

2022

Collaborate, Teach, and Travel: Librarians and Study Abroad

Nancy Cunningham

Susan Ariew

COLLABORATE, TEACH, AND TRAVEL: LIBRARIANS AND STUDY ABROAD

NANCY CUNNINGHAM AND SUSAN ARIEW

INTRODUCTION

Just as institutions of higher education are unique, so are their study abroad programs. Some offer students extensive, credit bearing, semester or yearlong experiences while others tend to support shorter experiences that range from two to six weeks in length. Clearly, if global citizenship and study abroad is a high priority for the leadership of an institution, so too, will there be evidence of high commitment and support for it both in the curriculum and from the academic library that serves the community. An example of strong leadership and commitment is highlighted in a 2015 article from the University of Maryland, which discusses how study abroad became an important mandate in their strategic plan. Their document *Transforming Maryland: Higher Expectations* states, “an academically rich and personally rewarding experience abroad will become a normal part of a student’s university experience” (Griner, Herron, & White, 2015, p.190). With this mandate, administrators, faculty, and librarians worked together to launch many innovative study abroad programs. Similarly, the University of South Florida (USF) began developing students as global citizens as a result of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The Global Citizens Project (GCP) is the focus of the QEP and it significantly expanded study abroad programs when it launched in 2015. The QEP encouraged students to “explore their role in the world, connect with diverse places and issues, and participate to make a difference” (University of South Florida, 2018).

USF is a large, public 4-year institution with more than 50,000 students across three urban campuses. At present, the university offers more than fifty study abroad programs. The most well attended programs are located in Europe and range in length from two to six weeks. While abroad, these students take classes from USF faculty and itineraries often consist of visits to tourist sites. The emphasis is on the experience of the living in another country as opposed to writing research papers or conducting fieldwork. Up until the launch of the QEP, study abroad was not emphasized as a key student experience. This might be explained by the fact that a good number of students at USF struggle just to afford textbooks and tuition; study abroad is often enjoyed by students who are financially privileged. Currently, 60% of full-time undergraduates receive some kind of need-based financial aid (U.S. News & World Report, Best Colleges, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), Pell grants support 33% of the USF student population. Moreover, a sizeable number of students have to work part time or full time to be able to afford their college education. In 2015-16, only 10% of the graduating class participated in a global study experience. To remedy this and expand access to a wider range of students, the GCP now provides \$115,000 annually in travel scholarships. In contrast, Haverford College, with a more privileged student population, enjoys a 49% study abroad participation rate and includes over 100 credit programs, many of which cover an entire year of study (Haverford College, 2018).

When GCP began, the USF Tampa Library responded by creating its own initiatives to support and encourage study abroad. Based on USF Libraries’ experience with GCP, this paper outlines how librarians can contribute to study abroad experiences both on campus and abroad, how librarians or administrators can encourage institutional collaboration and engagement, and how librarians can assess their efforts to in order to better support students participating in study abroad programs.

ON-CAMPUS LIBRARIAN SUPPORT: ONLINE GUIDES

The most common way in which libraries provide support for study abroad is the creation of online guides, many of which offer information sources about countries and travel. Academic libraries across the country have created guides for study abroad and they vary in terms of level of detail. For example, some guides are directed toward 'distance students' without any specific links to information about countries or travel. More detailed guides, such as Cornell University's, provide access to resources related to country profiles, language learning, news, travel logistics, e-books resources, and distance education information (How, 2018). Most study abroad guides follow the same pattern with some that emphasize academic research and others that focus on travel and culture. Interestingly, some universities like the University of Illinois and Pepperdine University include customized guides to specific program locations in Costa Rica, Lausanne, Florence, Shanghai, Buenos Aires, and London (Chan, Colvin, Vinyard, Leach, Naumann, & Stenis, 2015). At USF, taking ideas from the best of these, the focus has been on study abroad travel and not academic research, where orientation to various cultures and countries, travel apps, and logistics take priority. Design of the current guide took into account resources also presented in an online module designed by USF Education Abroad for their pre-departure student orientation (Cunningham, 2018).

WORKSHOPS AND STUDY ABROAD ORIENTATIONS

One way to increase awareness of library support for study abroad is by offering informative workshops to students who are participating in study abroad programs before departure or to students considering study abroad in their future. At USF, the GCP allows students to earn points toward a USF Global Citizen Award by attending pre-approved events such as a library workshop on finding country information and travel resources (Global Citizens Project, 2018). Attendance each semester has ranged from 10 to 20 participants with generally positive feedback. These sessions are designed to initiate a conversation with the students about resources that can help them with travel logistics and preparations for their abroad experiences. Other institutions, such as Rutgers, also offer library workshops that are included as part of pre-departure study abroad orientations (Denda, 2013).

STUDY ABROAD LIAISONS ON CAMPUS AND ABROAD

Along with guides and workshops, some institutions provide subject specialist liaison support for study abroad programs, particularly when those liaisons collaborate with academic faculty on creating student assignments. Subject specialists can offer course-specific support in the form of resource guides and reference assistance for student research (Chan et al., 2015). Still other schools assign a librarian as the liaison for all study abroad programs, as in the case of Rutgers (Lissenden, 2018). When students know whom to contact at their institution, they are more likely to seek assistance by email or even through Skype sessions with librarians if they are doing research as part of their travel abroad requirements.

In contrast to on-campus support for programs, another opportunity for collaboration occurs when librarians travel as part of a study abroad course. At the University of Maryland, librarians have been involved in the design and development of a business course in Nicaragua (Griner et al., 2015). This involved librarian on-site visits to become familiar with the Nicaraguan business environment. The Business librarian and the Latin American Studies librarian worked together with a local business owner to develop course goals and later worked with business faculty to develop a study abroad course with a service-learning component. Similarly, at the University of South Florida, a Special Collections librarian designed and co-taught a three-week Children's Literature course in England and Ireland. The librarian's objective was to incorporate a special collections research experience into the context of the class. The librarian developed assignments, researched available collections, and arranged visits to local libraries and museums in the UK. In country, the librarian traveled and lived with the students. She arranged all the logistics to the UK libraries and museums, which housed special collections of children's literature. Before each visit, she briefed the students on what they could expect. As a co-instructor, she was also responsible for the safety of the students and had to make sure that participants followed all university study abroad policies. Another USF librarian travelled with students and their instructors to Bolivia in 2013 and Argentina in 2014. In Bolivia, she served as both a translator and guide. This weeklong study abroad trip took place after a semester course on the life and times of Che Guevara. She attended all course sessions on campus and assisted students in the identification of resources for their research assignments. While in Bolivia, together with the instructor, she prepared students by providing background information for site visits and assisted students who had trouble understanding presentations in Spanish. In addition, she also travelled on a longer study abroad program (four weeks) the following year to Buenos Aires. There she provided guidance to students researching Argentina's human rights history. She assisted the students in locating local resources, finding USF Library resources online, and setting up a visit to the national library.

LIBRARY LEADER ENGAGEMENT WITH STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Library administrators and librarians serving in leadership roles can support campus study abroad programs in a number of ways. Getting involved in global issues and campus study abroad does not mean one has to travel. Because librarians offer a unique perspective, on-campus units often welcome librarian participation on committees and task forces focused on study abroad. Their

knowledge of resources and access to library resources off-campus give them a voice in the design of support materials for traveling students. At USF, library administrators have reached out to education abroad and global initiative committees to encourage librarian involvement. USF librarians have participated on committees to review study abroad courses, designed pre-departure orientation modules, reviewed faculty templates for travel orientations and researched student international risk issues. In addition, librarians are a part of the ongoing orientation program for international scholars. This type of outreach increases awareness of librarian expertise among campus units and encourages deeper collaboration with study abroad programs and their instructors.

ASSESSING LIBRARY IMPACT ON STUDY ABROAD

While some of the literature discusses library support for students in study abroad programs, there is little about how that support was evaluated in terms of impact on students. This may be due to the challenge of contacting students after they return from their study abroad programs. Clearly, librarians who are co-teaching and designing curricula are at an advantage because they can engage in assessing student learning within the courses in which they are embedded. USF librarians used two assessment methods to understand the needs of study abroad students for library support and services: 1) post study-abroad surveys and 2) focus groups. They developed a survey in 2017 to give specifically to student Global Ambassadors. These students are paid employees who recently participated in a study abroad program. Their job is to serve as study abroad promoters and liaisons to student groups and organizations. All Global Ambassadors were sent a 19-question survey in the spring of 2017 and 31 responses were collected. A new group in 2018 took the same survey with one additional question that asked if the students visited any libraries or museums during their study abroad program. There were 33 responses collected. Overall, respondent characteristics reflected both study abroad students and Global Ambassadors. The survey indicated that 70% were female, 58% were seniors and 25% were juniors. Majors represented included the biosciences, sciences, business, and social sciences. Eighty percent traveled to USF study abroad programs in the U.K., Italy, and France with the average stay being four to six weeks. As a follow up to the online survey, researchers asked students if they wished to volunteer to participate in a focus group.

ASSESSMENT: SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Most interesting among the survey results (Table 1) was student use and non-use of library resources in researching their abroad locations. The majority of students relied on Google to provide information on their program country and city. This increased from 32% of respondents in 2017 to 52% of respondents in 2018. Another source of information about their country came from faculty and family and/or friends. In 2018, 82% of student respondents indicated they did not use library resources to prepare for their trip and this increased from 68% in 2017. Those who used library resources listed JSTOR, Oxford Online, and Music Online as library resources used to find information to help their prepare for their experience.

As a follow up to the online survey, researchers asked students if they wished to volunteer to participate in focus groups. The focus group format allowed the self-selected student participants who took the survey to elaborate on their responses and provide unique feedback to the researcher librarians. The focus group interviews included questions about where students looked for information related to their study abroad experiences, what sources they used, satisfaction with their sources, and interest in library workshops. In 2017, ten students participated and in 2018, three students participated in the focus group. The results revealed a number of issues not fully understood from the survey. For example, according to the survey, the majority of students used Google to find information about their study abroad program country. In the focus groups, students verbally expressed a level of dissatisfaction with results from Google indicating that much of the information was either old or too “touristy.” Both the 2017 and 2018 focus group participants affirmed that help from a librarian before the trip would have led to better resources and more efficient searching. It was also clear that some students in both groups did not know they could connect to the library while abroad. Both groups expressed that study abroad students would definitely benefit from a special guide dedicated to students on USF study abroad programs. Interest in face-to-face library workshops for study abroad students was mixed but if student schedules would allow, they expressed interest in attending. Another takeaway from discussions with students was that only a handful actually conducted academic research involving the use of online library or non-library resources while abroad. For the majority of study abroad students the need is for basic country information, travel resources, and apps they can use while traveling.

CONCLUSION

As one can see, there are many ways librarians and library leaders can support study abroad programs from both on and off campus. Academic librarian knowledge of resources, ability to create online guides, expertise in helping students conduct research and skills in integrating library instructional curricula are all reasons why library involvement enhances study abroad. Also critical to success is assessing library services for study abroad programs to ensure those services are customized, timely, and relevant. As universities become more involved in global initiatives, academic libraries can leverage their strengths to respond to those initiatives in unique and meaningful ways.

REFERENCES

- Chan, K.P., Colvin, J.B., Vinyard, M., Leach, C., Naumann, M.A., & Stenis, P. (2015). Libraries across the sea: Using a virtual presence and skilled student assistants to serve students abroad. *Journal of Library Administration* 55(4), 278-301.
- Cunningham, N. (2018). *Country and travel information resources*. USF Libraries. Retrieved from <http://guides.lib.usf.edu/country>
- Denda, K. (2013). Study abroad programs: A golden opportunity for academic library engagement. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39(2), 155-160.
- Griner, L., Herron, P.J., & White, S. (2015). Study abroad partnerships: Librarians, business faculty, and in-country facilitator develop an innovative and experiential learning program. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship* 20(3), 189-208.
- Global Citizens Project. (2018). *Global citizen overview*. Retrieved from <http://www.usf.edu/gcp/students/gcaward-reqs.aspx>
- Haverford College (2018). *Haverford College at a Glance*. Retrieved from <https://www.haverford.edu/why-haverford>
- Lissenden, A. (2018). *Study abroad research guide*. Rutgers University Libraries. Retrieved from https://libguides.rutgers.edu/study_abroad
- How, S. (2018). *Study abroad: Cornell Library Services*. Retrieved from <http://guides.library.cornell.edu/studyabroad>
- University of South Florida (2018). *Being a global citizen*. Retrieved from <http://www.usf.edu/gcp/being->
- U.S. Department of Education. (2017). *Distribution of federal Pell grant program funds by institution*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-institution.html>
- U.S. News & World Report. (2018). *Best colleges: University of South Florida*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/usf-1537>

Table 1

Assessing Student Use of Library Resources: Selected Survey Results

2017 (n=31)	2018 (n=33)
Question: How did you learn about your study abroad country/city? -Google 32% -Faculty 29% -Friends or Family 32%	52% 21% 14%
Question: Did you need to login to the USF network to access library resources while abroad? -Yes 29% - No 71%	38% 62%
Question: did you use any library databases/resources to prepare? -Yes 16% -No 68% -Not sure 16%	9% 82% 9%