



QUANTUM ASSOCIATES CONSULTING

Ms. Wallace
Northern Plains Community College
765 College Lane
Cleveland, OH 32451

2/20/2023

Dear Ms. Wallace,

I am enclosing the report "International Study Abroad: Does It Really Make a Difference?" It contains an overview of the statistics and research of programs that allow students to study abroad.

In this report, I have outlined the general advantages and disadvantages of a study abroad program. More specifically, the report contains a comparison of a short-term program versus a semester-long program. I did conclude recommendations based on my findings.

I hope that this report provides you with the information you need at the upcoming review meeting concerning the courses of study at North Plains. Should you need any additional information, please contact me at the number listed.

Sincerely,

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International Study Abroad

Does it Really Make a Difference?



Quantum Associates Consulting



Prepared for Northern Plains Community College
February 20, 2023
Samantha Howard

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the importance of international study abroad for students at secondary institutions. The purpose of this report is to reveal the potential benefits that students receive with this opportunity as part of their curriculum and any drawbacks that may hinder its success. This report will cover short-term versus long-term study abroad as well as different types of study abroad approaches. At the conclusion of the report, recommendations will be made for the board of Northern Plains Community College to consider in making study abroad a requirement for its students.

It is important for colleges to promote study abroad to improve internationalization for students. Rationales for internationalization include political, economic, cultural/social, and academic. For students, it increases their marketability in the modern workforce and increases their chances for financial stability. The goal for institutions is to find a way to implement study abroad into the curriculum of its students, so that this trend becomes a normality.

From a student perspective, one benefit is that study abroad programs allow students to see the world through a different lens. Other benefits of international study abroad include cultural literacy, increased fluency in foreign languages, and greater understanding of the “global economy.” These programs create opportunities for students that otherwise would remain unseen. The small investment of time compared to the benefits received present a strong case for the implementation of study abroad programs.

Before the institution implements any study abroad program, it needs to be aware of any potential drawbacks or hurdles the program may present. Most of these issues are from the student perspective and include financial, family, and academic concerns.

The two types of study abroad programs are long-term and short-term. Long-term programs are at least one semester long with some programs lasting a year. Short-term programs are at least eight weeks, give or take a couple of weeks, and most of these programs are led by a faculty member. There are other divisions of study abroad programs that could affect the type of program an institution implements including island, direct enrollment, and immersion. Students also need to know what type of experience they want from their study abroad program. The four concepts of experience are observing, interacting, participating, and embracing.

Overall, though, most of the decisions for an institution’s international study abroad will begin with the choice of faculty-led short or individual long-term program. It is important that the institution realizes that this is not a “linear process” toward a goal but that there is a “messiness” in this experience.

Research on international study abroad covers a wide range of topics but ultimately needs to answer several questions:

- Is study abroad that important for a secondary institution’s curriculum?
- Is the program as beneficial to the student as it claims?
- Is a faculty-led short-term study abroad better than a long-term?

Institutions that want to broaden the experiences of their students, help them to become productive in the world past college, and make them a more rounded human being should consider implementing study abroad programs in their curriculum. An international experience will lead to students either “being in, relating to or changing to” a culture that is not their own. Students will gain a sense of identity as they develop their own understanding of their culture in light of another (Streitwieser & Light, 2017).

The benefits of study abroad programs far outweigh any potential drawbacks these programs might have. According to Tyner (2017), “Studying abroad is designed to be an opportunity for growth, where students ideally take rigorous classes, improve their foreign-language fluency, gain cultural literacy, and return home with a better understanding of the global economy (p. 385). These programs help to encourage ambassador-type leadership from students who engage in this cross-cultural experience. It allows students to have control over their learning experiences and helps them to understand that one person has enough power to cause a ripple of change.

International study abroad programs generally encompass two choices—faculty-led short-term program or a long-term program. Short-term programs are growing in popularity with one study revealing that “45% of students who studied abroad” used this type of program (Niehaus & Wegener, 2018, p. 105). It seems that short-term programs increase the accessibility to more students. It is also important to note that because these short-term programs are faculty-led, they can be more course specific and can easily be embedded into a student’s course of study and curriculum.

Long-term programs seem to improve the generation of ideas, critical thinking, and receiving a broader education. However, these programs lose the faculty-student interaction that occurs with short-term programs. This interaction helps students hone in on life skills like critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, confidence, and perseverance.

It takes effort from the institution, the faculty members, and the students to help develop these study abroad courses, but it is the one of the only ways to achieve the level of internationalization that most institutions want to achieve.

With this information provided, I recommend the following for North Plains Community College:

- Implementation of a faculty-led short-term international study abroad program that lasts at least 8 weeks and no more than 12 weeks.
- Make the program degree or class specific, embedding it in the required curriculum.
- Form a plan to address the financial, family, and academic concerns of the students and their parents

This type of program will take time to form, implement, and accept. It will take unbiased criticism to implement changes to the program as the college moves forward through the years.

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the importance of international study abroad for students at secondary institutions. The purpose of this report is to reveal the potential benefits that students receive with this opportunity as part of their curriculum and any drawbacks that may hinder its success. This report will cover short-term versus long-term study abroad as well as different types of study abroad approaches. At the conclusion of the report, recommendations will be made for the board of Northern Plains Community College to consider in making study abroad a requirement for its students.

Importance of International Study Abroad

International study abroad is on the rise at secondary institutions, tripling over the past thirty years. It is important for colleges to promote study abroad to improve internationalization for students. Rationales for internationalization include political, economic, cultural/social, and academic. For students, it increases their marketability in the modern workforce and increases their chances for financial stability. With such benefits for students, “increased participation in study abroad is the number one priority for U.S. institutions looking to internationalize” (Niehaus & Wegener, 2018, p. 104).

The goal for institutions is to find a way to implement study abroad into the curriculum of its students, so that this trend becomes a normality. In her article, “International Cooperation: The Study Abroad Experience,” Nicole Tyner succinctly summarizes the importance of study abroad by stating, “The American worldview needs to include a comprehensive understanding of life *outside* of the United States to better understand life *inside* of the United States” (2013, p. 386). Study abroad opens students’ eyes to different worlds and cultures, pushing the boundaries of the box they have drawn for their own comfort.

Benefits of International Study Abroad

From a student perspective, one benefit is that study abroad programs allow students to see the world through a different lens. Other benefits of international study abroad include, but are not limited to:

- “Cultural Literacy”
- Increased fluency in foreign languages
- Greater understanding of the “global economy”

Cultural literacy is an active part of the study abroad programs that allow students to experience the culture through art, entertainment, food, and other avenues. It is through this experience that students engage in the language of that culture by seeing the interactions between the natives and picking up on the nuances of the language. To re-emphasize an earlier point, when students understand the “global economy,” their marketability in the workforce increases (Tyner, 2013).

These programs create opportunities for students that otherwise would remain unseen. Ross Lewin, as quoted by Nicole Tyner in her article, says that students learn to “work alongside

people from across the world to cultivate habits of mind and action that will promote further engagement in the future” (2013, p. 385). The small investment of time compared to the benefits received present a strong case for the implementation of study abroad programs.

Potential Drawbacks of International Study Abroad

Before the institution implements any study abroad program, it needs to be aware of any potential drawbacks or hurdles the program may present. Most of these issues are from the student perspective and include:

- Financial concerns
- Family concerns
- Academic concerns

Because of the increased cost of tuition at most secondary institutions, several college students are paying for their own education by working either part-time or full-time. Therefore, any unnecessary expense, like traveling abroad, is not even a consideration for these students. They may be family concerns that supersede any possible trip abroad like safety or the affect it may have on the academic calendar of their student. Lastly, if the study abroad course is non-transferrable to their home college, it would not make sense for a student to partake in the program (Tyner, 2013).

Types of International Study Abroad Programs

The two types of study abroad programs are long-term and short-term. Long-term programs are at least one semester long with some programs lasting a year. Short-term programs are at least eight weeks, give or take a couple of weeks, and most of these programs are led by a faculty member. Recent information gathered shows “that 95% of responding institutions offered faculty-led short-term programs and that 45% of students who studied abroad through their college or university...did so through such programs” (Niehaus & Wegener, 2018, p. 105).

There are other divisions of study abroad programs that could affect the type of program an institution implements including the following:

- Island—selected classes are taught by the faculty leading the program or by a faculty member at the host university
- Direct Enrollment—students are enrolled in the host university
- Immersion Program—students become involved in the culture and form their own curriculum.

The above divisions in study abroad programs can affect the student experience, especially since time is a factor—a few weeks versus an entire semester or year. Therefore, students need to know what type of experience they want from their study abroad program. The four concepts of experience are:

- *Observing* the culture and while making comparisons with own culture
- *Interacting* with the culture through art, entertainment, food, education
- *Participating* in the culture while present
- *Embracing* the culture and making it one's own culture.

Overall, though, most of the decisions for an institution's international study abroad will begin with the choice of faculty-led short or individual long-term program. It is important that the institution realizes that this is not a "linear process" toward a goal but that there is a "messiness" in this experience (Streitwieser & Light, 2017).

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Research on international study abroad covers a wide range of topics but ultimately needs to answer several questions:

- Is study abroad that important for a secondary institution's curriculum?
- Is the program as beneficial to the student as it claims?
- Is a faculty-led short-term study abroad better than a long-term?

Study Abroad as Curriculum

Institutions that want to broaden the experiences of their students, help them to become productive in the world past college, and make them a more rounded human being should consider implementing study abroad programs in their curriculum. According to Figure 1, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand the world and culture are embedded in "internal and external learning outcomes." The internal outcomes "enable the individual to see and respond to the world from the other's perspectives" and the external outcomes "are assessed in terms of how effective and appropriate they are in the intercultural situation" (Streitwieser & Light, 2017, p. 472-73).

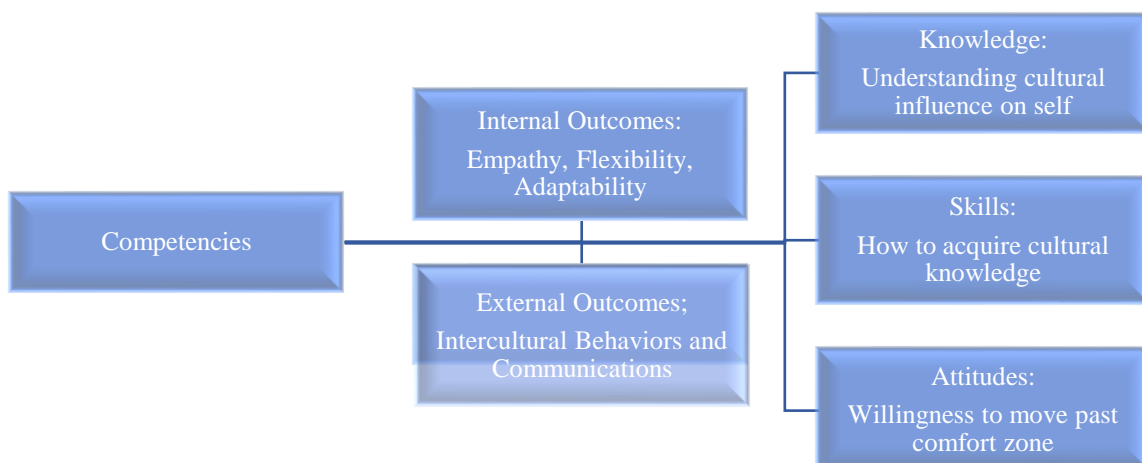


Fig. 1. Deardorff's Pyramid Model (Streitwieser & Light, 2017)

The outcomes are embedded in the four outcomes of experience—observing, interacting, participating, and embracing the culture through study abroad programs. However, learning is cumulative and can vary from one experience to another, or one student to another. An international experience will lead to students either “being in, relating to or changing to” a culture that is not their own. Students will gain a sense of identity as they develop their own understanding of their culture in light of another (Streitwieser & Light, 2017).

Benefits of Study Abroad Programs

The benefits of study abroad programs far outweigh any potential drawbacks these programs might have. According to Tyner (2017), “Studying abroad is designed to be an opportunity for growth, where students ideally take rigorous classes, improve their foreign-language fluency, gain cultural literacy, and return home with a better understanding of the global economy (p. 385). It basically preps students to become a competitive asset in the global workforce where interacting with other cultures occurs daily.

The faculty involved in creating these international study abroad programs set goals they want to achieve or they want the students to achieve. By looking at Figure 2 of what study abroad programs strive and should accomplish, it is not hard to disagree with the benefits of including them in an institution’s curriculum.

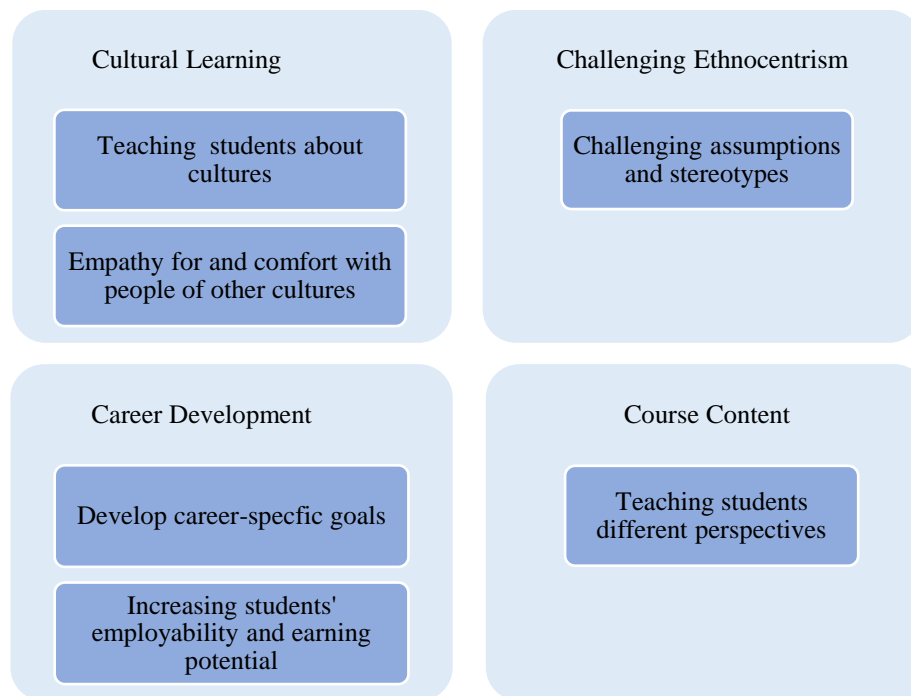


Fig. 2. Goals of International Study Abroad Programs per Faculty

These programs help to encourage ambassador-type leadership from students who engage in this cross-cultural experience. It allows students to have control over their learning experiences and helps them to understand that one person has enough power to cause a ripple of change.

Types of Programs

International study abroad programs generally encompass two choices—faculty-led short-term program or a long-term program. Short-term programs are growing in popularity with one study revealing that “45% of students who studied abroad” used this type of program (Niehaus & Wegener, 2018, p. 105). It seems that short-term programs increase the accessibility to more students. It is also important to note that because these short-term programs are faculty-led, they can be more course specific and can easily be embedded into a student’s course of study and curriculum.

Short-term programs have led to several positive outcomes including:

- Increased cultural awareness
- Global awareness
- Intercultural development.

The one drawback of short-term programs is that even though these students are more apt to interact with other cultures, they may lack in sensitivity of other cultures.

Long-term programs seem to improve the generation of ideas, critical thinking, and receiving a broader education. However, these programs lose the faculty-student interaction that occurs with short-term programs. This interaction help students hone in on life skills like critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, confidence, and perseverance.

It takes effort from the institution, the faculty members, and the students to help develop these study abroad courses, but it is the one of the only ways to achieve the level of internationalization that most institutions want to achieve.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of institutions implementing an international study abroad program can be summed of the best by once again quoting Nicole Tyner (2013)—“The American worldview needs to include a comprehensive understanding of life *outside* of the United States to better understand life *inside* of the United States” (p. 386). These programs are important for several reasons, but most importantly to expose students to different cultures, allowing them to reach beyond their comfort zones to learn leadership, confidence, teamwork skills, and tolerance. All these characteristics make these students adaptable and essential in the global workforce market.

Research strongly suggests that faculty-led short-term study abroad programs more accepted than long-term programs. They are more accessible, more goal-oriented and specific, and allow faculty help students learn life skills. This short-term programs can also be more easily embedded into the course curriculum and teach students a variety of concepts like cultural learning, career development, and ethnocentrism.

The potential drawbacks of study abroad programs that include financial, family, and academic concerns needs to be addressed by the institution. Some possible resolutions include “scholarship funds, domestic study programs, program awareness, and cooperative academic policy within institutions that focuses on international learning (Tyner, 2013). Study abroad forces institutions

to look at learning from a different perspective, which does not follow the neatly outlined proficiencies like other classes. Students are experiencing life in different culture, and it is bound to be a challenge.

With this information provided, I recommend the following for North Plains Community College:

- Implementation of a faculty-led short-term international study abroad program that lasts at least 8 weeks and no more than 12 weeks.
- Make the program degree or class specific, embedding it in the required curriculum.
- Form a plan to address the financial, family, and academic concerns of the students and their parents
 - Grant programs or scholarship opportunities
 - Faculty-led so students are not alone in another country
 - Will receive credit toward their degree for the study abroad program.

This type of program will take time to form, implement, and accept. It will take unbiased criticism to implement changes to the program as the college moves forward through the years. However, “it is precisely these forms of deeper analyses which can seriously assist program designers to create the innovative programs that actually achieve the oft-touted rhetorical claims of the ‘transformative’ nature of international experience” (Streitwieser & Light, 2017, p. 485).

REFERENCES

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