

Running Head: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Missing Components of International Education

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Abstract

Every year, thousands of young men and women decide to participate in international education as a part of their academic programs. This paper communicates the need for appropriate campus based pre-and post program preparation and programming for individuals participating in academic centered international education programs. It examines the recent trend of private and public institutions of higher education to engage their student populations in international education and questions their capacity to provide the adequate infrastructure to support these programs. This paper contributes a greater understanding of international education efforts of colleges and universities, documents the need for development of intentionally designed student support programs, and offers an outline of appropriate programming components that can be implemented to ensure a safe and successful program.

Introduction

When starting a job, a new employee may spend up to six weeks in intensive training, approximately 240 hours, to prepare them to do a specific task or job where they will be spending 40 hours per week. In contrast, students who study abroad will receive an average of 6 hours of training and preparation and then will spend 120 hours per week in another culture, in another city, surrounded by new and different people, foods, traditions, unfamiliar bathrooms, smells, sounds, religions and even bathing habits.

How much training and preparation should students receive to make this a comfortable, smooth, safe and educational experience? Are the hundreds of Institutions of Higher Education that are facilitating study abroad programs planning strategically around the complex issues that students face while abroad? Are they developing programs that prepare them before their exciting time abroad, support the student when they are abroad and guide them through the complex process of returning home? The recent push from administrators to enhance diverse learning experiences has encouraged colleges and universities to commence study abroad programs before they have a strong infrastructure to adequately support them.

Meredith Kercher (UK) and Amanda Knox (US) were two students spending time in Perugia, Italy on study abroad programs through their universities. November 2nd 2007, Meredith Kercher was found dead in her rented house shared with Amanda Knox, a student from the University of Washington. Several days later, Knox was arrested. More than two years later on December 5th, 2009, the trial came to a close as Knox was found guilty of murdering Kercher and she was sentenced to 26 years in an Italian prison.

The media portrays Amanda Knox either as the innocent college student abroad, caught in the flawed judicial system of Italy, or a rebellious traveler, mixed up in excessive drug use and

sex games and now: guilty of murder. This controversial trial and the final verdict have been in the domestic and international media and has brought cause to closely inspect international education programs.

I will not enter into the discussion of her guilt or her innocence. The Italian judicial system has made their decision. What I would like to make clear is that when traveling abroad for study or leisure, people often find themselves in situations that may be new, different, exciting, scary, challenging, and life changing. They often enter the situation ill-equipped for what situations will occur, and find themselves acting in different ways than they would normally at home. It is possible to be involved with the wrong people, be in the wrong place, suffer from confusion, and not be aware of the consequences of your actions. The combination of reckless behavior by college-age students and the complex issues which emerge when one is abroad is a very dangerous mix. In the case of the Italian murder trial, it cost Meredith her life and it cost Amanda thousands in court fees, two years in prison so far and ultimately her freedom.

One particular experience of my own, though not tragic by any means, shows the need for insensitive cultural training. I spent a semester traveling through Central America with 24 other college students studying Spanish, sociology, and history. We spent one month of that experience throughout Honduras living with families and working alongside local non-profit organizations. One evening my host family held a neighborhood birthday party for a neighbor. The youth started to dance and I left the living room to join my host mother and her friends in the kitchen. It became clear that I needed to participate in this cultural celebration by dancing. By the next morning, the entire staff at my office had heard the news “the American girl danced at village party!” A man on staff approached me in disapproval. He was friendly and teased me,

but it was made clear to me that I shouldn't have danced. The NGO I worked for employed men and women of all faiths. In Honduras, and other Latin American countries, Catholics and Protestants have been fighting for years over the issues of dancing, drinking, playing cards and many other activities and it is deemed morally inappropriate to dance.

Although I believe I did the right thing by participating in this cultural festivity, I should have considered the consequences of this decision. Luckily I was not in serious danger or extremely offensive to my hosts. This was the first of many cultural "fouls" committed during my international education experience that led me to a deep and serious concern for sending our young people overseas without the necessary tools for successful assimilation into a new culture.

In order for colleges and universities to adequately protect and prepare their students, they must design and implement comprehensive supportive programs to go along side their study abroad programming. This can look different for each institution based on institutional goals and capacity. However, it is critical that programs of preparation and debriefing be built into any study abroad program. If this is neglected, students may still have a good time traveling and studying abroad, however the intended outcomes of an institution will not be met. This paper will explain the recent trends in international education initiatives, and will outline some of the missing components that are necessary for success.

Background Information

International Education: Defining Terms

International Education is the term I have chosen to use throughout this paper. Institutions may call it various titles and offer it in various formats. Study Abroad, Global Studies, Global Education, Semester abroad, Study Tours or Trips are other names used at where students travel outside the US for an international learning experience. The way institutions title

international programs, says a lot about the institutions priorities and guides programming. Institutions are staying away from terms like “trip” or “tour” as according to Donnelly-Smith, a “‘trip’ is a one-time, isolated thing. A good short-term program is strongly connected to coursework and an integral part of a larger learning experience” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

In addition to variations in the titles assigned to programs, institutions offer credit programs, non-credit program, language emersion programs, internships and fellowships, and even volunteer or missionary experiences. To accommodate student schedules and requirements, they are offered for any length of time from several weeks to up to a year. According to one article, “the intensity of quality of a study abroad program is what matters, not the duration” (Anon., 2010). While the combinations of length, title and academic components are limitless, the premise is the same; an institution of higher education acts as the sending agent for young men and women to enter another country as representatives of the institution and of the country with the purpose of learning.

The term Institute of Higher Education will refer to colleges and universities offering post- high school education and training. This may include Community Colleges, Junior Colleges, as well as undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. All Institutions of Higher Education who are developing International Education opportunities need to consider the ways that they can improve and enhance their programs.

Benefits of Global Education

Apart from being a fun experience for young people, students and institutions alike enjoy many benefits from spending time abroad. Institutions may have lofty educational and academic goals of introducing global issues to their students in context while students may not be as interested in these lofty goals. Lewin suggests that “We find ourselves pushing these loftier

goals onto students against their primary expectations for travel, adventure, and general pleasure-seeking” (Lewin, 2009). It is important for the student and the institution of higher education to understand the various motivations as they proceed.

International education is beneficial not only to the student, but also for the institution. Muller argues that “the whole community benefits if students are getting excited about global learning, engaged in their classrooms, and motivated to continue learning” (Muller, 2009). Even the United States government has an interest in sending students abroad as a way of developing competencies that will benefit the country in the future as they try to remain relevant in the world market, as Lewin shares when stating that we “recognize the importance of an educated workforce becoming more knowledgeable about other cultures as essential so that the United States remains economically competitive” (Lewin, 2009). Additionally, it is becoming more important for the US to send diplomatic representatives into the rest of the world for reasons other than business or war. Lewin continues by acknowledging that “we regard sending students abroad as one of the most effective diplomatic tools, both to improve our damaged reputation in the short term and to help resolve intractable international conflicts in the long run” (Lewin, 2009).

Student Benefits and Motivation

Students choose to participate in International Education with various motivations. Every year young men and women decide to participate in international travel and study to enhance and expand the learning in their chosen academic programs. They seek multi-cultural experience or language learning. Others participate simply for the purpose of meeting a requirement imposed on them by the institution. The motivating factors of the students traveling abroad are as diverse as their sending campus thus leading to a diverse group of students abroad with different levels

of multicultural competencies, sensitivities and tolerance for diversity. Students traveling abroad should understand their own motivations and those of their respective institutions.

As mentioned, many students seek travel, adventure and recreation when signing-up for a study abroad program. It is not only educational, but also according to Hulstrand for “most students, education abroad is a wonderful, life-changing experience.” (Hulstrand, 2009) Study Away, the unauthorized guide to study abroad mentions that students consider study abroad because they feel like they can learn more abroad than they can studying the same content at their college (Balaba, 2003).

Evidence shows a positive impact on the individual when young people engage in international Education. Findings from the Beyond Immediate Impact: Study Abroad for Global Engagement project, based at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, show that “students who study abroad during college are much more likely to become globally engaged citizens later in life” (Anon., 2010). This project defined global engagement as a combination of six characteristics- civic engagement, global leadership, global values, philanthropic donations, and volunteerism.

While challenging, it is developmentally and experientially impactful for many students to be experiencing travel in new settings, while eating unfamiliar food, and speaking a foreign language. Hulstrand asserts that “even the experience of getting sick while abroad can be an invaluable opportunity for students to begin to master the independent living and problem solving skills that are among the most important things they can gain from education abroad” (Hulstrand, 2009). International Education experiences teach students lessons that cannot be learned in the classroom. Gardner claims that “some of the most meaningful learning

experiences do not happen in class, but occur in study abroad, student organizations, and service-learning experiences” (Gardner, et al., 2009).

Another benefit that students often seek to gain from an international education experience is an advantage in their job search upon graduation. Employers place importance on a multicultural educational experience if it is communicated appropriately on the student resume and in the interview process (Gardner, et al., 2009). Students who participate in these programs find themselves better prepared to face the demands of working in a global environment. The North Carolina Center for International Understanding has identified four global competencies for future-ready students; “cultural awareness, awareness of world events and global dynamics, effective communication skills across cultures, and the ability to work as collaborative members on multicultural teams” (Muller, 2009). With the employment market tightening-up, students are eager to pursue anything that will give them an advantage, and being “future-ready” is a definite advantage to employers.

Institutional Benefits and Motivation

Just as student motivations vary, so do the motivating factors of their sending institutions. Many initiate these programs due to a deep conviction and commitment to develop future global citizens, instilling multicultural understanding among their students as they learn about the world around them and themselves. However, other institutions participate in international education it is the popular thing to do, because it is what administrators or the board demands, or to meet particular funding requirements or expectations for continued accreditation.

While a student’s educational experience should be the priority in the discussion of international education, many other entities stand to benefit from a well-developed international education program. Lewin contends that “gaining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes through an

international experience is no longer just the interest of individual students. It has now become a priority of the collective” (Lewin, 2009). We must collectively address the challenges faced with study abroad to improve our ability to serve students. For example, Boston University (BU) currently has more than 2000 students who travel abroad each year (Connell, 2009). They believe strongly the “landscape for our students and programs is more than Boston; it is the world.” (Connell, 2009). BU is capitalizing on their strengths in international programs as the cornerstone of their 10-year, strategic plan to move higher in academic rankings. In discussing how BU has chosen their partners abroad, Jay Halford who chairs the President council for a Global University said they look for “true academic relationships and engagements that will enhance the reputation of the university” (Connell, 2009). Many institutions seek to increase their public reputation through the presence of international education programs and their partners.

International Education opportunities increases enrollment. Students are drawn to universities who have strong and attractive study abroad programs. According to Connell, within an institution, departments benefit as they realize “If the student knows there is a study abroad program, that draws them in like a vacuum cleaner” (Connell, 2009).

Despite the obvious and the not so obvious benefits of international education, institutions are not all equally equipped to facilitate international education experiences for their students. This fact should lead institutions in thinking seriously and strategically about their participation in international education and plan accordingly for the stability of the institution and in the best interest of their students.

Recent Trends

Today, more students than ever are studying abroad. The recent trends in institutions of higher education is to engage as many students as possible in international education programs. Colleges and universities have practically birthed international education programs overnight. According to Lewin, in the last fifteen years, “participation has risen over 300 percent, from under 75,000 students in 1994 to nearly a quarter million last year” (Lewin, 2009). According to the annual Open Doors Report published by the Institute of International Education, the number of students from the United States study in short term-abroad programs has increased over 75% over the past 10 years (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008).

In order to accommodate this trend, institutions are developing programs and curriculum that include international experiences. This effort is guided by institutional legislation and supported by the federal government. In June of 2009, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act was approved by the US House of Representatives. The act establishes the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation states the goal that over the next 10 years, at least 1 million U.S. university and college students will study abroad annually across the globe (Anon, 2009). Institutions are scrambling furiously to meet this projection.

In 2002 Goucher College, a small liberal arts colleges in Baltimore, “made a commitment to educate students to become global citizens through a curriculum infused with an awareness of the international and intercultural dimensions of every subject” (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008). Three years later this commitment was expanded to also require an international study abroad experience. This is a common example. The desire for more students to go abroad is now broadcasted in mission statements and vision statements of institutions and is heard from the mouths of the presidents and board members. It is even communicated in the form of federal

legislation. Lewin shares that “study abroad offices feel tremendous pressure from central administrations to meet numerical goals” (Lewin, 2009).

International education, in all its forms, is growing more important to students, their institutions, and their communities. Programs are starting at institutions with little to no experience in the international education field. Students are either required to participate or at least highly encouraged. The concern remains, are institutions of higher education prepared to provide the necessary support for these programs?

The Problem

As globalization is shrinking the business world and bringing diverse populations together in one place for shared purposes and outcomes, it is critical the institutions of higher education act as leaders in intercultural competency, multicultural understanding and communication. This knowledge and training that universities develop can also be used to enhance diversity and communication on their campuses for the students who do not travel abroad. Additionally institutions can become leaders in their communities and provide training to increase the diversity and mutual understanding.

Institutions of higher education are striving to meet the needs of their students by providing a well-rounded education through international education programs and multicultural requirements. Huvland writes that “global learning should simultaneously address international interconnection and interdependence and inequality, injustice, and American power - at home and abroad” (Huvland, 2009). These are important and complex issues that should not be treated lightly by institutions, therefore appropriate methods to ensure that these issues are taught and exposed in appropriate ways.

Diversity and international education are popular concepts and there are few institutions of higher education that do not seek to promote global awareness and responsibility among their students. However, a critical component is missing from many international education programs. Huvlund continues his argument by sharing that “across all sectors, institutions continue to struggle to develop the best practices for translating goals into concrete curricular and cocurricular global experiences that are flexible, rigorous, and relevant to all students in all programs” (Huvlund, 2009). Resources available to students and institutions are rare. Even the current Edition of IIE Passport: Short Term Study Abroad (a near 600 page book) lists thousands of programs for students, yet offers no advice for how to prepare for or how to support study abroad experiences. According to Donnelly-Smith, “Because widespread participation in short-term study abroad programs is a relatively new phenomenon... there is little formal research describing either the best practices for short-term study abroad or the learning outcomes that can accompany it” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). This is the problem that we must address.

As a “relatively new phenomenon” and trend in institutions of higher education, the current literature available is limited. In search of best practices, there are none. In search for guidance or program templates, none exist. Therefore this paper shares several proven effective practices with a strong call for comprehensive programming by the institutions to ensure appropriate preparation with an emphasis on best practices, original theories and proposed solutions that can be adapted to institutional needs.

In order to meet these needs of the institution as well as the needs of the student, a pre and post international education experience must be integrated into the framework of the institution. Even institutions with the best of intentions are guilty of on-the-fly program development which neglect to evaluate the needs and concerns addressed in this paper.

The need is for appropriate, thorough pre-experience preparation, followed-by a post experience follow-up and continued academic, career and personal guidance. These pre-and post-experience components make the difference in a successful program and ineffective one. Without these programming components, the goals are not achieved, students learning outcomes are not attained, and in the worst possible cases, students may find themselves in very dangerous situations abroad, or unprepared to return home in a healthy state. It would be a mistake to pursue international education programs without a proper infrastructure in place

With a proper understanding of the critical nature of the subject, this paper will outline the key components of a successful and effective program. With a strong foundation for multicultural curriculum programs, learning outcomes will be achieved and all parties will benefit. This knowledge can be shared and modified to meet the needs of the institution; however there are several critical components that all institutions should initiate.

The Solution

Necessary Programmatic Components

Donnelly Smith shares that faculty and study abroad administrators agree that students get the most out of international education programs when they are “highly structured, require ongoing reflection, and include in-depth experience working or studying with host country participants” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Huvland includes the argument that international education requires multiple experiential opportunities within the curriculum for students to practice in the real world what they are learning in the classroom. (Huvland, 2009). International educators recommend requiring ongoing student reflection. Finally, Donnelly-Smith believes that this form of education requires that “students should keep structured journals of their study abroad experience, using guided reflection practices to help them process and understand their

experiences. The group should regularly engage in structured discussion” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Due to the diverse nature of students participating in international education, it is impossible for them to be equally equipped for the experience. This fact should encourage even more training and preparation for the students before they leave the protective campus environment and enter international territory. The international experience is strengthened by course based preparation and reflection. Huvland believes that “the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained in study abroad or away, in turn, expand and deepen the insights that students bring to what they are learning in the rest of their courses” (Huvland, 2009).

Donnelly-Smith suggests that faculty are comfortable and competent with experiential teaching. They propose a challenge; “A faculty member might give brilliant lectures, but can he or she teach experientially, integrating the unique features of the site abroad to ensure students make connections and have authentic learning experiences?” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Many institutions assume that a good teacher can also teach in this environment and that is an incorrect assumption. Teaching in experiential environments is a unique pedagogical model.

During a study abroad program regular contact with the participants must happen with faculty and staff. This may mean a faculty member is actually in country with a group of students. Moreno-Lopez proposes a goal for the study abroad programming: “to facilitate the student’s adjustment to the new setting and increase cultural empathy” (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008). Without regular institutional contact this facilitation and development of empathy goes unguided. Facilitation may range from personal meetings with faculty abroad or online weekly posts from the students so that the institution can maintain regular contact with student.

Conversations over the internet are even easier than ever before and these opportunities should be utilized to maintain close contact between the student and sending institution.

Another consideration of any international education program that Donnelly-Smith suggests is to ensure “that participants avoid the island or bubble effect” says Sarah Spencer, of the University of St. Thomas (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). The programs that act more like a guided tourist excursion are far less educational and should be avoided under the guise of international education. In facilitating tours or trips, the institution is sending a clear message that students are not there to immerse themselves in a multicultural experience as much as they are to act as a consumer of a frivolous, touristy experience.

Campus-wide Effort

The associate provost for international programs at Boston University has orchestrated the expansion of BU’s activities since 1997. He says that the biggest challenge for him and for the University was “integrating study abroad into the fabric of the curriculum and into the university as an integral part, not a set apart experience” (Connell, 2009). If the entire institution recognizes that internationalization is critical, then developing programs will not be hard. This message is repeated by Huvland “...study abroad as a vehicle for global learning needs to be carefully situated within a broader institutional and educational context” (Huvland, 2009.) Boston University claims that including international efforts in their strategic plan helped to get “the community to declare that this is one of the core competencies of the university” (Connell, 2009).

International education requires a campus-wide philosophy that must reach all corners of the institution and connect with students along their academic path. Huvland supports this assertion sharing that “such integration requires cooperation, collaboration, and communication

across departments and divisions, between disciplines and, ideally, between academic and student affairs. Global learning must be designed at the institutional level” (Huvland, 2009). Any college that has started an international education program understands that it is most effective when understood, supported and advocated by colleagues and administrators. Lewin adds to the discuss that “chief academic officers... need to champion study abroad internally to deans, department heads, faculty, and students as a central component of the process of internationalization” (Lewin, 2009). Only through collaboration and commitment to international education can programs thrive. Huvland writes, “In the specific context of study abroad or study away, we must encourage conversation and shared responsibility between faculty and staff who are involved in those programs and those who are not” (Huvland, 2009). All members of the institution need to participate in the shared vision of international education.

The former director of the Fogarty International Center at the National Institute of Health said, “if you believe as we do that global health touches on everything, then you need to connect across the whole of the University” (Connell, 2009). Institutions of higher education believe that they must prepare their students for a future that is more global than ever before.

Huvland summarizes this argument declaring “Global learning is not a task to be assigned to an individual, an office, or a department; it is a complex set of goals and outcomes to be coordinated across and throughout the institution. Consequently, study abroad as a vehicle for global learning needs to be carefully situated within a broader institutional and educational context” (Huvland, 2009.)

Pre-Program Student Preparation

Lewin argues that institutions with experience in international education often complain that their students arrive in their host countries, as experts on where to find the lowest-priced

beer and the best places to access the internet “but with faint knowledge about their host country's culture, history, geography, or politics” (Lewin, 2009). Sadly, the solution to this problem is often a haphazard rush to develop pre-departure courses. However, Hulstrand reminds us that with the challenges that students can potentially face while abroad, “Preparing students to do so [face challenges], and helping them recognize...their next steps... is one of the most important things educators can do to help them make the most of education abroad” (Hulstrand, 2009). Donnelly-Smith mentions that international educators from various institutions agree that when working on study abroad programs, preparation is critical to the success of any program for the benefit of the students and the institution (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Preparation and materials should be communicated to students face to face, frequently, and in an easily accessible format both while local and abroad. Meetings should begin at least three months in advance of departure. Resources should be given to students in some form of pre-departure handbook and made available and accessible online. Michigan State University holds predeparture "packings" so that students might make their experiences more purposeful and intentional (Gardner, et al., 2009).

When a student leaves this country and spends time in another country they are automatically a representative of the institutions from which they came. They are a diplomat entering a foreign land and are wearing the name of that university across their forehead and should understand all that entails. A written contract should be created outlining the expectations and behaviors that will or will not be permitted. Additionally, the student must acknowledge that there are certain risks faced when traveling abroad. A waiver of responsibility is also critical to protect the University from any Liability should there be an accident abroad affecting the individual student, the student group, or the host country.

Cultural and Language Preparation

Cultural awareness training should be provided to the students as it relates to the specific destination. Issues of history, gender, politics, religion, and even family values should be discussed as it relates to a student visiting the country. Moore states that “orientation programs are for outgoing students are a valuable part of preparing for a study abroad” (Moore, 282, 2000).

Contextualized cultural preparation is necessary before arriving in country. Although before going to Central America I had studied the religious rift between the Catholic and Protestant sects, I was not aware of the strong opinions surrounding dancing. Institutions have facilitated this is preparation through workshops on understanding cultural differences, or inviting guest speakers from the host country to speak to the students before the leave. Some institutions even have credit classes as part of the required curriculum, and they use that as the venue for communicating this information.

Language training is not always required by programs. However in order to learn and understand certain elements of culture, minimal language competency should be encouraged. In terms of effective language training and immersion. Moreno-Lopez argues that “The combination of language and content study in the classroom before travel with extended language practice in an immersion setting while abroad is one of the best methods to achieve foreign language competency and increased cultural awareness” (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008).

Study Away, the unauthorized guide to study abroad offers good advice on staying safe and being culturally sensitive. The author suggests that students don't bring American tendencies with them and try to blend in and mix with the people in their host country. Another piece of guidance they offer is simple yet often ignored; encourage student not to act in ways that

you wouldn't act at home (Balaba, 2003). For example, if you don't drink beer at home, don't start just because you are in Germany.

Staff and Faculty Capacity

Institutions must consider the funding and programmatic demands placed on staff and faculty before considering embarking on new programs. Asking a faculty member to lead an international education experience is more than teaching a regular class. This requires experience and training in teaching experiential learning, cultural sensitivity, along with asking them to leave families at home for the duration of the program. The responsibility of preparing for the program, as well as during the experience and post-experience follow-up, is often seemingly impossible expectation on top of an already full load. As other institutional priorities arise, the logistics of an International Education program must not be neglected. Considerations and compensation for the duration of the pre and post experience must be considered as part of the institutional commitment to international education.

Good Health Abroad

The physical and mental health of the students abroad must not be neglected. Institutions should consider this of primary importance in the development their international education programs. Hulstrand insists that, "In preparing for education abroad experiences, a student's excitement of going to a new country and learning in a new environment can often put the idea of staying healthy on the back burner." Therefore, "many unexpected health concerns can occur while abroad, but fortunately most of them can be avoided if proper precautions are taken in advance" (Hulstrand, 2009).

One way that this can be done is to invite experts from the community or from campus health and psychological centers to speak at pre-departure sessions. According to Hulstrand, "it

is as important for education abroad advisors to offer health and safety information as it is for students to accept that they are responsible for their health and well-being while traveling and studying abroad” (Hulstrand, 2009).

It is recommendable to require students to complete an extensive health profile and submit written approval from their medical doctor. Hulstrand argues that this not only offers the opportunity for the individual and their family to think through the potential for a medical concern abroad but it gives the school valuable information on each participant (Hulstrand, 2009). It would be irresponsible for an institution to send a student to any country, without prior knowledge of their physical and mental health considerations.

Institutions should require students to have health insurance if they will travel abroad under the supervision of an institution. Hulstrand notes that “many programs now require that students to provide proof of health insurance covers while abroad; others offer travel insurance that includes medical coverage as part of their education abroad package” (Hulstrand, 2009). This is also an important consideration for students who many not otherwise have health insurance. This saves the students, the families and the institutions stress. It is the simplest and easiest thing that an institution can do to improve the safety of their students abroad.

With regard to the most common health issues abroad, Hulstrand writes that other than the potential health concerns that students face abroad “Alcohol abuse is probably the single most common issue across education abroad globally” (Hulstrand, 2009). Some level of depression as well as excitement is normal as they confront the differences in their host culture. Hulstrand reminds us that “knowing that its dangerous to add excessive use of alcohol to an already challenging mix is important information for students to be armed with” (Hulstrand, 2009).

Post-Program Continued Support

The work is not done when a student returns from a program abroad. In fact, I would argue that this is the most critical time for interventions to occur for the institution and for the student. Creating global citizens through international education is a process that involves many people. According to Lewin, the challenge is when “students return from some of the most effective study abroad experiences finding neither coursework for them to take in order to deepen their knowledge, nor engagement opportunities for them to continue developing their civic sensibilities” (Lewin, 2009). Institutions of higher education have yet to solve this problem, despite valiant efforts. Moreno-Lopez adds that some have chosen to use an additional component to an immersion abroad experience that gives students the opportunity to bring together their newly acquired knowledge and skills and to reflect on how to integrate these experiences in their future plans (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008).

My experience in Central America ended by spending the final week in Mexico City. This design offered a middle ground for cultural transition, assimilation and debriefing. Many programs offer something similar that gives time and space for students to adjust to leaving their host country, and prepare to return home. At the point we arrived in Mexico City, I had a sprained ankle, an annoying rash and a nasty combination of parasites and amoebas. I spend most of this “transitional week” watching the clock during group sessions, wishing that I were home. This made me eager to leave instead of willing to take the time to adequately process the semester-long experience. I was not the only one who was emotionally “checked-out” during that debriefing time. Upon return we had several informal gatherings with the group, a reunion and a presentation to the campus about our experience. Debriefing cannot and should not be a

one time event or retreat, but a process recognized to take time and effort on the part of the individual and the institution.

We navigated the waters of expressing ourselves to a group of people who had no idea what we had experienced. We struggled trying to explain to our middle-upper class family and friends the poverty that we witnessed and felt torn as we returned comfortably to our cell phones, cars, and big houses. The friendships made during that study abroad continued in many cases, through informal gatherings, meals and discussions as we continued to translate our experience to a life at home.

Each participant spent a certain amount of time “lost” as we re-evaluated how we fit back into our own culture. One member of the group ate nothing but rice and beans for several months out of “reverence” to the time she spent in Central America. Another wore a poncho for several weeks, (a strange choice for July) as he tried to bring his experience home with him. Determining next steps after college life is hard enough for the young adult as they move from a student life to the life of a professional. Add the riveting experience of living abroad, world view alterations and the impact of reverse culture shock and returning home after abroad experience can be more challenging than a regular life transition.

According to Gardner, Michigan State University (MSU) tries to accomplish three main things in their debriefing workshops for students returned home from international education. First, they want to help students make “critical connections between their learning experiences abroad, both inside and outside the classroom, in the context of career preparation” (Gardner, et al., 2009). Second, they want to challenge the meaningfulness of a study abroad experience by probing deeper in to the ways it may have helped them develop academically, culturally, professionally, and personally. Finally, they seek to help students find confident ways

to articulate more effectively the skills and knowledge they developed through study abroad. (Gardner, et al., 2009).

The format that MSU uses is a two-hour workshop offered twice each semester and when requested by a faculty member. During this workshop they cover the importance of skills and competencies to employers, through authentic reflective practice, debriefing the unpacking exercises, and a wrap-up exercise. Gardner shares that they “learned from these sessions that personal and academic meaning come through a purposeful direction that students envision for themselves. We are encouraged by our workshops that students can gain significantly from participation in global education” (Gardner, et al., 2009). MSU’s workshop model is a good effort; however I contend that a two-hour workshop is insufficient. In an experience like this Sullivan adds that students may have “learned as much outside the university as they did in it, and coming home with all this new knowledge can lead to something like culture shock they experienced when they first arrived in the host country” (Sullivan, p. 264, 2004). It requires more than two hours to fully “un-pack” an international education experience. According to Moore, as a preventative method, it is proven that students will have an easier time adjusting to re-entry if they have been in regular contact to family and friends during their time abroad (Moore, p. 279, 2000).

The insider’s guide to Study Abroad (Moore, 2000) prepared a brief Insider’s guide to re-entry that is helpful in minimizing the challenges of re-entry. First and foremost this guide reminds the student that “[You have] enriched your perceptions of the role of your country and community in the global scheme of things... Your experiences have changed you, perhaps more than you realize” (Moore, p. 279, 2000). Sullivan recommends that students take time to reflect alone on their experiences when preparing to go home. Sullivan reminds students to “think

about who you were when you arrived in your host country and how this experience has affected your thinking and personality (politics, interpersonal relations, priorities, view of time, community identification, and so on.)” (Sullivan, p. 264, 2004). This form of guided reflection upon returning home will minimize the challenges faced.

Integrated Curriculum

Integrating international education into the framework of the institution is one way the institutions can support students as they return home. When that occurs the learning experienced abroad can be applied and enhanced in future course work. Leadership and direction from the faculty is best when pursuing international education. Donnelly-Smith reminds educators that “Faculty members have much control over the program, and are able to ensure that the program activities are closely integrated with the content of the students' coursework back home” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009).

Lewin recommends that instead of just developing pre and post programming, institutions should ensure the “existence and expansion of general coursework that exposes students to global systems, area studies, and world language training; with affording them a recognized global pathway that appears on their official college transcript” (Lewin, 2009). This offers the cultural environment where faculty use international examples in their courses, where students may choose further study related to what they have learned and where they have the opportunity to apply their new knowledge to their academic pathway (Lewin, 2009).

Andreas Sobisch from John Carroll University believes that ideally “institutions have students enroll in a one-credit class to prepare for a short-term program, and then require a one-credit follow-up course the following semester in which students would produce a paper, presentation, or capstone project about the experience” (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). According to

Moreno-Lopez, Goucher College uses a “three-part sequence of study that includes a seven-week content course on campus, followed by three weeks of study abroad, and a summative seven week course back on campus” (Moreno-Lopez, et al, 2008). This format allows for students to properly prepare, and debrief their experience.

Sharing their Experience

Upon return students need a venue to express themselves and share their experience. Mullen shares that “some universities are very lacking when it comes to helping students with reentry transition and figuring out the point of their time abroad” (Muller, 2009). The *Insiders Guide to Study Abroad* also highly recommends that students find venues to share the experiences upon return. They specifically believe that students should provide a thorough report to department or study-abroad office.

According to Mullen and other international educators, having a community outreach program in which students “reflect on their experiences in order to design a presentation appropriate for K-12 students helps the returning university students take this much needed step in completing their education abroad journey” (Muller, 2009). Trying to describe what it was like to live in a rural village in Africa, to parents who have only ever vacationed in 5 star hotels is a challenge. Through these speaking engagements students are able to articulate what they have learned about themselves, their experiences, and how to teach and develop their public speaking skills as they share their experiences with the K-12 students (Muller, 2009).

Returning students may also find a place for continued engagement through the international education office. Moore asserts that they will likely “welcome assistance in organizing information sessions for students going to the country where you sojourned” (Moore, p. 282, 2000). Moore recommends students offer to attend the orientation sessions and bring

along photos and other material to help prepare outgoing students. Students can also volunteer to lead “coffee hour” discussions or informational meetings, or arrange to come in at regular time each week to help advise students who are selecting programs (Moore, p. 282, 2000).

Opportunities for Continued Engagement

Returning students need opportunities for activism or cultural participation to ensure that the study-abroad experience was not a one-time event that occurred in their past, but a life changing experience that will shape and form their future. Additionally, more suggests getting involved in club activity or connecting with organizations that do work in the region visited as good ways of staying involved and engaged (Moore, p. 282, 2000). Without finding opportunities for continued engagement, it may seem that their experience and the lessons learned while studying abroad are isolated to that specific event in that specific location. Educators must ensure this doesn’t happen. Huvland argues that “there are local/global intersections in every community that colleges and universities can identify and utilize them” (Huvland, 2009).

Re-entry programming for returning students must be a feature of all short-term study abroad programs. Some institutions facilitate peer counselor groups made up of returning study abroad students who discuss their experiences with prospective students and give advice. Faculty may hold meetings to reunite a study group, discuss current events and news from the host country, and help students draw connections with any future study abroad programs they are planning.

Career Services

Institutions can significantly support students returning from an international education experience through career services and guidance. Although students and institutions believe that

study abroad increases employability upon graduation, initial results of a study done at Michigan State University, showed that “employers placed low importance on study abroad compared to other cocurricular activities” (Gardner, et al., 2009). This was concerning the University, therefore they completed a follow-up study, revealing students were not articulating their international experiences in meaningful ways for employers. According to this study, “Instead, employers often were led to believe that the study abroad program was “fun, but contained little (work-related) substance” (Gardner, et al., 2009). This led to the development of their “Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experiences” seminars for returning study abroad participants.

When examining what behaviors, skills, and competencies gained from study abroad appear relevant in the workplace, there were a group of traits that experienced hires demonstrated according to the employers. Gardner shares the findings that some of the valuable competencies that a student can carry into an interview include “interacting with people who hold different interests, values, or perspectives, understanding cultural differences in the workplace, adapting to situations of change, and gaining new knowledge from experiences” (Gardner, et al., 2009). It is the responsibility of faculty and staff to guide students through the process to realize what transferable skills they have learned abroad that may be applied to future educational and career pursuits.

Alternative Programming Options

It is best when the institution can take ownership of international education preparation and debriefing programs. This will help ensure that the international education is reaching the entire institutional community. However, there are times when the administration or faculty does not have the capacity to develop these comprehensive programs. Connell asserts that it is important that programs have an “experienced person with academic credentials running

education abroad.” (Connell, 2009). If the institute does not have the necessary experience, it may be in the best interests of the students and institute to hire professional speakers, trainers and facilitators to assist in the preparation and debriefing processes. This may be worth the cost if it ensures that appropriate training and de-briefing occurs.

One organization that has been working with young adults in this manner is The Krista Foundation for Global Citizenship in Seattle, Washington. Their primary aim is to work with their selected colleagues who participate in a year of service through intentional community, mentorship, and guidance. However, they are currently looking to expand their program to offer debriefing retreats (re-entry retreats) to other institutions like universities and other volunteer-sending organizations who are in need of assistance in guiding their student through the debriefing process. The Krista Foundation would like to share their expertise in this area and broaden the impact on their target population, to young people in their twenties with desire for service. They recently helped facilitate a debriefing sessions for students from Gonzaga University who spent time in Zambia.

Another organization is the Pallotti Center in Washington, DC. They are currently starting to work with a couple of universities in the Washington, D.C. area on debriefing workshops. Specifically, they have worked with Catholic University students who returned from alternative spring break trips to Central America and the Caribbean in March and then again in pre- and post-trip sessions with different groups of students from the same university around the time of their longer summer mission trips. They are now in discussion with Georgetown University to provide some of the same services to their immersion trips.

Conclusion

Individual motives and experiences vary among students, yet most institutions seek to help the student better understand the world around them and guide the student to gaining a better understanding of themselves. While evidence shows a positive impact on the individual if they participate in global education, many educational institutions are neglecting to provide appropriate pre experience preparation and post experience support services to students. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to develop these programming components alongside the development of international education initiatives.

Through discussion of benefits and motivations for international programs, one question remains unanswered. If the individual student, the institution and even the country benefit from international education is there any benefit to the host country as a result of these programs? Many international education programs are either encouraging or requiring volunteer or internship work in local organizations in the host countries. Many programs in the US include improving civic responsibility and inspiring action.

Lewin contends that “Our [US] strong sense of individualism has, of course, filtered down to higher education, which emphasizes satisfying the desires of individual students over meeting the needs of our society” (Lewin, 2009). Due to this inclination, we must model to students and educate them in considering the greater needs confronted while visiting other countries. Lewin continues by arguing that “with the help of our senior leaders, we should witness continued growth in study abroad in a way that serves the needs of our communities here and abroad” (Lewin, 2009). The question is how exactly a community benefits from students traveling abroad, or from volunteers who enter their world for a short period of time and then leave?

Institutions often justify their presence outside the US, as financially beneficial, as thousands of dollars and infused into the host economy. Intercultural exchange can be beneficial to the host country, and if volunteers are able to assist in meaningful ways, the host agencies may really appreciate the extra man-power. However, my concern for the welfare of the host community remains. Perhaps future investigation could offer some insight into the potential benefits to host countries; poverty reduction, economic & business development, environmental justice, or advocacy? Then with this information, institutions may integrate the findings into the framework of their international programs.

The necessary components of international education programs at institutions of higher education are in the process of being developed and strengthened. Through intentional and strategic planning, institutions will put in place appropriate preparatory and debriefing programs. This paper is intended to call international educators, and administrators at institutions of higher education to action. With this common understanding of the critical need and with the foundational suggestions provided in this paper, institutions across the US will have a common framework for developing effective educational programs.

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