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## Study Abroad as an Education Experience: Challenges, Realizations, and Lessons Learned

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# Communications of the Association for Information Systems

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## Study Abroad as an Education Experience: Challenges, Realizations, and Lessons Learned

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### Abstract:

Study abroad programs can represent an important component of an Information Systems (IS) education. This article presents the views of five scholars on study abroad education. These views are based on their experiences leading such programs, and were presented during a panel session at the America's Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) 2010 in Lima, Peru. The panel discussed short-term (seven to fourteen days), medium-term (fourteen to thirty days), and long-term study abroad experiences. In addition, the panelists touched on the logistical issues related to leading a study abroad trip, and on lessons learned by the panelists.

**Keywords:** study abroad, IS education, education, globalization, IS curriculum

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The business environment has expanded to a point that many companies compete on a global level. They need new employees who are globally aware, especially in Information Systems (IS) as an enabler of globalization. The labor market for IT employees has become globalized, with workers shifting readily to countries with higher salaries. Many websites can be accessed in various languages, but inept translations may have a significant negative impact on their effectiveness. The technologies are the same the world over, but the conditions and the manner in which they are used may be very different. Supply chains connect companies across countries and continents. Outsourcing and offshoring are commonplace in most large companies. It is vitally important that all business students, and especially IS students, understand the global environment in which they will work, including both the similarities and differences among countries, cultures, languages, and work practices.

One way for students to prepare for the global business environment is to take part in a study abroad experience. Study abroad experiences provide students with a rich educational experience. They allow students to experience the culture, language, and, many times, the work practices of the country visited. A study abroad experience can be short term (seven to fourteen days), medium term (fifteen to thirty days), or longer term (over thirty days).

From the faculty viewpoint, leading study abroad trips can be exhausting and challenging. Study abroad trips require considerable planning, coordination, and leadership. This article summarizes the views of the panelists on the challenges, realizations, and lessons learned from study abroad experiences. It is aimed at faculty who want to gain a better understanding of the planning and execution of a study abroad trip. The purposes of this article, therefore, are to present information regarding study abroad experiences and to encourage IS faculty to provide study abroad experiences to students. This article is based on a panel discussion at the 2010 America's Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) held in Lima, Peru. The article is organized as follows: first we present the view of faculty on the short-term, medium-term, and long-term study abroad programs. We then discuss the logistics and the lessons learned from conducting study abroad programs. The conclusion incorporates comments and suggestions that emerged in the discussions between panelists and the audience and closes with a brief synthesis of our views on this topic.

### II. ORGANIZATION OF THE PANEL

The panel was organized by Al Harris in 2010. All of the presenters had participated in at least two study abroad experiences. The five panelists had a variety of study abroad experiences, lasting from ten days to several months.

The panel was introduced and moderated by Al Harris. This was then followed by five presentations. The presenters were (in order of their presentations): Al Harris, France Belanger, Andrew Urbaczewski, Karen Loch, and Meg Murray. Some of the areas that were addressed by the panelists included:

- Planning the study abroad trip
- Maximizing the educational value of the trip
- Finding companies that will host "company visits" for students
- Working with a "host" institution
- Projects that are appropriate for U.S.–Host institution student teams
- Balancing cultural/sightseeing with educational objectives
- Student safety and security
- How many students should go on a trip?

### III. STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES: SHORT-TERM, MID-TERM, AND LONG-TERM PROGRAMS

#### Short-Term Programs: Al Harris, Appalachian State University

Short-term experiences usually last from about seven to fourteen days. All of the trips require some pre-trip class work regarding the culture of the country to be visited and the companies and sights to be visited and post-trip reporting. I start with brief descriptions of two of the short terms study abroad trips that I have lead in the past three years. This is followed by the discussion of the advantages and problems with short-term study abroad trips.

In March 2010, I took twenty-one MBA students to Paris and Angers, France for ten days over spring break. We left the U.S. on Thursday and arrived in Paris on Friday morning. We spent three nights in Paris (sightseeing, cultural acclimatization, and adjusting to the jet lag), four nights in Angers (the graduate students worked with French graduate International Management students on a joint project), and ended with two more nights in Paris (sightseeing, free time) before flying back to the U.S. Students received three hours graduate International Business credit. The trip required several pre-trip classes and assignments about France, culture of France, and places/sights we would see. Each student gave an oral report on one of the places or sights that we would visit during the trip. After the trip was completed, each student had to turn in a post-trip Observation Journal and, in teams of four or five, create a video about the trip, which have been posted to YouTube.

In March 2008, I took twelve undergraduate students to Bangalore and Delhi, India, again over spring break. We left the U.S. on Thursday afternoon and arrived in Bangalore at 1:30 a.m. on Saturday. On this trip, we spent seven nights in Bangalore and two nights in Delhi. In Bangalore, we had business visits, sightseeing, cultural acclimatization, informal activities with Indian students at an affiliate university, and free time. In Delhi we went to Agra to see the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort and saw many sights and national landmarks in Delhi before departing for the US. Students received three hours International Business credit. Pre-trip activities included classes and assignments about India, culture of India, and reports on places/sights we would see. The only post-trip activity was submission of an Observation Journal.

#### Advantages of Short-Term Study Abroad Trips

The advantages of short term study abroad trips include:

- Cheaper for students—both trips that I described above cost the students \$2000. A short-term study abroad trip usually costs between \$1500 and \$3000, depending on where the trip is going. These costs can be reduced if students are able to room with host students and no hotel expenses are incurred. The biggest single cost is usually the airfare.
- Concentrated program—students can concentrate on the sights, culture, and activities in the country being visited.
- Short stays are easier on home country hosts—If you are visiting a host institution and want student interaction, students in the host country must be available. Short term trips require less of a long-term commitment from students at the host institution than longer trips do.
- The trip can be made during university breaks or between terms—spring break is a great time to take a short-term study abroad. This means that there are few, if any, lost class days for the students. In addition, host university students are usually in class, which results in maximum student interaction.
- Develops a good taste/enthusiasm for travel for the students, especially students who have no or very limited exposure to international travel.
- Allows multiple experiences abroad for the same costs as for a longer stay in one trip—a typical four-week study abroad trip can cost \$4,000–7,000, depending on where the trip is going. For the same money, a student can take two or three short-term trips to different destinations and receive a wider global exposure than a single longer-term trip provides.
- Minimal job and family disruption—If the student has a family or a job that they depend on for school expenses, short-term trips minimize disruption in these areas.

#### Problems with Short-Term Study Abroad Trips

The problems with short-term study abroad include:

- Students (and leaders) need to get over jet lag fast.
- If U.S. students are working with local students, projects need to be limited in scope.

- Hard to program much free time. Sightseeing, company visits, and student interactions take a lot of time. Students want free time to explore and shop.
- Not enough time to overcome language barriers, especially menus and food. Hopefully, there is enough time in pre-trip activities to learn some basic words and to familiarize students with menu choices.
- Big up-front time commitment for the faculty member to plan trip and teach a class. It takes almost as much time to plan a short study abroad trip as it does to plan a longer one.
- Hard to visit more than about two places. Because of the travel time that it takes to move a group, the number of places that can be visited is limited to one or two. If travel by air from one place to another, programming in travel time to the airport, arrival two to three hours before a flight, flight time, and travel from the airport to a hotel can consume most of a day.

### Summary

Short-term study abroad experiences can create an interest in foreign travel for students. It is a great way to introduce students to foreign travel at a minimum of cost and encourage students to plan a semester study abroad.

### Medium-Term Programs: France Belanger, Virginia Tech

Our typical medium-term program includes a combination of in-class teaching, business seminars, industry visits, and travel over a four-week period. The study abroad program is complemented with several field trips. Our program is housed in one location, Antibes, France, which is located a few miles from the techno-park of Sophia Antipolis, the equivalent of the Silicon Valley of France. Our medium-term programs typically cost students \$3,000–3,800 plus their summer-school tuition (five credits) and personal expenses. The covered costs include return airfare, local transportation, lodging for twenty-eight days, six group dinners, ferries, discount train passes, transportation, and admittance to some local events and business visits, and several activities (team building). We take twenty to twenty-eight students on the programs each summer. While we originally worked with a host institution, we have moved away from this model and now conduct seminars and lectures in hotel facilities provided to us. While the program covers IS material, a significant portion of the experience is also related to cultural awareness and personal growth. This is accomplished through various lifestyle experiences such as learning to read train schedules and learning to get on the right train (since many trains use the same tracks), learning how to request services in restaurants or shops, how to dress in a different country, and even how to pack for a month-long trip. The students also have two weekends to travel on their own (two students minimum per travel group). This provides them an opportunity to explore more of Europe, but also to practice the skills they have developed living in another country on their own.

In terms of logistics, we develop relationships and establish contacts while we are abroad for the following study abroad program (twelve months before the next one). Approximately ten months prior to the beginning of the study abroad program, we contact our suppliers for the main logistical components: airfare, lodging, events, industry visits. We attempt to finalize all of these six months before the departure. Within the last month before departure, we also reserve restaurants for the first night of arrival (students are tired). We then have at least one group dinner per week.

We conduct three pre-departure meetings. The first one allows us to get to know the students and get them to know each other. We also discuss the main logistics and answer any remaining questions about the program. The second meeting is purely social and allows students to further get to know each other and to finalize room assignments (students share apartments at four students per apartment). The final meeting is longer and covers all important information, such as travel (what to do if you miss the plane), emergencies, packing, course readings, culture (how to dress; how to address shopkeepers; etc.), security, and attitudes (which behaviors get you sent back home). Students can also start to identify which side trips they want to do together during the free travel weekends.

### Advantages of Medium-Term Study Abroad Trips

Overall, it is my firm belief that any study abroad experience is better than none. However, I particularly like the one-month programs for the following reasons:

- Students have time to really experience the culture to a point where they can be on their own even if they do not speak the language.
- The one-month program allows us to include a wide variety of activities in addition to having seminars, industry visits, and classes.
- Students are able to travel on their own because free travel time can be built into the program.
- Students have the time to get over culture shock and experience personal growth.

- Students develop the confidence to travel on their own, and several students extend their stay to experience other regions/countries on their own.
- Faculty get to know the students well. The memories of the study abroad are strong for both students and faculty.

### Problems with Medium-Term Study Abroad Trips

There are also disadvantages, of course, of one-month programs.

- Class material must be highly condensed to fit in the schedule, especially if many industry visits and seminars are planned in addition to traditional class material.
- The program leaves very limited “time off” for the faculty involved.
- Some students experience loneliness because a month is a long time to be away from home when you have never done that before.

### Evaluating the Study Abroad

There are three major components to the evaluation of the study abroad course for the IT students: participation, information technology report, and study abroad report. Below are excerpts from the study abroad syllabus:

*The success of your study abroad experience depends substantially on your participation in the various aspects of this course. As a result, we will dedicate 50 percent of your grade to participation. Please be assured that not everyone gets equal points on participation and that no one should expect a full grade for participation unless they really deserve it. Elements that will make up the participation grade:*

- Attendance at all events, class sessions, and seminars
- Demonstrated preparation for class sessions (having read the material)
- Demonstrated effort on assignments given during the program
- Actual participation in class discussion during class sessions

*You must provide a technology infrastructure recommendation to support the organization of the special event you suggested and the actual event itself. The report must also discuss the competitive advantages provided by the technologies, as well as the challenges the event organizers and/or users will face in the use and implementation of these technologies. This is a group report worth thirty points. Examples of components for the technology infrastructure include*

- Hardware and software to organize and support the event, including enterprise systems
- Networking components to organize and support the event
- Personnel issues related to information technology, such as support, training, etc.
- Information technology procedures and processes needed to organize and support your event, such as security and privacy, etc.

*The study abroad report should provide a critical evaluation of your study abroad experience. The report should include a description of what you consider to be your two or three most important learning experiences (What new knowledge will you remember most or use most in your future studies or careers?). Also, provide suggested improvements for the next study abroad, if applicable. This is an individual report worth twenty points.*

Interestingly, the question of what were the two or three most important learning experiences for you (What new knowledge will you remember most or use most in your future studies or careers?) results in incredible responses from the students. Below are excerpts from the reports of students from the 2008, 2009, and 2010 study abroad.

*“I knew before leaving that I would have a great time on the study abroad, but I never knew that I would have the most amazing experience of my life” (male, undergrad, 2010).*

*“In addition to the valuable lessons we learned in class, one of the most important things I learned that will stick with me for the rest of my life is the ability to adapt to a new environment” (female, undergrad, 2009).*

*"I grew more as a person in the 28 days spent in the French Riviera than I have in my entire three years of college thus far. The greatest lesson I can take away from this trip, is to trust yourself. You're a lot more resourceful than you think"* (female, undergrad, 2009).

*"I learned as much in those four weeks as I have in an entire semester at university. Not only did I learn much more than I had expected about the material, but I learned how to adapt to new surroundings, how to live with new people, how to overcome barriers, and most importantly, I learned about myself"* (female, undergrad, 2008).

## Summary

Medium-term study abroad programs allow students to experience another culture while at the same time allow them to do this without disruption to their regular school schedules and enough time to hold summer jobs. There are many events and situations that can occur while on a one-month study abroad with students. Here, I highlight some top lessons learned from years of conducting such programs.

1. Be prepared for culture shock. Students do not realize this is going to happen even if you tell them many times; they are going to experience culture shock. Students are transplanted in a different culture, where individuals react to them differently than what they are used to. They have to eat different foods, eat at different times than they are used to (and have to spend much longer times at the table than they are used to). Often, students cannot understand what is being said around them. What you can do is warn them and provide them with tools and advices. Eventually, you have to let them go to experience the culture on their own. It is a good idea to discuss this a few weeks into the program. You will be amazed at how much some of these students have grown in just two weeks!
2. Enforce departure times day 1. Travelling in groups is always challenging, but becomes even more so when you are dependent on local transportation. For this reason, I give them a departure time the first day we are in France and if anyone is not there on time, I just leave (and they have to stay at the hotel and miss that day's events). I found that once one person misses a departure time, it never occurs again with anyone in the group.
3. Avoid/control dependency on the Internet (if possible). One of the biggest problems with today's travel is that all students bring some form of communication device and constantly stay connected to their friends and families in the United States. We spend time explaining to them that it is not necessary to tell everyone up to the minute events that are happening. Instead, they should enjoy the moments for themselves. A few will never get this, but most students learn to become more independent from their technologies. When we spend a weekend on an island where there is no cell phone service or Internet access, they often experience some "withdrawal" from their technologies, but it helps them to bond with their classmates.
4. Remind of security several times. We have a special discussion about security before departure. We discuss how people can be pick-pocketed in public transportation, behaviors that students must keep in mind regarding strangers, and security in and around the apartments we live in. However, sometimes students keep their laptops visible, discuss entrance security codes with strangers, and so on. Therefore, we need to remind them about security on a regular basis, at least once a week.

## Long-Term Programs: Andrew Urbaczewski, University of Michigan-Dearborn

While the experiences I discussed were informed by exchanges with two different European institutions, I wanted to speak in more general terms so that these could be applied to any institution.

When looking for a partner institute for a long-term study abroad experience, there are many factors to consider in creating a success. The partner program must have perceived value to both the students and their goals and to the institution and its goals. While study abroad might be obvious as a unique opportunity for students, students must see tangible value, such as credits earned, progress toward graduation, and cost. The institute must also see value, such as in the prestige of the partner institute, compatibility with accreditations, and possibility for further exchanges. The more experienced your partner is in working with study abroad programs, the easier it will be to do it.

## Advantages to Long-Term Study Abroad Trips

- There is time for the students to really immerse themselves in the foreign culture. In order to survive, students must live in the culture and interact with the locals, unable to hide in a small group of foreign students for too long. Through this interaction, students learn things about the culture that increases its understanding. For example, in Finland, almost no real business is done in July. To Americans, this might seem quite strange, but

when immersing yourself in the summer culture of Finland and recognizing the people's harmony with nature and the short summer, then the slow down makes perfect sense.

- The program length allows for flexibility of experiences. Diversions from a traditional classroom environment are much easier when one is in place for several months, and allowing them to take advantage of spur-of-the-moment opportunities without worry for damaging the academic experience.
- The classes offered are likely to be similar in structure to those in the traditional curriculum, providing for ease in curriculum management. This is also particularly helpful when the class being taught (or substituted) abroad is a prerequisite for other courses at the home institution.
- A partner's unavailability on a particular date requires merely a reschedule and not an event cancellation.

### Disadvantages to Long-Term Study Abroad Trips

- Recruiting students can be difficult, particularly at a commuter or nontraditional campus. Using students who have gone on the programs before is helpful as a recruiting tool so that students can talk to fellow students who have gone on these programs and learn the benefits.
- Interruptions to established schedules (e.g., work, rent, family) may be impossible to overcome and can limit the pool of potential candidates. In order to appeal to the greatest number of possible students, recruiting needs to start early. This should be done at least a year in advance to be the most successful. For IS programs, this means students should be contacted in the survey courses or perhaps even earlier in the program. Students need time to plan their courses of study, obtain funding, make temporary arrangements for their homes and belongings, and possibly obtain leave from their jobs.
- Immigration requirements can change when programs extend beyond ninety days, necessitating visas and other governmental documents.
- Students may become homesick.
- These programs can be expensive. A common student question is "How much will this cost?" While the cost might be obvious on a short-term program, on long term ones the answer is often "It depends." It is helpful to have a figure ready, for example \$13,000, but immediately afterwards explain the breakdown and how much of those costs are identical to what the student would pay if staying at their home institution. For example, \$4500 in tuition, \$2000 in rent, \$1500 in food, \$500 in books—all figured into the bigger number but costs that would be paid at home make the sticker shock less threatening.

### Summary

Long-term study abroad is a wonderful way for students to experience a foreign culture and bring those experiences back to their own studies. Several students also use it as a means to pick up an IS minor (or major) by completing the majority of the coursework in a semester. Moreover, the addition of the studies abroad have given our students a huge leg up on those who do not have those experiences, and many have parlayed that experience into new jobs or promotions in their jobs back home.

Ideally, faculty should also seek opportunities for collaborative faculty research, faculty exchanges, or even to attend academic conferences that you might not normally attend because they are on different continents. Get detailed opportunities for cultural experiences and tourism, but remind the students that these grades count and the academics are primary.

## IV. STUDY ABOARD PROGRAMS: LOGISTICS AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Logistics Issues: Karen Loch, Georgia State University

Logistical needs and challenges are organized as follows: program format, accommodations, visas, size of the program, insurance and logistics once on-site. Each item is described in the following paragraphs.

#### Program Format

The first decision is program format: will the study abroad program be classroom focused or a field study? In both cases, it may include collaboration with a local institutional partner.

A collaborative arrangement with a local institution may be the way to go. It does require, however, a committed faculty member or designated administrator at the host institution to work smoothly. A local partner may be able to provide the following:



- Contacts with local companies to facilitate visits, or guest speakers in the classroom.
- Assistance with accommodations. This may be access to dormitories, assistance in making home-stay arrangements, or preferred rates at a hotel.
- Intimate knowledge of the environment to advise faculty and students regarding security concerns and their well-being outside of formal class time.

A stand-alone field study without a partner means that the program director will be responsible for addressing all aspects of the program ranging from scheduling company visits to handling all the transportation and on-site logistics. These tend to be shorter in length and more intense. It is important to use available resources, such as local alums who can facilitate company access for visits, or provide eyes-on-the ground feedback about accommodations and preferred, or not-so-preferred locations. A local handler is essential. If doing this for the first time, it is easiest to start with locations where the faculty director has spent some time and is familiar with the cities to be visited, as an example. While there is a higher-order of responsibility and work load for the respective faculty director, the payback is a more in-depth, hands-on experience in the target country.

### Accommodations

Hotels are generally acceptable for short-term study abroad programs, both from a perspective of cost and accommodation. The location of the hotel is most important in this case: Is it centrally located to minimize time to visits, does it provide the basic amenities for the students at a reasonable cost, such as Internet access, and is it safe and secure? If a local partner is involved, it may be able to provide home-stays. It should be noted, however, that while home-stays provide an additional level of intimate contact with the local culture, it does necessarily raise the need for transportation and coordination to bring the group together in an efficient manner.

It is when the programs are longer in length that the students weary of sharing a single room, having no kitchen facility, and the expense weighs in favor of other arrangements. As such, long stay or residence hotels, or even renting flats from private proprietors, become a preferred scenario for the medium- and longer-term programs. Options available depend heavily on location, time of year—high or low season, holiday breaks—and who is footing the bill. In our programs running from five weeks to sixteen weeks, our students find local flats that meet program parameters that address ease of transportation, and safety and security concerns. In all cases, the flat must be approved by the faculty director. Again, a local partner may have access to dormitories as a viable and inexpensive alternative.

### Visas

A nontrivial item, visa logistics are determined by four functions:

1. Location of the study abroad. Visas are country specific.
2. Length of stay. Typically, the longer the stay, a visa may be required, and more often, the type of required visa changes.
3. Nationality of the student participant.
4. Nature of the program. Is it degree-seeking or just a single course?

The combination of the first three will determine the necessity for a visa, the type of visa (tourist or student), and the price. First order of priority is to contact directly the target country consulate and verify if a visa is needed, for whom, what will be the cost, and its visa application requirements. There may be considerable price variability depending on a student's nationality.

We have found it best to bundle the application process and develop a close relationship with the local consulate or agency who will handle the applications. Our students bear the cost of the visas. Lessons learned are many. Some consulates may require four to six weeks to process; others take less than ten days. In some cases, depending on the student's nationality, the passport will be physically sent to the target country's embassy or consulate. In a multi-country study abroad program, one country may require the other country's visa first. This is usually a function of the order in which the countries are being visited. In one of our programs, the students are in France and then go to China. We must secure the China visa first, and then the French visa. This is because France wants to be sure that the student will be authorized to leave.

In most cases, a tourist visa is all that is required for short- and medium-length programs, and a student visa for longer periods. However, if a degree or certificate is awarded, a student visa may be required. The requirement may also change from year to year. We have a five-week program where the students were required to have a student

visa one year and a tourist visa the next year. It is, therefore, prudent to reconfirm requirements as they frequently change from year to year, including face-to-face appointments for fingerprints, or in one case, a local police report is required as part of the visa application. Hopefully nothing comes to light that will result in the denial of the visa.

Finally, make sure everyone's passport is good for at least six months beyond the return date, and there are plenty of blank pages. Visas will be denied if these two requirements are not met.

### **Size of the Program**

Size of program is the third major decision and with many implications. Generally speaking, a host institution and a classroom format are able to more readily handle larger groups. There are minimal transportation needs and outside speakers may come to the classroom. Size of program for the field study model presents three separate challenges. First, decisions related to transportation of the group. This begins with airport transfers and being sure there is sufficient capacity to transport not just the students, but all the luggage, too. The work days will typically include two or more company visits per day. With a smaller group, fifteen seems to be a breaking point, public transit may be a good alternative: it may be less expensive and faster. The odds, however, of losing a less-than-attentive student without knowing it increases dramatically as the group size increases. Renting a coach may be the preferred, more reliable alternative.

We have an institutional policy that study abroad programs—field study model—have two faculty directors when on-site. This ensures the continuity of the program in the event an emergency occurs. It may be the faculty member who becomes unable to stay with the group, or something happens to one of the students that requires the full attention of the faculty member. Crazy things happen—a run-away motorcycle on the sidewalk outside a café in London runs over a student, a broken arm requiring emergency surgery and a three-day hospital stay in Shanghai, or heat exhaustion in Mumbai. It pays to be prepared.

Finally, size impacts choice of visits. Not all companies have facilities to handle large groups. We have found fifteen to eighteen to be a magic number for many firms' meeting room capacity, and an even smaller number for smaller companies. If the group is greater than twenty students, a company may be willing to engage a visit, but you must provide the venue. This may mean renting a room in the hotel, or using the facilities of the local American Chamber or World Trade Center. In these scenarios, there will likely be a budgetary impact as well.

One additional consideration related to group size is no different than in our regular classroom settings. Smaller groups have greater opportunity to interact with the presenter and ability to probe deeper into the subject matter. Time always runs short. Larger groups, however, may provide the requisite financial break-even to make it all happen.

### **Insurance**

Insurance is needed regardless of the length of the program. Most universities require all students on study abroad programs to purchase international insurance which covers repatriation and evacuation. This is available for a very low price, but worth its weight in gold. Most important, be sure that all international students (F-1 visa) carry this international insurance, too. This was an important lesson we learned the hard way. International students at U.S. institutions must show proof of insurance to enroll. Therefore, we did not require the student to purchase the additional international insurance that we required of our U.S. citizens. What we learned, however, was that the insurance provider was not available 24/7 nor prepared to work with foreign caregivers and assist in the settlement process. An emergency happened on a Saturday morning in China—now after-hours on Friday. Monday was a holiday and the U.S. provider was closed. The hospital in China wanted full payment, well beyond the credit card limit of the student. In contrast, the international insurance provider is available 24/7 and is well-versed in working with foreign care providers and will assist in the settlement process. It all worked out but not without a lot of drama. Lesson learned: ALL students take the international insurance coverage. The service provided is excellent, and it may also increase the student's coverage from a 80/20 to 100 percent.

### **Local Issues Once On-Site**

Once on-site, it is all in the details. If working with a location institution and there is a designated faculty lead or administrative support, these will be less of a concern. If, however, the students are staying for an extended period, perhaps in flats, or a field-study format where there is frequent group movement, the use of a trustworthy, dependable, local handler is highly recommended.

The local handler can arrange all logistics, including hotels, coaches, transfers, tickets for cultural visits, maps, and so on. Working closely with the handler prior to departure allows the faculty director to preview and sign-off on accommodations and schedule, for example, and then be invoiced directly, so that is not a concern while on-site.



Our students are in Rio for five weeks with one of our programs. They live on their own, sharing local flats. The local handler provides each flat with a cell phone. Who keeps the phone is up to the roommates, but it gives them ready access to our agent should they have a problem of any kind, and an ability to stay in contact with each other and the local faculty director, and for us, we have peace of mind.

The local handler may also serve as your *guide* when on a field study. In this case, her primary role is to work closely with the faculty director, make contact with the company to reconfirm the visit, best driving directions and how long it will take to get to the venue, any particulars such as where to park the coach or a meeting room change, and to assist the driver to be sure that you arrive on time. Payment logistics should not be forgotten. Be prepared to pay honorariums for guest speakers, fees for room usage, and tips to the coach driver and guide. The speaker will tell you the expected honorarium. There are generally accepted guidelines for tips. ATMs are the wonder of international travel. Be prepared that the maximum amount per day allowed to withdraw may be a function of your bank, or your account. Talking with your financial institution in advance will help to alleviate bad surprises.

Finally, in all cases, an emergency process should be outlined in detail and shared with the students in advance. We provide the students with small tri-folds listing all important names and contact information, including consulate addresses and phone numbers, and the closest hospital and police station. This affords them the comfort level to get out and explore on their own, and for us, the reassurance that they are safe.

### Summary

For a faculty member thinking about leading a study abroad program for the first time, it may appear overwhelming. Institutional resources are typically available. The best resource, however, is our colleagues who have track records leading study abroad programs.

### Lessons Learned: Meg Murray, Kennesaw State University

Leading a study abroad is a unique and wonderful experience. It presents the opportunity that many faculty strive for—the chance to facilitate real-world engagement for students. It provides students with first-hand experience. It broadens their perspective. It makes another part of the world the student's classroom. However, from a faculty perspective, there are many logistics involved in leading a study abroad that begin with pre-trip planning activities and end with post-travel duties.

Research indicates that students' primary considerations when choosing to study abroad are the locations to be visited, the number of credit hours offered, the faculty involved, and the academic content of the program. Study abroad courses must integrate with greater university and discipline specific curriculum requirements. Sometimes existing courses or associated course learning outcomes map directly to study abroad experiences; other times special topics or directed study options can be offered. Inevitably, students interested in the study abroad location will have already completed course credit for one of the courses offered. Offering directed studies increases faculty work but offers flexibility to the students. Additional considerations include the number of courses or credit hours, the level of study such as graduate or undergraduate, and the schedule of class time. Accrediting agencies generally require a minimum number of instructional contact hours. Pre- and post-trip instructional time can be used to meet part of this requirement.

Other planning activities, such as budgeting, recruiting, advertising the program, being available to students to answer questions, and understanding process and procedures which must be completed cannot be understated. Budgeting is specifically challenging because many financial decisions must be made well before the study abroad program commences. Economic environments often change, currencies and prices fluctuate, and many costs cannot be negotiated in advance. For instance, when dealing with foreign currency, the negotiated price might be written in terms of the value of that country's currency or exclusions may be applied based on currency exchange rates. This type of risk is simply a reality when planning for a study abroad. Predicting economic conditions is not always easy. What it means is that organization is essential, planning is crucial, and paying [or contracting an amount in U.S. dollars] upfront when feasible reduces risk.

### Faculty Compensation

Faculty compensation is also a consideration especially for faculty-lead programs. Different institutions have different policies in place for both salary and expense reimbursement. For instance, in some programs faculty salary is tied directly to student tuition; faculty are paid based on the number of students who enroll in the program. This may or may not meet faculty expectations, so it must be a consideration when the study abroad budget and student costs are calculated. If additional salary is required, it is often added to the student cost of the program as a salary allowance line item. Of course, faculty expenses must also be included in the budget. A common method for doing

this is to estimate these costs and add them to the budget. Preparing the budget and ensuring all associated costs are included is a major component of the planning process of any study abroad experience.

### Marketing and Recruiting

Marketing and recruiting are also important activities. Many students have an interest in study abroad but are reluctant to make a commitment. Faculty need to devise and carry-out a plan to promote their program. Traditional means include advertising through various campus venues such as e-mail, a website, a printed brochure, class visits, and advertisements in school publications. However, the most successful recruiting often happens as a result of one-on-one or small-group meetings. The recruiting process takes considerable time and effort and typically spans multiple semesters. Students need time to become informed, secure financial resources, and adjust their course schedules. An additional valuable recruiting resource is past program participants. They bring an enthusiasm that is catching. As the reputation for a strong study abroad program becomes established, the old adage of “*success breeds success*” is true.

### Balancing Educational Activities and Sightseeing

Another challenge when designing a study abroad is balancing instructional time with cultural experiences and tourist activities. There are always more opportunities than time allows. Other considerations must also be made, such as accounting for the culture shock some students experience when arriving in the host country and also re-entry culture shock some students experience when arriving home. Logistics related to transportation must also be considered. For instance, coaches-for-hire can be very costly, but public transportation can be difficult to navigate. The key to a successful study abroad schedule is one that is well planned out, yet flexible, and counterbalances activities with downtime.

### Post Trip Activities

Arrival back to campus does not mean the work is over. Given the full itinerary of the study abroad experience and the fact that students simply need time to acclimate to their new surroundings, completing course requirements while on the study abroad trip is not always feasible. In this case, post-experience meetings need to be scheduled, projects completed, and course grades assigned. Further, many students state participating in a study abroad program is a life-changing experience. Providing post-trip opportunities for student reflection is valuable. Logistically, however, it can be difficult to find meeting times as students quickly return to their daily routines. Scheduling these meetings before the study abroad program begins and requiring attendance is recommended.

In faculty-lead study abroad programs a major post-trip task is budget reconciliation and expense reimbursement. This can be challenging. For instance, collecting and retaining itemized receipts, especially for small amounts, is often a problem. In many places it is just not customary to give receipts for small cost items such as public bus fares. Maintaining detailed records of what was spent, completing all required financial accounting forms as soon as possible, and working closely with the Business Office help to overcome any problems that may be encountered in this process.

### Summary

Student interest in study abroad is increasing. In its 2005 report to Congress, the bipartisan Lincoln Commission advocated a goal that 1 million American college student study abroad annually by 2016. This is an aggressive goal, given that currently less than 300,000 students participate in study abroad programs in a given year. When making this recommendation, the Commission stated, “The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward and that important. For their own future and that of the nation, college graduates today must be internationally competent” [Commission on the Abraham Lincoln *Study Abroad* Fellowship Program, 2005]. The goal is to develop high quality programs that enrich student learning experiences. This is achieved through planning, follow-through and reflection. The research suggests that “students learn effectively only if we intervene before, during and after their experiences abroad” (Lederman, 2007).

## V. CONCLUSION

There are few course offerings that have such high payback for both parties as do study abroad programs. Whether short-term or longer-term, the intense, immersion experiences have significant impact. It is not often that we hear students exclaim, “It changed my life,” about a course. This is, however, a commonly heard statement after a study abroad experience.

While the time required of the faculty member is higher than the traditional, resident course, faculty who lead study abroad programs also reap personal and professional rewards in three distinct ways. First, the study abroad experience expands our portfolio of life experiences in the same way it does for the students. Second, these



experiences, coupled with insights and perspectives from talking with managers, interacting with students from the host country, or through simple first-hand observations, give faculty fresh examples to fodder classroom discussion. Finally, there are opportunities to build relationships with the local, institutional partner, or the hosting companies that may themselves transform into data sites, co-authors, and publications.

The panel unanimously agreed that institutional support is an essential component for successful study abroad programs. Support should include scholarships or other financial support for students and a recognition of the importance of a study abroad portfolio by administration. This would mean that a study abroad course could count as part of a faculty member's regular teaching load. It is also recognition by the institution of the critical role of study abroad offerings in the internationalization process of its student body, faculty members, and the institution itself.

## REFERENCES

*Editor's Note:* The following reference list contains hyperlinks to World Wide Web pages. Readers who have the ability to access the Web directly from their word processor or are reading the article on the Web, can gain direct access to these linked references. Readers are warned, however, that:

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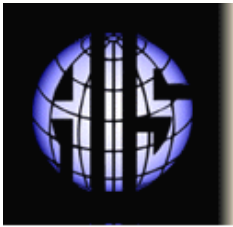
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