Assessing the learning outcomes of Fashion Design students who studied away

Kim Hahn and Young Kim Thanos
Kent State University

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Introduction: As recognized by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Global Learning VALUE, n.d.), "Global learning is a critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability. Through global learning, students should 1) become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, 2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and 3) address the world's most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably". We recognize the importance of global competency to a fashion student's education; therefore we offer various opportunities for our students to be involved in international programs. As one of the premier Universities in the Midwestern United States, with a student population of approximately two thousand, students majoring in Fashion Design make up about a quarter of the entire school. Based on the last five years of student participation in the study away programs, statistics show that 81% of the design students partook in one or more study away program(s). Study away locations include, but are not limited to NYC, Florence, Paris, Hong Kong and L.A. Beginning with the freshmen cohort of 2016-17, an approved study-away experience is now required for all fashion students prior to graduation.

Purpose: Having several programs running simultaneously across the globe under one curriculum presented several challenges, such as discrepancies in learning outcomes, varied physical and emotional responses, and diverging acquired skillsets. This was especially critical when participants returned to main campus after their junior year study away experience, to complete their undergraduate studies. Additionally, the gap in perception of the experience was more evident to the faculty. Consequently, we wanted to understand the perception of the experience from the students, as it pertains to their design discipline. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to assess learning outcomes for fashion design students, after studying away.

Methods: Data were collected from US college seniors studying design, in a Midwestern university. Using online surveys, a total of 62 study away participants during academic year 2014-15 were invited, and 29 responses were collected (response rate = 46.7%), of which 28 were deemed usable for data analysis. The majority were female (67.9%) and Caucasian/White (89.5%). About 42% of them were pursuing BA degree, while 57.9% were pursuing BFA degree. Most of the participants indicated their GPA to be 3.6-4.0 (63.2%), followed by 3.1-3.5 (26.3%) and 2.6-3.0 (10.5%).

About 68% of the participants have completed their internships, and 75% of them have worked in jobs related to fashion. The questionnaire asks each participant where they studied away, and how prepared they felt regarding the list of knowledge/skills that are required as a senior design student. This list consisted of thirteen competencies, such as "Fundamental knowledge of Design

development for apparel collection", "Understanding the ways in which fabric, texture, and pattern can affect visual appearance of a garment", "Constructing and fitting simple garments", etc. Items were adapted from both current junior and senior design studio course learning objectives, on 5-point Likert scales (1=not prepared, 5=very prepared).

Results: A series of descriptive analyses pertaining to each study away program were performed using SPSS 22.0. The results revealed that 71.4 % of the students studied away in Florence. Of those, 30 % of them studied in both NYC and Florence; 15% studied in NYC, Florence, 5% studied in Florence and Paris, and 45% studied only in the Florence location. There were about 53% who studied in NYC, and of those, 46% studied in both NYC and Florence, 2% studied in all three locations (NYC, Florence, and Paris), 2% studied in both NYC and Paris, and 13% only studied in NYC. Out of 28 students, three students studied in Paris alone. Overall, students seem prepared for knowledge/skills required as a senior design student (m= 4.09). The top two knowledge/skills students feel prepared for were "Fundamental knowledge of draping process" (m=4.58) and "Constructing and fitting simple garments" (m=4.48). The categories students felt least prepared for were "Sketching design ideas with computer generated illustration programs" (m=3.05) and "Understanding practices of sustainability on fashion and incorporate ideas into design process" (m=3.55). There were slight differences among students who studied away in different locations. Top knowledge/skills for students who studied in NYC were "Fundamental knowledge of Draping process" (m=4.62) and "Ability to research and utilize current fashion trends and interpret as they relate to patternmaking, draping and garment construction" (m=4.62). The top knowledge/skills Florence students identified was "Fundamental knowledge of pattern making" (m=4.62). Top knowledge/skills for Paris students were "Understanding the ways in which fabric, texture, and pattern can affect visual appearance of a garment" (m=4.83) and "Constructing and fitting simple garments" (m=4.83). The least prepared knowledge/skills students perceived was "Sketching design ideas with computer generated illustration programs" for all three locations (NYC= 3.15, Florence=2.85, Paris=3.50). When ANOVA was conducted between BA and BFA students, the only evident difference was that BA students (m=4.00) were significantly less prepared than BFA students (m=4.83) regarding "Developing patterns from a design sketch" (F= 6.016; p=. 037).

Conclusion: The findings from this study shed light on understanding our current students' perception of their learning outcomes after studying away, as well as their preparedness for the senior-level design coursework. This study will help to update our curriculum across all study away locations, utilizing student data, to ultimately provide guidance to students in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, this study offers valuable information to other schools that are planning to or already have study away programs. Universities can develop their curriculum in relation to these programs to optimize learning outcomes for design students.

Reference:

Global Learning VALUE Rubric. (n.d.). Retrieved from
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