office. As an example, the career development office should have materials that heighten students' awareness about work opportunities outside the U.S. Peace Corps recruitment literature, information about career opportunities in the Foreign Service, occupations that require English, a second language and a specialty in business, import – export, communications, international development, international education, etc. Magazines such as *Transitions* provide a wealth of information about employment opportunities overseas. Similarly, the International Education office should

have in its student library titles that cover these same subjects, as well as more general career development materials for students who are considering a work experience abroad. Both offices should coordinate their holdings and in some cases it may be advantageous to have popular titles in both libraries, especially on large campuses where the two offices are not nearby each other.

Other ideas for collaboration between these offices would be the Director of International Education or other international educators serving as consultants to students who are exploring career opportunities in International Education. The Career Services office should have an agreement with international educators on campus to serve as career consultants for those persons interested in careers in international education. If the Career Services office sponsors a career day, the International Education office should collaborate by promoting careers that build upon overseas study and work experiences.

5. A final point of possible collaboration is writing and publishing on career development topics in international education settings. Professionals in both of these specialties would benefit from publishing where these two important areas intersect. There are journals and other venues in the career counseling as well as the international education areas that would welcome such topics for consideration for publication.

In summary, international educators would likely improve on the educational and vocational quality of the work abroad experience by collaborating with career counselors on their campus in a program that includes pre, during and post sojourn activities that keep the focus on the important topic of career development.

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The Role of Experiential Learning in Preparing Global-Ready Graduates

by Renatte K. Adler

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How many times have we exalted the transformational powers of an international education, yet wished we had better data to show how experiential learning in an international setting gives students a competitive edge in the global work force? How often have we utilized concepts like global proficiencies or intercultural competence, yet wished we had a more definitive understanding of what these terms mean, how they are acquired, and how they foster success in the global workplace? For those of us who ‘got religion’ decades ago about the career enhancing benefits of an international education, but had little more than our own self-validations to back us up as we moved forward in preparing students for a global future, it looks like reinforcements are finally on the way.

A growing number of studies are now focusing on various learning outcomes and processes associated with international education, and their findings are beginning to validate the multifaceted benefits that accrue from learning within an international context. New research is now informing those institutions intent on assessing the effectiveness of their campus internationalization efforts, and it is helping international educators learn not only what to evaluate, but more importantly, how to evaluate their success in preparing students for the global work force.

Some of the research focuses on defining those basic elements that constitute specific conceptual learning outcomes. Deriving consensual definitions within a myriad of abstract constructs seems to be the first hurdle most researchers face. For example, the Spring 2004 issue of NAFSA’s *International Educator* introduced two studies that seek to define global and intercultural competencies as a precursor to measuring such competencies. William Hunter’s¹ research focuses on deriving a definition of global competence before determining the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary to become globally competent. Likewise, Darla Deardorff’s² research focuses on deriving a definition of what it means to be interculturally competent before determining how institutions can best measure such an outcome.

Other recent studies explore the role of experiential learning in an international setting. In previous volumes in this AIFS series, Harold Barry³ and Humphrey Tonkin⁴ each extol the value of international service learning. Barry summarizes their findings: “The values inherent in service learning are particularly enhanced when it is conducted in international/intercultural settings. It allows students to experience and encounter levels of the other culture not usually possible with more traditional programs. Instead of the cultural experience being secondary to the study abroad experience it becomes central and co-equal. There is strong evidence that cultural and language learning particularly are strengthened and accelerated through the service-learning experience.”

At San Diego State University (SDSU), clear results are emerging from studies on the impact of study abroad and international internships on the career development of more than 3,000 international business students during the past 16 years. Now, for the first time, solid evidence supports the contention that students with an experiential international education compete more successfully than their peers in today’s global work force.

SDSU’s International Business (IB) program is a nationally recognized, multiple award-winning, trend-setting innovator that combines curricular, co-curricular, and experiential learning requirements to facilitate students’ transition into the global business work force. Experiential learning in the IB program consists of semester-long study abroad and an internship, both of which are required for graduation. The program’s study abroad model is truly unique for several reasons⁵. All 750 majors must complete four business and regional/cultural studies courses at a business school abroad. All coursework is conducted in the host country’s language, including all lectures, assignments, and exams. IB majors must compete for grades with students from the host university. There is no special grading scale for IB majors. Concomitantly, the experience enriches the student’s knowledge of business practices of the host country and also strengthens their language skills.

This study abroad model also includes the availability of transnational dual- and triple-degree programs. In the transnational dual-degree program, for example, IB majors complete 10 to 20 business and regional/cultural studies courses at the host university. Upon completion, students receive not only SDSU's B.A. in International Business but also the bachelor's degree from the host university. The transnational multiple-degree concept makes our students globally ready as a result of one to two years of study at a business school abroad. SDSU now offers dual-degree programs with Mexico (two years in length), Quebec (one year), Chile (three semesters), and Brazil (three semesters) and two triple-degree programs, one with Mexico and Quebec and the second with Mexico and Chile.

How effective has SDSU's IB study abroad model been in preparing global-ready students? The key data comes from our alumni survey that many complete yearly. The survey tells us the percentage of alumni working in an international setting, their salaries, and most importantly for this paper, the impact of study abroad and an internship. Compacting survey data from 1989 to 2004, 82 percent of SDSU IB alumni stated that their study abroad experience improved their chances at getting a job. Additionally, 58 percent stated that their study abroad experience increased their earning potential. As for internships, 80 percent stated that their internationally oriented internship improved their chances at getting a job, while 51 percent claimed that their internship experience increased their earning potential.

While the alumni survey provides us with critical data on the importance of study abroad, how interculturally competent are SDSU IB majors? To assess global skills, the IB program requires students to pass an international certification exam that includes language, intercultural knowledge, and business practices. These exams are offered by international trade organizations such as the World Trade Center, the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Madrid Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Goethe-Institut. Additionally, we have compiled grade point averages of all of our students since 1989. The average GPA over these 16 years is 2.8 out of 4.0. This figure is remarkable given that in many countries like France and Germany, for example, the grading scale is much more rigorous than in U.S. institutions of higher education.

Academic internship opportunities in undergraduate business departments across the nation vary widely. Of the 100 top-ranked business departments in the U.S., we find that 42 percent award units to international business students for completing internships. Of the top 25 programs in international business, only three universities offer internship options, and only SDSU requires the internship in the curriculum. SDSU's IB program offers an internship course that is integrated as an academic program within the major's curriculum with the intent to provide job experience that allows students to apply theoretical concepts in the global work-

place. Operating since 1987, the internship course has enrolled more than 3,000 students.

A soon to be published SDSU study⁶ contends that student interns not only gain valuable work experience, especially in skills areas neglected by traditional academic institutions, but student interns have multiple and diverse opportunities to apply theory learned in classrooms to real world problems in business firms, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. The study investigates how frequently students achieve a measurable set of learning outcomes that include the development of career enhancing skills and on-the-job training that may lead to career positions. The study also tests to see if this set of learning outcomes is improved when students complete the internship abroad, as compared to those who complete their internship in the United States.

To measure multiple learning outcomes specific to an internship course that bridges the transition between classrooms and careers, the study utilizes positive trait analysis to develop a scoring rubric called the Index of Learning Outcomes in Transition (LOT Index). Of the 16 learning outcomes measured, 14 were drawn from a national study, undertaken by Bikson and Law⁷ of the RAND Institute, investigating both university educators' and multinational corporations' judgments on the state of American university students' academic preparedness to enter the global work force upon completion of undergraduate degrees. The LOT Index developed in the SDSU study includes: Generic Cognitive Skills (decision making ability, self-managing ability, knowing how to learn); Social Skills (teamwork, ability to negotiate/compromise, written and oral communication skills, cooperation); Personal Traits (problem-solving skills/innovativeness, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, openness to new ideas, commitment to quality work); and Other Outcomes (ability to use a second Language, cross-cultural experience, computer skills, and research skills).

One way of scoring for assessment purposes is to directly evaluate attainment of specific learning outcomes that are in evidence in students' written reports. To tabulate the LOT Index for the internship course, instructors read 425 randomly selected reports to determine which of the 16 learning outcomes were achieved. Of these, 219 were international business majors and 206 were economics majors. Reports were randomly selected from students who completed internships during the eight-year period from 1997 to 2004. Using the scoring rubric, each student was given a point for each of the skills acquired.

Results showed that students develop more than half of the LOT success indicators in a typical internship and that the learning outcomes index is positively associated with internships completed abroad, hours worked, experience in the non-profit sector, and spring semester enrollment. Furthermore, skills in a second language and cross-cultural skills are improved by a majority of international business

majors, while students majoring in economics do not develop these skills. In addition, they discovered that adding skills to the bundle acquired through an internship leads to a higher probability of a job offer for the students in their sample.

International educators are now finding themselves equipped with solid empirical data to verify what they have always assumed to be true: learning in an international/intercultural setting not only transforms students' lives, it clearly enhances their career development. While the international business community has been capitalizing on this good news for some time now, the entire academic community can build on these models when attempting to internationalize other disciplines.

If the benefits of study abroad and international internships become more clearly defined in terms of learning outcomes in other knowledge domains, a wide array of academic departments can better justify the resource costs of staffing and providing study abroad and internship courses as part of their majors' curricula.

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Pathways to International Careers: How We Can Support Students' Aspirations

by William Nolting

Director of International Opportunities

University of Michigan International Center

As a longtime education abroad advisor at a research university, I've been privileged to work with students at all stages of their academic careers and beyond. Many demonstrate sustained interest in developing a career with an international focus. Allow me to present mini-biographies of just five students to demonstrate what I would describe as typical pathways to international careers:

- International Foundation—Kristin W.: Undergraduate Russian major/studied abroad in Russia/had internship with the US State Department in Washington, Russia desk /first career position with the Soros Foundation in New York (funds democracy initiatives in Russia and Eastern Europe); was told after being hired that State Department internship was deciding factor / Rotary World Peace Scholar in Paris.
- International Development—Charu S.: Undergraduate major in Family Sciences, did not study abroad / assistant case worker, social services, for two years / Peace Corps in South Africa / Masters degree in Social Work with summer internship in South Africa via Minority International Training Program / IFESH Africa Fellow in Malawi (working with Save the Children).
- Engineering—Ed A.: Undergraduate engineering major / internship in Germany via IAESTE internship program / Masters degree in Engineering / self-arranged internship with BMW in Germany / career position with General Motor's Research and Development Department, where his overseas experience was important in his obtaining the position because of GM's international work.
- Human Rights—Kara M.: Undergraduate liberal arts major / summer clerical jobs (self-found) at the UN in Geneva during undergraduate years / after graduation, volunteered in Africa for one year through a volunteer program / Masters in International Policy from Tufts Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy/ human rights monitoring work in Bosnia and Kosovo with the OSCE / working for USAID in Washington.
- Law and Public Policy—Benjamin M.: B.A. in political science and French / junior year abroad, French language program in Lausanne, Switzerland / six months teaching English at a Finnish social work school via American-Scandinavian Foundation / entered Law School / law semester abroad at the University of Paris II / legal intern-

ships with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's international division, Washington, D.C., Debandt Linklaters' Brussels office, and the U.N. International Law Commission, Geneva, Switzerland / Dual degrees, J.D., M.P.P. (Public Policy) / career position with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

These otherwise diverse life histories share one thing in common: *multiple international educational experiences* – consisting of a mix of study abroad, internships, volunteering, paid work experiences and graduate study with an international focus. Such experiences may take place during undergraduate study, after graduation, during graduate school and after attaining a graduate degree. These individuals are generally academically successful students who have personal qualities of self-direction and perseverance. But it is arguably the additional factor of their repeated international experiences that distinguishes them from their equally talented peers, opening the way to their ideal careers.

Interestingly, when these students speak about themselves, they will often say that only in retrospect does their “career path” take on the appearance of intentional linear development. Their lived experience was as often a sense of serendipity, facing obstacles yet maintaining an openness to pursue international opportunities even when these sometimes seemed only indirectly related to their career goals. What motivates them is a passion for in-depth international experience; their challenge has been to find ways to make this possible.

How can colleges and universities help support the aspirations of our education abroad “success stories,” those students who are so deeply affected by their international experience that they want the rest of their life to have an international dimension? While study abroad is a given at most institutions today, far fewer assist their students in planning for other kinds of international experience, since study abroad offices often see their focus as academic, and career offices usually lack international expertise.

But some universities are making concerted efforts to help their students pursue their international interests in multiple ways and beyond their undergraduate years. Study abroad programs increasingly offer for-credit internships. Additionally, more than 35,000 students and recent graduates of U.S. colleges and universities participate each year in formal but not-for-credit work abroad programs, ranging from

summer internships to the Peace Corps (see the University of Michigan website, below, for details of statistics and programs). At Harvard, for example, a faculty committee recently gave formal endorsement to what was already a campus tradition, when they recommended that “all Harvard College students pursue a significant international experience during their time in the College. [...] We would expect that study abroad for a summer, term, or year, as well as international internships, independent research, volunteer work, or employment abroad would qualify, but that travel for tourism or recreation would not.” (page 40, *A Report on the Harvard College Curricular Review*, April 2004).

Studies of participants in experiential international programs have shown that they gain the same kinds of benefits as do students who study abroad—only more so!—with greater gains in self-development, understanding of the host culture, and where applicable, knowledge of a foreign language. In an attempt to measure long-term outcomes, a recent survey by IES of 3,400 of their alumni, going back fifty years, found that “Students who participated in internships and field placements ... were much more likely to say that study abroad ignited their interest in a *career decision* pursued after graduation” [than did those who studied abroad but did not participate in an internship or field placement] (page 218, Michael Steinberg, “Involve Me and I will Understand”; see this and other articles in *Frontiers*, Winter 2002; see additional research in the bibliography).

There are a number of ways that colleges and universities can easily make accessible to their students a broad range of international experiential programs. Representatives and alumni of programs (see references to notable programs listed on University of Michigan International Center web link in References) may be willing to give presentations or participate in education abroad fairs. Offices for education abroad and/or career advising can make available information about such programs. By contacting program providers, campus offices may track participants, solicit evaluations and create peer advising networks. This has long been practiced successfully at University of Michigan, where around 450 students work abroad each year. However, we sought to create a central, high-visibility event on campus to attract a large variety of organizations that could help our students gain international educational experience at all stages of their careers. The idea of a symposium and fair, called “International Career Pathways,” proved to be a unifying theme that brought together almost a dozen campus offices, from such diverse fields as international area studies, education abroad offices, and career offices, and from University schools such as engineering, public policy, public health and social work.

The event consists of an “International Opportunities Fair” and a series of panel discussions about work abroad and international careers. After considerable discussion in our organizing committee, four types of organizations were invited to the fair: 1) work abroad programs; 2) scholarship programs (Fulbright, NSEP, DAAD, etc.); 3) international graduate

degree programs from many universities; and 4) organizations offering varied career positions (government agencies such as the State Department and CIA, non-governmental organizations and private sector corporations). Except for category four, we had a high rate of acceptance from the invited organizations. It proved controversial within the committee to include these four types of organizations because existing fairs (with a domestic focus) separated them into “graduate school fair,” “internships fair,” and “non-profit careers fair.” The annual study abroad fair features only academic programs for undergraduates.

Overall, more than 40 external organizations and U-M units came the first year, and more than 50 the second year. We also invited nearby Michigan State University to collaborate in a similar fair, which they did, making the events more attractive for organizations that had to travel a long way to get here. This collaborative model has been successful elsewhere, such as at the “re-entry” conferences of Philadelphia and Boston-area colleges and universities.

Around 500 students have come each year to the international opportunities fair, and another 400 attend the panel discussions. Student comments are generally very positive. Students do wish that there were more employers offering career positions (it is precisely those organizations that respond in such small numbers to our invitation!). *Perhaps it's difficult to realize that international careers develop in multiple steps, such as through the experiences offered by study and work abroad programs, along with the need to obtain an advanced degree.*

Here are a few representative student comments: “Gave someone like me with little direction ideas for postgrad opportunities and the future” and “I liked the variety of organizations: internships, graduate schools, longterm jobs, etc.” On the other hand, students disliked “Too much stuff where you pay them rather than you get paid” and “I was under the impression that the fair would be CAREER oriented—I felt there could have been a greater emphasis on job opportunities rather than internships.”

Overall, all parties involved—students, university offices and external organizations—felt that “International Career Pathways” was a success, and it is well on its way to becoming an annual tradition at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

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Transitions Abroad – Award-winning periodical includes many first-hand articles on working abroad and international careers, www.transitionsabroad.com

University of California-Irvine International Opportunities, www.cie.uci.edu/iop

University of California-Berkeley Career Services – search using “symposium” provides summaries of panel discussions on international careers, <http://career.berkeley.edu>

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Research on working abroad and international careers

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The University of Minnesota Career Development Network

by **Martha Johnson**

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University of Minnesota

The ability to effectively communicate across cultures is consistently identified as a core competency desired as an outcome of an experience abroad. An aptitude for actively seeking the perspective of others from a different culture as a means of re-evaluating our own is beneficial for both the individual and the organization in which they work. So why begin by stating the obvious? Because the broad and varied application of this truth is not always so obvious, even to those of us who are the first to champion its value.

Most international educators are effective and highly comfortable in working across cultures and develop our proficiencies through the many challenges our jobs offer: international program development and management, advising students from varied background and cultures, crisis management. But often the demands and the somewhat myopic nature of our work keeps us from exploring one of the most diverse and complicated “host” cultures to be found: our own university campuses. Over the last four years, I have had a unique opportunity for an on-campus cultural immersion experience with my colleagues in the career services and advising world. As is inevitable with any successful cross-cultural experience, I have gained invaluable perspective on the world of career development and in particular its application to education abroad. This essay is an attempt to point out that sometimes the diverse cultures we desire to learn from and about are in our own academic backyards.

The University of Minnesota is a large and decentralized public university. The Twin Cities campus enrolls more than 41,000 students and employs 14,000 staff and faculty. While education abroad is now advised centrally in the Learning Abroad Center, the university is home to 17 dedicated career offices, with many individuals in other offices maintaining some responsibilities for career-related information and advising. In the summer of 2001, the professional staff in these offices joined to form a network to collaborate on projects, share resources, offer professional development, and to promote and advocate for career issues on campus. Today, the resulting University of Minnesota Career Development Network has a membership of more than 50, is an organized and dynamic group, and sponsors several subcommittees including a working group dedicated to internship issues.

I was initially invited by a colleague in the university’s Institute of Technology’s Career office to attend the group’s inception meeting. At that time, I was the director of the International Service and Travel Center (ISTC), which has since merged with the Global Campus Study Abroad to create the Learning Abroad Center. ISTC had a history of offering dedicated resources and advising for international experiential

opportunities and careers. I was initially nervous about attending, as I lacked any formal training in career issues, student development, or counseling and only knew one person in the group of 40. In the first year I attended, I listened, took notes, asked questions, and reviewed resources. As I became more familiar with the issues and projects, I began to engage and contribute the perspective of my office and expertise, eventually serving a term on the board of the network.

I have identified four particularly useful ideas, truths, and perspectives I have gained from my colleagues in career services at the University of Minnesota, who continue to impress me with their talents as well as their inclusiveness.

1. *Experiential components of a student’s college experience are most effective when they are valued as part of the student’s education.* The application of this concept seems simple enough, but it actually may require shifts in a few pervasive beliefs in traditional study abroad. First, while credit is one important and effective way of assessing quality and encouraging meaningful engagement, it is not necessarily the only way. Engineering degrees have a rich tradition of cooperative technical placements that are paid, never for credit, but very much considered a part of the student’s education. Internships that are imbedded in, or even required for, some degrees at the University of Minnesota are often done without the student registering for credit, as is the case for domestic internships at many institutions.

Education abroad professionals have, in my experience, often been reticent to embrace models for internships that do not bear credit. There seems to be a pervasive belief that credit ensures quality. I have learned from my career services colleagues to look past credit for other markers of quality in experiential programs, such as the engagement with the placement or project, preparation and management of expectations, and the fostering of independence. While these are obviously the same components of a quality accredited experience, the relevant point is that credit does not ensure them.

Conversely, a program that does not bear credit is most effective when it maintains a direct relationship to the student’s educational plan. Internships, community service, and field research are increasing being reflected through transcript notations or as a basis for senior theses or projects. And at the very least, students are most successful in these experiences when they can take advantage of advising and preparation resources. So the second shift my premise suggests is that the field of education abroad needs to expand recognition of the legitimacy of many international experiences that are undertaken for reasons other than credit, and work in partnership

with providers and other sponsoring offices on campuses to improve the student experience as a participant on any quality experiential program. In return, our experience in navigating complex issues in liability and safety may exceed that of offices working exclusively in the domestic realm and prove beneficial in their program development efforts.

2. *Student development is a continuous process, and many of the tools and theories that assist students in developing career skills and interests can be useful in assisting with program selection and engagement.* The application of student development theory to study abroad is not new. Effective advisors employ strategies to assess and enhance student readiness both for program selection and preparation. But through collaborative events and projects in collaboration with the Career Development Network, our office has applied tests such as the Holland Code, an inventory that assigns natural proficiencies (individuals are identified as being enterprising, creative, realistic, etc and then given correlative career suggestions) to education abroad. At a highly successful annual event at the University of Minnesota called “Discovering Your Place,” students take the Holland Code test and then are provided with comprehensive major/minor, career, and education abroad programmatic suggestions based on their results. Such a project synergizes skills, interests, and aptitude and elevates education abroad selection past destination and even area of study, to taking social and professional styles into consideration in selecting program models best suited to a student’s developmental stage and natural affinity.

Similarly, as career offices increasingly incorporate career exploration courses into university curricula early in the student career, the career component in education abroad might be more effective if introduced early in their trajectory of cross-cultural learning. Conventional wisdom has introduced the influence of the experience abroad on a student’s career in re-entry programming and advising. But many education abroad offices are finding ways to highlight the strong influence of the international experience on the academic and professional paths of students before they go abroad and even during program selection. Successful strategies include students preparing for and engaging in informational interviews on-site, sometime even with home institution alumni; tailoring internships and community service projects to help define or enhance career goals; or taking courses and engaging in research at host universities specifically related to potential professions. The tendency of some students to see study abroad as an isolated experience can be effectively challenged if the connection to and potential impact on their career and life plans is made early and often.

3. *Students, and education abroad professionals for that matter, cannot assume that employers, graduate committees, etc., inherently accept the value of an experience abroad.* At times, there is a lack of hard data, sometimes only anecdotal information, to prove the impact of education abroad on career choices and success. Study abroad may be perceived as an experience that only “rich” or “privileged” students are able to do and is not

“serious.” This view could be due to a hiring manager’s lack of international experience and lack of appreciation for the skills and aptitudes acquired.

Thus, it becomes imperative that students learn to articulate the value of their experience in terms of a direct benefit to the company, institution, or organization they hope to join. Students should identify proficiencies past those associated with an individual place or culture, and instead focus on transferable and general skills enhanced by their experience abroad. Campuses and providers best serve students when they provide specific resources to assist students incorporate newly learned skills and competencies gained from international experiences into resumes, graduate and professional school applications, and in their job interviews.

4. *Education abroad professionals cannot assume colleagues in career offices are familiar and comfortable with the international dimensions of experiential programs or the specific cross-cultural competencies gained from a program abroad.* As in the example of employers, the level of comfort career development colleagues have is often dependent on their own experiences. Several of the career professionals I work with at the University of Minnesota have studied or lived abroad themselves and are, not surprisingly, remarkably astute in their insights regarding synthesizing the experience into effective career development. But for those who have not had opportunities to work, live, or travel abroad, there can be an unintentional disregard for the impact of the experience. Or in other cases there can be an interest, but a concern for their own lack of expertise or knowledge in the international components of the discussion.

Some career professionals may see that employers are in most cases not yet specifically demanding or preferring graduates with international experience. While that may be the case, I believe it reflects more of a perception issue than a real lack of value. If career professionals can teach students to leverage the general and transferable skills gained while abroad, the value-added of their international experiences could become more apparent. The competencies employers continue to site as most important, leadership, communication, confidence, problem solving, all are almost naturally enhanced through experiences abroad, sometimes in ways that students themselves may not be fully aware. By proactively sharing anecdotal information, research, and outcome related data on these topics with career colleagues, we can work towards more effective integration of education abroad into career development.

As in the case in any cross-cultural undertaking, I find my interactions with career colleagues are greatly improved now that I “speak a bit of their language” and have learned more about their professional roles and values. Our office increasingly seeks out opportunities for collaboration including sending career colleagues on site visits and including them in reentry programming. The common goals and commitment to student success provides a natural basis for cooperation. So while your campus career office may not be as exotic as the places your students are going to, I highly recommend the trip.

The Boston College Global Proficiency Program

by Adrienne Nussbaum

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Boston College

“Global? Does this mean we are sending our students to the moon?”

“Proficient? How can we say that anyone is actually proficient in anything?”

“Certificate? Can you ever certify that someone is intercultur-ally competent?”

These are a few of the questions I received from faculty members six years ago when I proposed a new initiative at Boston College (BC) which I decided to call the “Global Proficiency Program.” I had been charged with the task of trying to “internationalize the campus.” Having worked at BC for many years, it was clear to me that we didn’t necessarily need more international things happening on campus, but rather what was lacking was a means of motivating students to take advantage of the many opportunities that existed.

For many years, we have discussed the creation of a “student development transcript” which would document the many co-curricular activities that students participate in outside of the classroom. I believed the concept of a transcript could be the reward, the motivating factor, to get students more interested in actively participating in international events on campus. This transcript could benefit them after they graduated, by giving them an additional credential to present to graduate schools, employers, etc.

But why stop with just co-curricular activities? Even though I primarily work in the field of international student advising, I dabble occasionally in study abroad and remember attending NAFSA conference sessions where there was a recurring theme of better integrating study abroad into the curriculum and a student’s entire college experience. And so an idea was born. I decided to bridge that great divide between academic and student affairs, and actually develop a certificate program—a Global Proficiency (GP) Program Certificate—that integrated both curricular and co-curricular requirements. The goals of the program are:

- To help internationalize the campus by encouraging students to take courses and participate in activities with an international focus
- To help students integrate their academic, co-curricular, and study-abroad experiences with the intention of giving them a more cohesive focus to their college experience that might ultimately influence their post graduate career decisions and

- To coherently document these accomplishments to benefit students in their post-graduate careers when applying for jobs, graduate schools, Fulbright grants, volunteer programs, etc.

Like any new idea, this proposal met with some early resistance. The Student Affairs staff was immediately on board, but it took more work to convince the faculty who I believe felt I was impinging on their territory. Eventually, once we got beyond all of the rhetoric, and I explained exactly what the program was and was not, I was given the go ahead. In designing the program, we wanted to motivate students to go outside of their comfort zones. Working with one of the academic deans, we developed the following program requirements:

1. International experience

- Study abroad program, international internship, international service trip

2. Academic coursework

- Language: two courses beyond the language requirement (in any modern foreign language at any level)
- Humanities: two international or multicultural courses
- Social Sciences, Business, or Education: two international or multicultural courses

3. Co-curricular activities

- Four intercultural co-curricular activities, at least one must be a service activity

4. Synthesis project (new)

- Presentation, essay or other final project to reflect on the experience of having done the GP program and its impact on future career plans.

If a student fulfills all of the above requirements by the time she graduates, then she receives a detailed transcript and a certificate signed by both the Academic Vice President and the Vice President for Student Affairs. We worked closely with the Career Center to develop the format for the transcript so that it would be modeled after a resume. Ideally, we like to have students join the program in their freshmen year so that they can make deliberate decisions as they go along, with input from their advisor, as to which courses to take, etc. For example, instead of just taking any history course to fulfill a core or major requirement, a student might take one with an international or multicultural focus and fulfill a GP requirement simultaneously.

Through much publicity both to students and relevant academic and administrative departments, the program has become enormously successful. At any given time, we have approximately 250 students enrolled across all four of our undergraduate schools; this year we expect to give out 40-45 certificates/transcripts—the largest number ever. Undoubtedly we have certainly accomplished the first goal of the program in influencing students' decisions. Students come to us to seek suggestions for international activities they can become involved in, and likewise they may also go to their advisors for alternative international courses. By integrating the academic and co-curricular sides of their college experience, students seem to be better organized and are taking a more holistic approach to their learning. The other goals are a bit more elusive and harder to document. We have not yet done any empirical research on the effect of the program on students' career decisions, nor on how influential the program has been on employers or graduate schools. In the near future, our Career Center is planning to interview GP students to assess if they believe the GP is an asset in the job hiring process.

We do have quite a bit of anecdotal evidence as to the success of the GP objectives. If you look at the current activities of our alumni from the past five years (www.bc.edu/gp), you will find ESL teachers, Master's students in International Education, Jesuit and Peace Corps Volunteers, and Rotary and Fulbright Scholars. When surveyed, a number of them have stated that, without a doubt, studying abroad combined with the GP program had a major influence on their present career choices and accomplishments. One of our graduates believes that he would not have been accepted into the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy had it not been for the GP program. I have also had a Peace Corps representative tell me that the GP is exactly the type of credential they are looking for in applicants.

We have also found that students are asking for letters early in their senior year—to certify they are in the process of completing the program—which they can use for job and admission applications. This alone is significant in that students perceive that the program is a way of distinguishing themselves and is a valuable asset for getting them into graduate school or securing employment. One of the Associate Directors of our Career Center has acknowledged that “there is no question that employers are impressed by a student's multicultural experiences, including service and educational programs abroad. Employers are also eager to hire people who know a language other than English.” One can therefore reasonably conclude that, if the GP program encourages these qualities and documents them for students, it is indeed of value to employers, even if they do not recognize it is a formal “program” per se. Often in job interviews, students are not always able to adequately articulate connections between the various aspects of their college experiences and how they relate to their chosen career path. The GP transcript bridges this gap

by having their international achievements stand out beyond the mere line or two on a resume.

The fact that the program formally acknowledges these international experiences and related accomplishments gives added value to students. To quote one of our graduates from 2003:

“The Global Proficiency program brought value and cogency to my Boston College experience. I have always been drawn to international issues and the GP program's structure allowed me to measure my international experiences and studies against a standard. I was charged with completing the program's requirements, which pushed me to explore other cultures by attending lectures, taking classes and studying abroad. Most importantly, I felt supported by the very existence of the GP program. I knew that my passion for learning about and understanding the world around me was not only important but also shared by many.”

This student is now a campus minister at a Catholic high school and tries to incorporate a global perspective in all of his various responsibilities.

What are the benefits of taking a different class, or doing an additional service activity in order to fulfill the requirements of the GP program? What effect does it have on students when they are asked to think about how their study abroad experience relates to their other academic experiences, or how being a member of an international organization ties into what they may be studying in class? Maybe it is an internship or volunteer experience that they do for the program that leads to a full-time job. Perhaps it is a course they took for the program outside of their major field that sparks an interest and results in an alternative career path. Returning study abroad students often say their experience has “changed their lives;” yet because it is an isolated experience, and not connected to the rest of their college experiences, they do not recognize how or what effect it may have on their post graduate life. This is where the GP program can make a difference, by placing these isolated experiences into a larger context and engaging them in a discernment process regarding their future career plans. This is why we recently added a final synthesis project to the GP requirements: to give students the opportunity to reflect on what it has meant for them to have participated in the program and reflect on the impact it will have on them after they graduate.

I have presented the GP program at numerous regional and national conferences, including those of NAFSA and NASPA, and received positive feedback. Several other universities have used it as a model for starting similar programs. It seems to meet many in bridging the gap between academic and student affairs offices, integrating study abroad and language study with other college experiences, and acknowledging the importance of a global perspective in the career development of students.

More than a Certificate: The Effect of Cultural Immersion in ESL/EFL Teacher Training

by Vivian V. Sockett

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Brethren Colleges Abroad

When considering the effect of study abroad on a student's approach to a future career as a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), two potential study abroad scenarios exist. In the first, the student has gone abroad to perfect a foreign language of her own and gain work experience as an English language assistant. Alternatively, the student has enrolled in a Certificate program to earn a qualification in Teaching English as a Second (or Foreign) Language (TESL/TEFL Certificate) and this program is located abroad. Each of these options offers the potential for influencing not only the student's choice of career, perhaps as a long-term ESL teacher in the United States or an itinerant EFL instructor abroad, but also, and surely more significantly, the manner in which she will approach her future ESL/EFL teaching practice.

A TESL/TEFL Program abroad in a non-English-speaking immersion setting has the potential for shaping a future ESL/EFL teacher's career development in a number of ways. In the Brethren Colleges Abroad program in France we have observed the benefits of offering students:

- A personal experience of second language acquisition accompanied by timely "scaffolding"¹
- A framework for processing their own cultural immersion experience
- Extended professional experience as a language teaching assistant in a non-American setting
- Instruction in TESL/TEFL Theory and Issues illustrated by the student's concurrent experiences in the above listed areas

There are two optimal outcomes of participation in such a program. The first is that the student may be inspired to return to the U.S. to focus on ESL teaching, having recognized the significance of the issues for their fellow citizens. The second is for a student to return abroad after graduation both to further their own understanding of other cultures as well as promote a teaching of EFL which equips learners to better participate in the international dialogue concerning their own future.

A personal experience of second language acquisition accompanied by timely scaffolding

American students arriving abroad are often unprepared for how the mental, emotional and psychological processes of second language acquisition (SLA) will affect them. They are puzzled by expressions that work in English not being understood when transliterated into the local language. The most eloquent in English are the most affected, finding it difficult to accept that simple is now better and that their attempts at complex, sophisticated communication are incoherent. All are unprepared for the fatigue of extended interaction in the foreign language and for the feeling that there is a seemingly infinite mass of the language that is beyond their grasp. Letting go of their American accent and of English grammatical structures to allow the new sounds and patterns to find a place in their minds can provoke panic as some feel they will no longer be "themselves."

Timely provision of strategies to assist students in their language acquisition as well as informed feedback on their linguistic struggles and victories constitute essential scaffolding of a student's insight into the mechanics of SLA. This concrete, personal understanding of the processes of SLA can later be translated into their future teaching practice when they dialogue with their own students as fellow second language learners.

A framework for processing their cultural immersion experience

For an American student who has grown up in an essentially monolingual, mono-cultural environment, the experiential understanding gained through an immersion experience abroad can be radically perspective changing. For the first time in their lives, they will feel the challenges of trying to assimilate another culture. Many students arrive abroad with the subconscious expectation that they will either absorb the new culture through a passive process somewhat akin to osmosis or that the differences that they will have to learn will be mainly superficial, allowing them to continue to relate, communicate and function essentially as they always have. A large element of their culture shock, therefore, is the extent to which being a cultural outsider impacts an individual's identity. Areas of competence which gave them a sense of value in America no longer exist and signs of their American social status are no longer recognized. Worse, a new identity is imposed

upon them: that of awkward foreigner, stumbling through basic interactions, startling local sensibilities and being treated as slightly backward, sometimes naughty, children.

All of this is destabilizing enough without the sudden, often unsolicited, insight into how English-speaking countries, their culture and politics can be viewed from outside the U.S. Not all of this feedback is negative, but enough is based on different values, patterns of reasoning and, even, information from different media, that it necessarily challenges the student's assumptions about the role of English and English-speaking countries. This, in turn, throws into question the student's perceptions of themselves as a representative of both the language and the culture.

There is nothing to say that this experience alone will lead a student to adopt a particular approach to their future language teaching. In fact, all of these struggles and frustrations can reinforce cultural and national prejudices. A short-term island program may structurally promote academic tourism and fail to emphasize the importance of mixing with and learning from a host culture. However, if the student is accompanied gently through a cultural immersion experience, and given space in which to make explicit their hitherto nameless frustrations, then the benefits for their future interaction with ESL/EFL learners are numerous.

Extended professional experience as a language teaching assistant in a non-American setting

If, in addition, students are in a program which offers them a work abroad experience in the form of an extended teaching practicum then the impact on their career development increases significantly as they:

- observe how English is taught and learned outside the US
- identify the values implicit in the local education system
- experience students' response to them as an American
- gain significant supervised experience teaching English as a Second/Foreign language in a non-American context.

These benefits may begin to show themselves after a short-term teaching experience (10-20 hours), but can be most constructively nurtured over the course of a semester or a year, allowing the students 40-60 hours of teaching practice.

Instruction in TESL/TEFL Theory and Issues illustrated by the student's daily experiences

By taking a TESL/TEFL Theory and Issues course while doing an ESL/EFL teaching assistantship abroad, students can gain a greater appreciation for the issues linking language and identity. A program which is training future ESL/EFL teachers to build bridges between cultures rather than promote the hegemony of English-speaking nations will:

- purposefully instruct future teachers in methodologies which demonstrate respect for the learner and the learner's culture

- encourage awareness of documents as cultural as well as linguistic texts
- promote an awareness of language as a vehicle for culture.
- instruct future teachers in the debates surrounding literacy and identity
- explore the different views on recognizing world Englishes.

English as a Second or Foreign Language is not a neutral commodity which future teachers can be encouraged to disseminate without considering how it will be received and what purpose the language will serve the learners. At its best, a TESL/TEFL program abroad will prepare future teachers to equip ESL/EFL learners to participate in the global dialogue regarding the future of their own country. In addition, far from promoting the view of native English as a 'birthright' commodity, to be bartered on the world market for a financial place in other countries, this sort of TEFL/TESL training program will instead encourage in future teachers a lifetime interest in the process of discovering other languages and cultures.

Benefits at home and abroad

In enumerating the above benefits of study abroad as they relate to TESL/TEFL, however, it is important to pause and consider that they do not come quickly. In spite of the current trend in education abroad toward shorter stays, there is no getting around the fact that the longer a student studies abroad, the deeper will be their grasp of the language acquisition and cultural adjustment process. This is the case not only because of the time required to assimilate another language and culture, but also because the longer a student knows s/he will be abroad the greater will be their motivation to become involved in their new environment.

Potentially, a TESL/TEFL program can provide quality training, experiential learning and a well-grounded understanding of the issues inherent in English language teaching in a global context. Students who had not have previously considered a TESL/TEFL career may discover the opportunity, and those who had only viewed TESL/TEFL as a fallback option may decide to make the field their first choice. According to CELA (*Survey of the States' Limited English Proficiency Students and Available Educational Programs and Services* 1999-2000 Summary Report), there is an increasing shortage of teachers in the U.S. with ESL training and a demand abroad for teachers with EFL training. This means that not only is there a market for teachers with ESL/EFL training and experience, but also that there is a significant cultural need for those working with ESL/EFL students to adopt an approach which is respectful of the learner's position and heritage. This will be a pedagogy that builds bridges both within communities in the U.S. as well as between English-speaking communities and the rest of the world.

Notes and references

¹Scaffolding is based on the theories of Vygotsky that “cognitive ability is only facilitated in situations where the learner interacts with others of a higher ability level in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) – the range in cognitive performance that exists between that of the unaided individual and that which can be attained by that individual when interacting with a more capable peer or adult.”

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Service-Learning for International Students: Win/Win/Win/Win Proposition

by John Norris

President

TransPacific Hawaii College

I was close to tears of pride as I watched this beautiful young woman being interviewed for a teleconference on service learning. The Pacific Ocean served as a backdrop at our campus in Honolulu as “Makiko” talked about her experiences in volunteering as an international student at the Oceanic Institute and the impact it has had on her life. Not only was she fulfilling her dreams of working with marine mammals, but she was doing so in grand style through a 4.0 GPA in her two years at TransPacific in Hawaii and continuing on through her Junior year at UC Santa Cruz. This feat becomes even more impressive when you consider that it was accomplished by a second language learner.

Thinking about “Makiko” and the trials and tribulations she experienced prompted me to reflect on our college’s service learning program and the impact it is having on the lives of our students. TransPacific Hawaii College (TPHC) is a non-traditional, two-year, private, non-profit college that is 100 percent international in its student body with all students coming from Asia (mostly Japan). The 281 students constitute a maximum size for the college that is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The academic curriculum of the college begins with an intense English as a Second Language (ESL) program for six months that is followed by eighteen months of credit-bearing Associate of Arts course work, culminating in an AA degree. Ninety percent of our students complete the AA degree and transfer to senior colleges, primarily on the mainland of the United States.

Due to our students’ backgrounds, heavy emphasis is placed on critical thinking, academic writing, the use of the English language (particularly as it applies to academic settings) and successful transfer to a four-year American program to finish the bachelor’s degree. A common theme throughout the curriculum and a major part of the mission statement of the college is the creation of the multicultural awareness essential to cultivating socially responsible, self-realized individuals who will both prosper in and enrich the global community of the 21st century.

Volunteering has become a key component at the college, beginning as a single course in service learning offered first in 1999, and then becoming a tradition with the students. Eighty percent of TPHC students will be involved in volunteering/service learning at some point in their two-year study with the college. Several of these students will earn the President of the United States’ award for service to the community and will completely change their academic focus as a

result of their community based volunteering experiences. “Makiko” was one of these students, accepting the Presidential award in 2002 for 100 plus hours working as a volunteer at the Oceanic Institute of Hawaii. With assistance from the college, a volunteering opportunity at the Oceanic Institute was arranged for “Makiko.” It allowed her to observe and work directly with marine research. It further convinced her that the area she sought was marine mammal research, not just marine related research.

Over the last four years, students of TransPacific have logged more than 10,000 hours of community service. Fifty-three students have been awarded the President of the United States’ Student Service Award for 100 hours of community service. Numerous students have been impacted by their volunteering experiences to such an extent that they have changed their major or narrowed the focus of their studies. Thousands of local citizens have been impacted through the students’ community service efforts.

Volunteering is a common practice in most U.S. communities. Including international students in this opportunity to serve and to learn while serving is one of the most effective ways a college can address the need of these newcomers to integrate themselves into their new community in a purposeful way, a way that provides them with a means for gaining insight into American ways of doing and with content for meaningful reflection and language learning. When colleges incorporate a program that encourages volunteerism by international students, a win/win/win situation occurs. The students win by having an accepting environment in which to practice new language skills; the college wins by enhancing its reputation and contribution to the community; and the community wins through the services of the students who bring energy and enthusiasm to the volunteer site.

With some students, a fourth win occurs when they have experiences that open their eyes to future career possibilities. While “Makiko” came to the college with an idea as to her future directions, “Eri” had no clue as to her future until she enrolled in the service learning course and selected volunteering at a local hospice program. The experience of working with the terminally ill led her to major in social science with a goal to work in social services in Japan. “Marika” knew that her future would rest with social services because her family owned a home for senior citizens. She used her service learning opportunity to learn how Americans treat their elderly and gathered ideas to take back to her family’s business.

“Hiroshi’s” goals changed following his experiences working with elementary children. He realized he wanted to become a teacher at the elementary level and as a result, chose to return to Japan to pursue a teaching certificate program. And “Akiko”, through a brief volunteer experience with a homeless shelter in Waikiki, knew that she wished to pursue a career in social services. Following a 4.0 GPA and an AA degree at TransPacific, she transferred to the University of Hawaii and worked with the University of Hawaii Health Services, focusing on women’s issues. Following another 4.0 performance, “Akiko” graduated with a degree in Social Science and pursued a Masters at New York City University where she did her internship working in a homeless shelter in New York City. Each of her choices along the way was influenced by her decision to study abroad in America and to integrate herself into American culture through volunteer experiences.

The areas where TransPacific students volunteer are widespread and have included such diverse activities as:

- assisting visitors to the Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, a marine life park known for its coral reef preservation program
- helping children who have special needs through the Easter Seals Foundation
- assisting in the teaching of reading to students in the third grade at a local elementary school
- helping to care for the elderly at a local nursing home
- creating costumes and assisting backstage at a local community theater
- caring for animals at the humane society
- assisting in marine ecological research at the Oceanic Institute, a renowned marine-life research center
- assisting runners in the Honolulu marathon by providing medical aid-station translation for the 17,000 plus Japanese runners each year

Each of these volunteering experiences has the potential to change the lives of the students who take them on. In some cases, it may be a realization that the area of volunteering is one that they do not wish to pursue. In others, it may be the spark that ignites their future ambitions.

In addition to developing the college’s articulated student learning outcomes of personal and social responsibility and the affective gains related to helping others, second language learners in this experiential learning environment have a chance to acquire and apply language in a way that is relevant and meaningful to themselves. Through the course, Community Involvement, each student volunteers for three hours per week at a work site they have selected from the available locations. They are required to maintain a reflective journal and to discuss their unique experiences through a round-table discussion with their peers. They also develop a research report, a challenge for second language learners. The volunteering requirement of the course provides the class with content for discussion about civic and personal responsibility while, at the same time, giving students an opportunity to explore related academic topics through research, journal writing, discussion and oral presentation. It is this exploration of career topics that can have a powerful impact on their lives.

Upon completion of the course, many of the students are eager to continue to volunteer. Often they stay with the site from their class, but sometimes they wish to try other experiences. The Service Learning Outcomes Survey completed by students following their volunteer experience indicates strong positive feelings. Particularly strong are areas related to personal growth, career choices, goal setting, metacognitive strategies for language learning, and their feelings of contribution to the community. Their enthusiasm for volunteering also has the effect of encouraging other students to take up volunteering. To meet this need, TransPacific has created a Service-Learning Center staffed by student project directors and a faculty coordinator to assist students in identifying community sites in need of volunteering assistance. Information is posted around the campus and active student volunteers are available to talk about their experiences in round-table discussions.

For the second language learner, the opportunities offered through service learning have proven to be highly beneficial to TransPacific students and the community in which we reside. Over the years, the interaction with community non-profit organizations has provided the college a strong reputation as an institution that values its place in the community and gives back more than it receives. The minimal costs to the institution to establish and maintain a service-learning program are far outweighed by the benefits to the all of the constituents. It is truly a win/win/win/win situation.

Study Abroad: Providing Students with Disabilities an Educational Boost, Career Preparation and Personal Pride

by Michele Scheib

National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange Project Initiatives Specialist
for Mobility International USA

“[Study abroad] was such a defining point in my life that no matter what the subject is, I [often] find myself saying: ‘When I was in Spain...’” said Jessica Ramquist, a wheelchair user who spent five months in Seville. Ramquist credits the challenges that she faced in Spain with giving her persistence, confidence and motivation that still impact her life and career path years later. “Recognizing and appreciating the differences between the countries was just part of the adventure,” she said.

When preparing for her trip, Ramquist focused on the physical obstacles that she expected to encounter. “I spoke some Spanish but they don’t teach you how to say ‘My wheelchair battery is dead, can you push me home?’ in Spanish classes,” explains Ramquist. “When I’m at home I have a much larger support group of family and friends. If there’s something in my life that isn’t easy, there are people to turn to. But when I was abroad, that wasn’t an option. It was either sink or swim. I either had to ask for something to be made accessible, or I had to go home,” Ramquist recalls.

Ramquist credits her experience in Spain with influencing her decision to go to law school. Her decision to add language studies to her education is not uncommon among returning international exchange students that have been inspired by the new culture. However, the influence of study abroad on her decision to go to law school has roots specifically in her overseas disability experience.

“When I was [in Spain], there were so many obstacles, and it was very difficult. I remember talking to my roommate over there, complaining about this and that and she said, ‘Why don’t you just do something about it?’ That’s when I started thinking about going to law school, and that’s how I went down that path,” recalls Ramquist. Friends also helped her to see that it was better to experience these barriers surrounded by “the culture, the people and its ambiance” in Spain that created the good memories she misses now.

The challenges Ramquist faced fostered a new commitment to assert her rights as an individual with a disability. “[Study abroad] really changed my attitude,” reflected Ramquist. “It’s a feeling of pride. Prior to [the study abroad experience], a lot of times [in the United States] I wouldn’t take a class because it was in a building that was inaccessible at my school. But that changed after being in Spain and seeing that I could accomplish things. I wasn’t going to accept the fact that there was no elevator in the building. That’s not okay anymore. I knew that I deserved it, and so that’s why I got into law,

because I know that there’s certain things that I deserve to have and everyone with a disability [deserves], and it really took being abroad and seeing the opposite [to realize this].”

Ramquist also believes that her experiences in Spain gave her a boost in getting into Seattle University School of Law. “I actually wrote my admissions personal statement about being in Spain, so I would say it [impacted my acceptance],” said Ramquist.

Making the Employment Case for Study Abroad

Ramquist’s beliefs about the outcomes of international exchange are not unique. In 2004, the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State and managed by Mobility International USA, conducted interviews with study abroad alumni with physical, vision, hearing or health-related disabilities. These alumni consistently cited the overseas experience as having had positive impact on resumes, in job interviews or on graduate school admissions applications. They also reported having acquired increased confidence and a “can do” approach to other aspects of their life, as well as expanded global awareness. These reports were congruent with those of international exchange alumni with disabilities focus groups held in 2001, also conducted by NCDE. These alumni also reported increased confidence, global awareness, job skills and new career goals following their overseas experiences.

Preparation for Employment

According to national surveys, people with disabilities are less likely to be employed than other minority groups. In spite of anti-discrimination laws, young people with disabilities continue to experience job discrimination based on inaccurate assumptions about their competence and capability. If international experience offers job seekers a competitive advantage, then it is all the more crucial for young people with disabilities. A study abroad experience may catch the eye of a potential employer, and engage the employer’s interest in exploring the applicants’ experience and potential.

Lynnae Rutledge, Planning and Policy Manager with Oregon’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services, notes that VR funding has supported students with disabilities to study abroad if relevant to career goals. Rutledge believes that international experience is vital to young adults with disabilities preparing to enter the increasingly global U.S. job market.

“Even with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people with disabilities in this country still are not always considered equally for positions of employment. A job applicant with a disability who has international experience brings that much more to the table to support their qualifications for the job,” according to Rutledge.

In the NCDE interviews, international exchange alumni recounted many examples of the positive influence that they perceived their international exchange experiences had had on their quest for employment.

“I think you’re always more employable if you’ve had experience abroad, and I think probably if you’re a person with a disability [prospective employers are] even more impressed because maybe their expectations are a bit lower. Having international experiences on my resume was definitely an asset in my job search. The work I’m doing now is for an organization with bases all over the world, so they do look for people who have that international experience.”

“I put [my exchange experience] on my resume and it did spark questions in my job interview. I’m now a camp program director and a quarter of my staff are international, so I’m sure that my international experience really helped me to get the job.”

“I definitely think it did impact getting my first job. The fact that I had been to Europe really did help me get an international accounting position, working with an international firm. Just from what they said, I think it gave me an edge over people who perhaps did not have this experience.”

Job Competence

Cross-cultural competence gained through study abroad was reported frequently by alumni as having been directly useful in their employment situations.

“I’m working for a very large import/export firm. I’m working on coordinating international shipments. [My international experience] does help me appreciate other cultures and to deal with people overseas.”

“I have Russian deaf clients and Mexican deaf clients. Because of my experience with Russian and Mexican deaf culture and sign language, I am able to communicate and help them figure things out.”

“The exchange programs have helped me greatly to communicate on my job, because a lot of the kids we serve are from Latin America. In school I did not study Spanish, but the trip to Costa Rica and the classes that I’ve taken since I’ve been back have helped, so it’s getting better.”

“[My international experience] helped because my boss was from England, and I spent a lot of time in England. So, I got along with him pretty well and I really understood where he was coming from.”

Alumni also reported personal qualities resulting from international exchange experiences that have benefited their job performance, including increased confidence, adaptability and creativity in problem solving.

“After I participated in the exchanges, I accepted a position as patient representative in a hospital, in which I serve as a spokesperson for children with disabilities and their parents on a committee that includes every department director. Had I not participated in two exchange programs I would have been much more intimidated. Participating in both exchanges has really given me courage. It helps me to realize that it’s not just me I’m speaking up for, I’m speaking up on behalf of a much larger group with a larger purpose.”

“To go abroad, be away for so long without having my back-up system with me, it allowed me to realize that I can certainly do more things than I had thought.... For career purposes, it gave me a tremendous boost. If I’m more confident to employers or whatever endeavor I may be doing, then it’s always a plus.”

“One of the main things that I learned from the exchange in terms of leadership was the concept of creative problem solving. The lessons we learned there were about accessibility, but also about communication and being adaptable. I learned [that when finding] a situation that’s not especially accessible to quickly look for ways to adapt it without getting frustrated.”

Educational Boost

Many alumni recounted that their overseas experience had given them an edge in their applications for graduate programs or educational internships, or had given them new perspectives on their academic potential.

“I had told [my internship supervisor at the World Affairs Center] that I was going to Spain [to fulfill] my curriculum requirement. I think it did have an impact on their decision to hire me for the semester.”

“It definitely helped me get into graduate school because I think that [when you] study abroad, it says something about you: that you have certain types of characteristics, that you can adjust to different types of environments, that you’re a people person.”

“In my graduate studies, I was taking some classes and people asked, ‘How can you take that class? It’s really hard. You have to have sight in order to take it.’ I said, ‘Look, if I’m able to go to Australia and deal with things there, then I can accomplish this. I can do it.’ And so they were really amazed. In the end, I still maintained my 4.0.”

“[I knew] I could do anything if I put my mind into it [after my experience in Thailand]. Subsequently, I signed up for five courses [upon returning home], which was rather insane. I managed to get a fairly respectful GPA.”

New Goals

Some alumni reported that their educational and career goals had taken new, many times international, directions following their international exchange.

“My year of study in England really put [disability rights] issues into a global framework. I did a lot of work with the disability community over there, comparing policy and legislation between the United States and Britain. Now I envision a career that brings domestic and international law together. I see them as inseparable now.”

“I was fascinated to learn about how the government in Germany addresses disability issues, and to compare that to what we do here in the United States. That comparison made me interested in policy. Now I’m working with a policy-making organization that advises our state government on disability issues.”

“I chose to study cross-cultural communication because my trip to Mexico sparked my interest in communication between cultures.”

Spreading the Word

According to a study by Cornell University for its Disability Statistics online resource (Annual Demographic Supplement 2002), using the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, “the employment rate of people with disabilities is not quite 21 percent while the rate of those with without disabilities is at 78 percent.” Many efforts are currently underway that focus on building the employment capacity of people with disabilities. Nevertheless, study abroad has not yet been exploited by disability communities or professionals as a key strategy for career preparation.

Recent studies conducted on the impact of international exchange experiences did not collect data that would indicate whether students with disabilities were included in the studies, and thereby lost a valuable opportunity to explore how the impact of study abroad experiences on students with disabilities is similar to or differed from that of non-disabled study abroad participants. On the other hand, when the University of Buffalo with Mobility International USA submitted a proposal to a prominent disability-related research institute to conduct a larger scale quantitative study on impacts of study abroad on people with disabilities, the proposal was turned down. “Lack of importance” was cited as a prime reason for denial. Clearly, outreach is needed to bring the benefits of international educational exchange to the attention of disability community leaders, educators and professionals.

“In my twenty-one years, the best decision I have ever made was to stay in Seville for those five months,” said Ramquist. More students with disabilities and people that are in their lives need to be told why education abroad is an important element in their career development. One step toward this goal is to ensure that results of research on the impact of study abroad reach disability audiences, and that the research includes and illuminates the experiences of exchange students with disabilities.

References

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International Service-Learning: Impact on Career Choices

by Barbara Wanasek

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“I had traveled a lot prior to that anyway, but this was the first time of actual productive travel where you are going and making an impact in a foreign environment. It made a world of difference for me as an individual, and I can say that we do impact the place and the people that we work with. . . . I can say, and it is not an overstatement to say, and it sounds dramatic but it is the truth, that it definitely shaped who I am today. It shaped the direction that I am going in academically and career-wise.” IPSL program participant, *Service-Learning Across Cultures: Promise and Achievement* (2004) p. 170

Over the past twenty-three years, the programs of the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership (IPSL) have provided nearly 3,000 students, both undergraduate and graduate, with unique opportunities to combine academic study for credit with volunteer community service in a variety of developing and developed nations world-wide. Some of these experiences have been captured in a study published by IPSL late in 2004: *Service-Learning Across Cultures: Promise and Achievement*, a report to the Ford Foundation which concluded a major grant in support of expanding and deepening service-learning opportunities for college and university students in the U.S. and elsewhere.

In the study, Humphrey Tonkin (president emeritus of the University of Hartford and current IPSL vice president for research and evaluation) and a team of researchers detail the impact of international service-learning programs on students, service agencies, and academic institutions. The student study involved focus groups of 17 IPSL alumni in an intense day of interviewing and group exercises to learn about their intellectual development, affective and moral development, thoughts on service, cross-cultural awareness, social integration and an overall assessment of the experience. Conversations ranged from reflection on their time abroad, to their current work, to observations on the state of the world. Researchers commented on the participants’ thought processes, intercultural awareness, and coping mechanisms.

Several common themes emerged through the study. International service-learning is a more radical educational experience for and tends to have a long-term impact on its participants. Students experience culture shock, have high levels of adaptability, and are eager to test theory against practice and practice against theory. They enjoy reflection, have positive attitudes, and are comfortable with ambiguity. IPSL students develop a pluralistic world view, rethink the idea of service, and tend to have a civic-minded personality. The IPSL

experience has been so powerful for some students that it has re-shaped their career aspirations and goals after their return to the U.S. or other home country.

The International Partnership has heard from alumni in all professional fields. There are a number of doctors and other healthcare professionals whose interest in the field started with tracking patients through the medical system in Kingston, Jamaica or in a hospital in London. There is a political theorist among the group who has written on misguided policies that effect local community life in the United States (see Williamson, Thad, David Imbroscio, and Gar Alperovitz. *Making a Place for Community*. 2002.). Many students have become teachers and social workers, continuing the path on which they first embarked by working with children in Mexico or the disenfranchised in Ecuador.

Here are some student stories, in their own words or paraphrased.

“I currently work as an orientation and mobility therapist for the NJ Commission for the Blind teaching children and adults to travel independently throughout their communities. After the program and graduation from Lewis and Clark College I worked with Latinos in Santa Cruz County, CA at the Head Start program for two years. I moved back to Philadelphia and developed an outreach program for blind and visually impaired Latinos for an association for the blind for three years. I next received my MSW from Bryn Mawr College graduate school of social work and my Masters in Orientation and Mobility Therapy from the PA College of Optometry. My experiences with the Partnership and my study abroad program in Argentina with a Lewis and Clark program profoundly influenced me to go into social work and education and assist the Latino population in the U.S., particularly with disabilities.” Robert Fitzgerald, Ecuador (Guayaquil), Fall 1990

Carrie Fathman served with Pharmaciens sans Frontieres and l’Association des Paralyses where she worked with disabled people in Montpellier, France (summer 1998). After graduating from Stanford, Carrie received a Fulbright Scholarship to travel to Slovakia and study people’s use of their land. Since returning, she has pulled all of her interests together to help establish a non-profit organization in St. Louis called Horticulture Jobs Partnership. Funded by United Way, the Partnership employs individuals with developmental disabilities in horticultural positions, such as working on organic farms or creating yard ornaments. Through her experience in

France and now in her current work, she says, “The goal of our non-profit and others is to fill the cracks until society figures out how to fill them on its own. Ideally, we will work ourselves right out of a job.”

“I am a programs coordinator for Campus Compact for New Hampshire, focusing in particular on working with campuses to develop their service-learning infrastructure. Service-learning has been part of my professional life for the last three years, and I often refer to my experiences in Quito. I am in a unique position to talk about the Partnership as I have constant access to students, faculty and community service directors.” Amy Schaltegger Escoto, Ecuador (Quito), Fall 1996

“. . . I've worked in several youth development jobs and spent three years in the Peace Corps (my decision to do Peace Corps came about as a direct result of my time in Ecuador and Mexico). Now I'm back in the U.S. and am finishing up a Master's in teaching ESL. I wanted to acknowledge the impact that my service-learning experiences had on me, up to and including now, six years later.” – Alice Solomon, Ecuador (Quito), Spring 1997 and Mexico, Summer 1997

“After my senior year at Washington and Lee University, I enrolled at Thomas Jefferson Medical College. After my first year I travelled to Uganda to work with Hospice Uganda in treating the many dying of AIDS and its related cancers within the capital, Kampala. In addition I joined with the Church of Uganda to help lead HIV education and prevention classes in rural areas. During my years in medical school I worked with several inner-city needle exchanges and student run clinics. The experiences then led me to the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, for a year long Master's program in International Health. During that year I worked on a project with the Thailand Ministry of Health to build improved primary care under their new nationalized healthcare system. Beyond my studies I volunteered for the night shift (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) at Mother Teresa's Gift of Hope House for homeless patients with AIDS who receive care at Johns Hopkins.

The opportunity was a blessing as I ran into a Sister of Charity after leaving school my first semester. When I asked if they needed help, she was overwhelmed with joy, having just lost two volunteers. Currently I'm working a study on injuries among long-term Afghan refugees in Pakistani Camps and Road Traffic Accidents in Pakistan. My focus is now fixed largely as a result of my experiences in India and the decision to go forward with the hero's journey. Of course not in the vernacular sense, but in Campbell's terms—in which we are all heroes on a course to life's greater truths, with unfortold

obstacles and even failures. I thank the International Partnership for pushing me to my limits and for the chance to fail. After knowing the feeling, I will now be less likely to fall again. I look forward to my journey in fighting for improved health the world over and hope my connection with IPSL will never again be severed.” David Sugarman, India, January 1999

“I graduated from Middlebury College (Spanish major, sociology and teacher's education minors) in 2001, taught high school Spanish for a year in Tennessee, and am now working as an AmeriCorps *VISTA Service-Learning Coordinator at Project YES, a nonprofit in Lafayette, CO, creating leadership opportunities for youth through arts and service. My job consists of building an infrastructure for s-l in the community and helping teachers and administrators implement service-learning in their classes and schools. Next year I'm hoping to go for my Master's in secondary ESL/bilingual education. Obviously, my time in Ecuador helped with both my Spanish skills and understanding of service learning. Thanks!” Laurel Cadwallader, Ecuador (Quito), Fall 1999

Has service-learning been an easy experience for IPSL's students? Not by a long shot. Some have found the challenge of adapting to the social assumptions, mores and realities of another nation or culture, particularly in the developing world very difficult; others have found it difficult to balance academic and service responsibilities with the temptations offered by socializing in bars, restaurants and clubs frequented by other study abroad students; and still others have found disconcerting the distinctive teaching and learning styles in foreign universities, so often very different from the academic environment of most U.S. academic institutions. Nonetheless, only a very few students have not persisted in their programs with IPSL, and many have reflected years later on how much they learned from experiences that, at the time, seemed so difficult and unpleasant.

International service-learning is not easy, but it can be enormously rewarding for students seeking a different kind of exposure to different cultures and nations.

Reference

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