

A Study to Determine the Scope of  
Educational Study Tours of Asia by  
Washington State Colleges and Universities  
As a Model for Northwest University School of Business

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## Abstract

Northwest University School of Business planned to travel to Asia in May of 2006. This would have been the first tour which Northwest University has taken to Asia. In order to provide a high quality educational experience to students the researcher studied best practices of Asia educational tours. A survey was created to question the practices of other higher education institutions within the State of Washington. The survey was distributed by mail to 14 institutions. Study results indicated that there are specific practices, such as knowing who will be doing the interpreting, who will be lecturing and who will be traveling with the group, which are implemented in order to provide students with an excellent educational opportunity.

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## **Problem Definition**



Northwest University School of Business endeavors to provide its students with the education and skills to excel in a global economy. As part of this focus the school of business has begun offering international tours in conjunction with case studies of particular businesses located around the world.

It is widely believed that the education system in the United States is currently failing to provide its students with the skills necessary to compete in a global economy. "Can America Compete? Is the nation's new No. 1 anxiety."(Covin, 2005, p. 1) "We're not building human capital the way we used to. Our primary and secondary schools are falling behind the rest of the worlds. Our universities are still excellent, but the foreign students who come to them are increasingly taking their education back home. As other nations multiply their science and engineering graduates—building a foundation for economic progress—ours are declining, in part because those filed are seen as nerdish and simply uncool. And our culture prizes cool." (Covin, 2005, p.1) "The No 1 Policy prescription, almost regardless of whom you ask, comes down to one word: education." (Covin, 2005, p.6)

Around the world the "production of goods and services has become routinized, and the cost advantage across a growing array of industries accrue to China and India." (Breen, 2005, p. 1) Business schools are in a position for the emerging design-based economy. (Martin, 2005) "Businesspeople don't just need to understand designers better-they need to become designers." (Martin, 2005, p. 1) "Business –based talent factories that will help fuel the North American economy as it undergoes its next great transformation." (Martin, 2005, p. 2) They need to improve education program in the United States in order to maintain the American global competitiveness. (Martin, 2005)

“No one can predict the future. But if U.S. – trained graduates rule China in the twenty-first century, it will not be a total surprise. One can envision a situation in which an almost certainly more prosperous and pluralistic China becomes an important ally of the United States due to the compatible values held by the elites of the two societies.” (Lin, 1994, p. 4)

The remainder of this paper will look at current literature on the subject along with an analysis of a survey performed to see what other schools are offering.

Northwest University needs to differentiate from among best Asia study tour practices in order to define and execute a program that best fits school of business objectives for Asia study tour.

## Literature Review

The business of educational tours has exploded over the last decade. The Washington Post report that by one count "as many as 400 U.S. organizations- profit and nonprofit- offer teenage travel programs, and foreign films have put together even more." (Yenckel, 1994, p. 2) "Nonprofit institutions across the country-and museums in particular-have built this idea into a multimillion-dollar business." (Reynolds, 1993, p. 1) The Smithsonian Institution scheduled more than 300 tours in 1992 with 7000 travelers expected. (Reynolds, 1993) "Driven by guilt or ambition or sophistication or simple boredom, thousands of tourists are looking for vacations that are journeys, idylls that are productive, adventures in which they will be not only tanned, but educated." On educational tours, travelers can step beyond the usual scenes to see the back rooms of museums and hear lectures from authorities on site at Stonehenge or in the Amazonian jungles. On the consumer side, travelers have a chance to a more focused travel experience, better access to expert information and a sense of accomplishment. The last of those in a big draw, Ann Waigand notes, "for those of us who have a hard time with pure leisure." (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3) "This is the Direction that travel is going," says Ann Waigand, Virginia-based publisher of The Educated Traveler newsletter, and editor of an annual directory of museum-sponsored tours. "If you look at demographics and how our society is changing, people are better educated and better traveled, and the general traveling experience just doesn't cut it anymore." (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3)

College students across the country have embraced the opportunity to study abroad. "At Earlham, where two-thirds of the students do some off-campus study before graduation, 94 have signed up for next fall, compared with 72 last fall. "I think that right now is a good time to go," said Lindsay Enders, a student at Earlham. "With the world situation, cross-cultural understanding is more important than ever." (Lewin, 2003, p. 2)



Despite the recent increase in terrorist activity and concerned parents students tend to play down the risks, saying that “trouble can arise anywhere and that they will not base their decisions” to travel “on fear.” (Lewin, 2003, p. 3)

According to Dr. Winston Ma, who taught a class at Northwest University on doing business in China, an institution entering China should follow three major principals. First, the customer needs should be understood and researched completely. Next, the market culture and demands should be a primary factor when considering a Chinese venture. Finally, one should only enter a market in which a competitive advantage and sustainable expansion is possible. A thorough understanding of the customer, culture, and market are the keys to success in China.

The Washington Post also reports that experience and training are extremely important. (Yenckel, 1994) The World Learning, a Vermont organization that sent 500 students abroad last year, recommends having leaders who have visited the destination and speak the language. Mara DelliPriscolii, a Montana-based consultant who organizes an annual Washington D.C. conference among nonprofit organizations that have travel programs, says “First, you want to know who is doing the interpreting, who is doing the interpreting, who is doing the lecturing, and who’s traveling with the group. (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3) “Inevitably, some travelers face challenges. “It was hard at times, living together and camping out,” said Kyin Peters, a student on a recent Europe tour.” “Even so, rewards were plentiful. “We got to experience a whole bunch of different cultures,” Kayin says. “Before I went, I was just involved in my world. Then when I was in Denmark, seeing the refugee camp, I realized there are other people who need a lot of help. It was a big wakeup call.” (Gardner, 1995, p. 3) Jim Stein, owner of The Road Less Traveled in Chicago, which offers wilderness and cultural experiences in the

western US, finds other benefits, such as increased self-confidence and a greater ability to work cooperatively. "They also learn better communication skills, more compassion for others, and a greater sensitivity to the environment." (Gardner, 1995, p. 3) Ben Lawrence, a student traveling to Spain said, "In America, we think we're the perfect country. But you realize there's lots of stuff other countries have that's good too. You learn to respect other people." (Gardner, 1995, p. 3)

The leaders should also receive training on how to handle students. "Well-planned tours have lower staff-to traveler ratios than do standard tours; one guide for every 15 travelers is fairly common." (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3) They also recommend that programs have "clearly established goals and learning objectives." "Students usually sign a contract agreeing not to smoke, drink or use drugs." (Gardner, 1995, p. 3) It is also important to use tour organizers which have "a signed statement from an independent certified public accountant attesting to its financial stability." Ms. DelliPriscolli said "the next question would be the experiences reputation and financial stability of the tour operator who is handling the logistics of the tour." (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3). The accuracy of all promotional materials and brochures should be accurate and all students should possess health and accident insurance. Finally it is essential to provide effective screening, selecting and training of its tour leaders. (Yenckel, 1994)

1. Does the program have what you are looking for?
2. Know exactly what you are getting.
3. Know the costs. What are you buying and what are the costs?
4. Who are the tour leaders and what training experience have they had?
5. Is there a pre-departure orientation?
6. Is the tour company financially sound?



7. What are the organizations cancellation policies?
8. What kind of supervision will leaders provide?
9. How much travel is there? (Yenckel, 1994))

#### Christian Coalition Universities as a Potential Model

The researcher examined the international study tour program at Colorado Christian University as a potential model for Northwest University. Colorado Christian University views the required study tour as a “program distinctive” according to Steve Brown, the school of business department head. The international study tour provides the learning objectives central to the MBA program. Steve Brown wants his students to “stretch their limits.” Students are asked to examine their world view, character base and world view in light of the decisions they will be making. “There is a general belief among educators around the world that people usually benefit from the experiences and practices of others; as the ancient Chinese saying goes, ‘stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one.’” (Ming, 2005, p. 1) Colorado Christian University currently tries to visit a different continent for every tour, but they have visited Asia several times. The location of the tour is determined by the function of the instructor and the student. Students are asked to develop potential contacts and help develop the tour in conjunction with their particular educational focus. They are encouraged to choose industries which will be of service in the future. “Participants are required to play an investigation role in studying issues under the selected theme. Through investigation, they will be able to attain a better and deeper understating of the system or practice, and also better comprehend the conditions and factors conductive to its effectiveness. As a result, they are less likely to take an apparently effective practice at face value and attempt to apply it directly to solve their own problems. Not only does this investigative

approach enable participants to study the system in a more critical manner, it also empowers them to be more capable of solving their own problems on their return.” (Ming, 2005, p. 32)

Students participating in the program are required to do homework before the tour, assignments on the tour, and a final project when they return. Students study the culture prior to the trip. “The experiences should be relevant and not superficial. The extent to which one can learn from another ‘s experience or practice depend on the relevance of that experience or practice to one’s own problems.” (Ming, 2005, p. 23)

“Participants should be motivated to action following the tour.” “Merely gaining knowledge about a system is not enough. A study tour should only be considered successful if it results in improvements to student learning.” (Ming, 2005, p. 24)

Ten to twenty students participate in every tour. Colorado Christian University School of business takes two tours every year The University currently requires all graduate students to participate in an international study tour. Undergraduates are encouraged to participate. Colorado Christian University accepts students of all faiths.

The program also has a distinct payment structure. “We believe in this to the point that we are investing in the students” participating in the study tours. Each student must pay \$1500 tuition and the school will pay costs over the cost of tuition. If the trip costs \$2000 the student will pay \$1500 in tuition and Colorado Christian University will pay the \$500 gap.

“Study tours allow us to learn from other systems. However, not all kinds of study tours are equally effective.” In order to be effective there are three desirable conditions.

First, the participants need to understand his or her own purposes and problems.

Second, the tour needs to provide an accurate in-depth understanding of the practice



under study. Third, the participant must be motivated to take action after the tour.

(Ming, 2005, p. 24)

## **Methodology**

Research involves the study of the best practices of Asia Study currently available at many higher education institutions in Washington State. Thirteen institutions were mailed a survey including City University, Gonzaga University, Pacific Lutheran University, Henry Cogswell College, Saint Martins College, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle University, University of Puget Sound, Walla Walla College, Whitworth College, and Whitman College. The institutions were chosen based location and the existence of a current business program. The survey included a cover letter to explain the purpose of the survey and the assurance that the results would be kept anonymous.

The participant group was approached with a questionnaire with the topic questions. The participants were asked if they currently have a study program in Asia. Participants were also asked if undergraduate and/or graduate students were enrolled in the Asia study tour. The questionnaire next asked in which counties are the study tours located. The participants were then asked to describe the nature of their program. Participants were then asked how many students were currently enrolled in the program. This question was then divided into graduates and undergraduates. At this point the survey asked the participant to identify the length of their Asia study tour by quarter, semester, or year. The participant was then asked if the program was an elective or a required course. Participants were also asked how long they have had an Asia study program available to students. The survey the asked what locations the participants typically visit while in Asia. Participants were asked to identify what industries they visit while in these locations. Next the survey asked participants if they were willing to share the names specific organizations which they visit. Finally participants were asked the organizations telephone numbers, location, contact name and telephone number.

The topic questions were approached by providing the participant group with a questionnaire. The survey began by asking the participants were asked if they currently have a study program in Asia.

The questions were left open ended or multiple choices. Of the 13 surveys sent, a total of four surveys were returned. This reflects a thirty-one percent response rate.

## **Data Analysis**

## Findings

### 1. Do you currently have study program in Asia?

Four of the respondents said they currently have an Asia study tour program.

### 2. If so, does this program include:

- Undergraduate Students
- Graduate Students

Three of the respondents commented that their program included both undergraduate and graduate students but programs are geared towards primarily graduate students.

### 3. Please list the countries in which you currently have an Asia study program and note if this program is for graduate or undergraduate students.

Included in the responses were China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Three of the institutions currently visit China. One institution visits Japan.

### 4. What is the nature of your program?

The respondents noted their programs as “study abroad” and “exchange” programs. Three of the respondents left this question unanswered.

### 5. How many students are enrolled in your program?

Only one respondent replied to this question. The respondent noted that 20 to 40 students participated “depending on the trip.”



**6. How many of these students are undergraduates?**

The majority of the programs only had the program available to both graduate and undergraduate students, with the exception of one respondent which had 3-5 undergraduates participate in a group of 20-40 students.

**7. How many of these students are enrolled in a masters program?**

25% of the respondents did not respond to this question. 25% of respondents have tours available to undergraduate students. 50% of the respondents have tours available to both graduate and undergraduate students.

**8. How long is the program? (Quarter, semester, quarter, year)**

The length of the tour varied from program to program. The tours stated at 2-3 weeks. One program offered short tours as well as a year study abroad.

**9. Is your program for credit or is it an elective?**

All of the respondents offered their tours as an elective course.

**10. How long have you had an Asia study program?**

One respondent began offering an Asia study tour 3 years ago. The rest of the respondents had a study tour of Asia between 10 and 20 years.

**11. What are typically some of the locations you visit in Tokyo, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai?**

Only one respondent replied to this question. The respondent mentioned the wall of China, and galleries, as well as specific pottery artists.

**12. What are the industries you visit while in these locations? (Banking, finance, manufacturing, communications)**

The participants did not answer this question.

**13. Please list the organization names, telephone numbers, and name of the contact persons you visit in Asia.**

The participants did not answer this question.



## **Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be based upon the findings of the survey and the comments gathered by the respondents, a greater of participation return would broaden the data from which conclusive recommendations are drawn. Many of the recommendations are based upon outside research and interviews.

The Chinese business market is booming and many educational institutions are jumping at the opportunity to get in at the ground level. Three major considerations must be taken into consideration if Northwest University is to be successful. First, Northwest University and the students should know who will be doing the interpreting, who will be lecturing and who will be traveling with the group. Northwest University should also have an understanding of the destination and culture. Students should be required to attend pre-departure training. Programs should have clearly defined goals and learning objectives. Finally, NU should carefully screen and train the tour leaders. The leaders must have the ability to handle difficult situations and uphold the standards of the Northwest University. According to Dr. Winston Ma "it is only by carefully examining the customers, the market and the possibility of competitive advantage that a business will be successful" in the Asia marketplace. This applies to the Northwest University School of Business Asia travel opportunities as well.

Dr. Winston Ma recommends "generating and validating customer insights for creating the opportunities for entry and growth." An investor must do more than just identify the needs or possible opportunities in the market. It is only by validating the customer personally that an organization is able to work without extreme price sensitivity.

Generating and validating market insights are necessary for every business entering the Chinese markets. A business must fit the Chinese culture in specific regions and communities. Constant validation of date is necessary.

Finally it is important for a business to build an ecosystem for competitive advantage and sustainable expansion. Monopolies are not illegal in China, and this is allowing many organizations to gain a strong lead in the Chinese market.

An educational institution entering Asia should follow three major principals. The customer needs should be understood and researched completely. The market culture and demands should be a primary factor when considering a Chinese venture. Finally, one should only enter a market in which a competitive advantage and sustainable expansion is possible. A thorough understanding of the customer, culture, and market are the keys to success in Asia.

#### *Conclusion*

The Asian economy has seen a recently growth explosion. This presents a unique opportunity to Northwest University School of Business. Several factors should be considered when taking an educational tour of Asia. First, the needs of the student's should be understood and researched completely such as the make-up of the group. Training prior to departure date should prepare students for their study tour. Students should study the market, culture and tour demands prior to departing on an Asia venture. Finally, leaders of an Asia tour should be thoroughly screened and trained. A thorough understanding of the culture and market are the keys to success in Asia. (Ma, 2004) Therefore, Northwest University has the ability to differentiate from among best

Asia study tours by implementing best practices listed above which best fit the School of Business objectives for Asia study tours.

The research would have been more informative if the sample group was larger. A low level of participation left the survey results inconclusive. The greater number of the survey group may have chosen to participate if the survey was sent my e-mail or if the survey was done over the telephone.

**Appendix**



# Asia Study Tour Survey

1. Do you currently have a study program in Asia? \_\_\_\_\_

2. If so, does this program include:

- Undergraduate Students
- Graduate Students

3. Please list the countries in which you currently have an Asia study program and note if this program is for graduate or undergraduate students.

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4. What is the nature of your program?

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5. How many students are enrolled in your program? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many of these students are undergraduates? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many of these students are enrolled in a masters program? \_\_\_\_\_

8. How long is the program? (Quarter, semester, quarter, year) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Is your program for credit or is it an elective? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How long have you had an Asia study program? \_\_\_\_\_

**11. What are typically some of the locations you visit in Tokyo, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai?**

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**12. What are the industries you visit while in these locations? (Banking, finance, manufacturing, communications)**

Location

Industry

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**13. Are you willing to share the names of specific organizations which you visit? \_\_\_\_\_**

**14. Please list the organization names, telephone numbers, and name of the contact persons you visit in Asia.**

Location

Organization

Contact Name

Telephone

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