

## **International Business Study Programs: Outgoing Approaches**

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*Primarily, there are two major approaches to overseas study experience for business students to learn about international business and cultures other than their own. These approaches center on long term and short term experiences. This article looks at planning and organizing issues for facilitating outgoing international study opportunities for students in higher education, both long term and short term international study programs.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Competition among business schools and requirements noted in AACSB accreditation standards has necessitated increasing emphasis in “internationalizing” the business curriculum and student experiences across North America and throughout the world (Gordon, Heischmidt and Greenwood, 2000). Exposing students to international business can be approached in various ways such as bringing international speakers into the classroom, case study analysis, and study abroad. An out of country study experience may be viewed as the best approach for business students to learn about international commerce (Blasco, 2009). Study abroad has been very popular in Europe for a number of years (Peitro and Page, 2008). A large number of schools have developed opportunities for students to study for a semester or school year at another school outside of their home country. Dwyer and Peters (2013) documented the value of long-term impact of study abroad. Their findings show study abroad positively influences the career path, world-view, and self-confidence of students (Dwyer and Peters, 2013). Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) documented the educational impacts of international short term programs on students educational endeavors and personal lives. An abbreviated opportunity is a shorter term immersion program of 2-3 weeks for students to travel internationally to visit and experience businesses and cultural sites (Heischmidt and Gordon, 2010). These short term programs have provided very positive benefits for student participants (Carley, Stuart and Dailey, 2011; Ritz, 2011). An increase in personal maturity and a broader world perspective are among these benefits. Eckert, Luqmani, Newell, Quraeshi, and Wagner (2013) provide a summary of benefits to students who study abroad. This paper will discuss some of the factors that impact the successful implementation of outbound international study programs.

## FACTORS IMPACTING SUCCESS

While others have provided step by step model for developing a short-term study abroad program (Eckert, Luqmani, Newell, Quraeshi, and Wagner, 2013), there needs to be a full discussion of the primary factors that impact the decisions related to international study on the university campus. Certain areas of the university that impact international study environment need to be collectively considered before deciding what type of international study program is best for the university and individual students. These interconnected areas include: university structure, university support, academic curriculum structure; students backgrounds, and faculty experiences (Table1).

**TABLE 1**  
**CONNECTED AREAS**

University Structure/Support Curriculum Structure Student Background Faculty Experiences
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### **University Structure/Support**

Any international study opportunity needs active support of department chairs, college deans, provosts, and the university president. Without their unqualified support an international program has very little chance of success. The support may consist of administrative leverage in terms of finances (for students and faculty), procedures and structures. For example, the creation of special scholarships for both student and faculty international programs can provide a significant boost to any international effort. Additionally, recognition of internationalization efforts by faculty in the tenure and promotion process will send a strong signal for all members of the faculty that it is worth their time and effort to be involved in such endeavors.

The structure of the university can significantly facilitate the development of international study programs and usually impacts the broad administrative issues of international study. For example, is there an international center at the university campus? If so, what is the focus of the international center related to the role of a broader educational purpose of the university? Is it recruiting of incoming international students that assist with revenue generation decisions in tight budget times or the facilitation of international outgoing programs, both semester long and short term programs, while assisting students in these outgoing efforts. If the focus is on incoming students, assistants will likely be directed toward incoming students with a much lesser time allocation to outgoing students. A focus on outgoing programs this may substantially facilitate the development of both semester long and short term outgoing international study programs for students by the university. This facilitation could be helpful to students considering international study as well as the willingness by faculty to development and promote such programs. Another example would be the policy of the university registrar related to accepting the transfer of credit. What amount of credit does a five hour ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) course transfer, as a three or two semester hour course with the domestic institution? There are also concerns that need to be addressed related to differences in international grade scales (eg. 4 or 10 point grading scales used by international institutions) and the normal distribution of grades in a class (a bell curve or positively skewed curve).

### **Curriculum Structure**

Students will likely look at an international experience as expanding their education, yet they may want the experience to count in some way toward their degree. Faculty organizing international experiences for students need to factor this desire for academic credit into their planning. Are there areas

related to students' degree programs that accept for credit the classes a student may take internationally? Is there the flexibility at the university (common university studies), college and department levels to accept either course credit or course substitution from both international transfer credits when a student completes a semester long program overseas or local credits from a short term (2-3 week) international program delivered by the institution? Students and parents tend to be practical in their decisions. If a student is paying for an experience it is best if it fits into the students' academic degree structure in some constructive way.

### **Student Background**

The prospective students' backgrounds need to be considered when designing international study programs. These considerations include their age and maturity, past travel experience, financial capability, and academic background. Different universities attract a student body that varies related to academic ability, financial resources, life experiences (which may impact maturity), parental support and expectations of the university experience. Students enrolled in large urban universities tend to be different from students attending smaller rural academic communities. Students attending private institutions may have more robust financial assets than students attending small regionally oriented state schools. Understanding these factors may go a long way in the decisions related to designing successful international study programs, such as costs incurred; minimum academic level required; prerequisite course; or academic credit hours earned prior to travel.

### **Faculty Background**

It is important to understand the background and personality of the facilitating faculty involved with planning, recruiting, coordinating and traveling with the students on an international program (Carver and Byrd, 2008). Faculty coordinators need to be able to relate to students and to get them excited about a program of international study. Faculty members should have prior travel experience with the areas to which they will be sending/leading students and there needs to be a least two faculty accompanying any group traveling internationally. A whole host of unexpected events may arise that require multiple faculty leaders. Issues related to sickness of students and even a faculty member, delayed students, lost passports, split up groups on the airline travel, and student discipline.

## **CONSIDERING LONG TERM AND SHORT TERM OPPORTUNITIES**

A long term international study experience can be defined as lasting more than eight weeks abroad. This long term experience, more typically a semester or a year, is appropriate for many students, especially those who have the financial resources, have the freedom/flexibility to be away from their regular home situation, and can structure the experience so as to not delay graduation (Kehl and Morris, 2007).

Semester long international business study programs may be grouped by three different models: direct enrollment, hybrid programs, and island programs (Hanouille and Leuner, 2001). Direct enrollment places students directly into courses at the receiving international institution. Hybrid programs have students take a combination of classes at the hosting institution as well as taking classes from a faculty member at their home institution. Island programs are self-contained programs that have faculty of the home institution providing all instruction to the participating students, yet everyone is located together overseas, usually at a host institution (Hanouille and Leuner, 2001).

Longer time international study programs may not be best suited for all students (Ladika, 2009). Some students do find it difficult to be away from their home institution for such a long period of time. Many students, including first generation college students as well as nontraditional students, fall within the situations mentioned above (Shallenberger, 2009). These students who wish to be exposed to international business experiences, and may need to have options in addition to the traditional semester long exchange program (Gordon, and Heischmidt, 2000).

Alternate approaches to facilitating international business education should to be considered. In contrast to semester long programs of international study, a study program that consists of a shorter period of time may be appropriate for many university students, usually consisting of one to three weeks. An appropriately designed short term program may allow many students, including a growing number of nontraditional students, a chance to experience international business in person while balancing the needs of family and jobs at home.

## **LONG TERM PROGRAMS**

Most long term programs provide students with opportunities to study in a country outside of their home country for one or two semesters. Consideration in the timing of a semester long program is important. Many universities overseas have academic calendars that are different from the U.S. For example, southern hemisphere has a summer break when schools in the northern hemisphere are in the middle of winter. Also, the start of semesters might be significantly different even in northern hemisphere schools. In Germany, for instance, the “fall” (winter) semester begins in October and ends in late February. “spring” (summer) semester begins in March and finishes in late June/July. Once timing issues related to the academic calendar are evaluated, the review of long-term possibilities and agreement need to be considered. The long-term agreements fall into five categories: bi-lateral agreements, consortium agreements, overseas campuses, transfers, or direct application.

### **Bi-Lateral Agreements**

There are various types of long-term semester study programs. Among these are partnering or bi-lateral programs where the home institution partners with an international partner for a one to one agreement. There is generally an agreement related to reciprocal tuition for students, assistance with lodging selection, and a go-to location (office) for all questions and assistance related to international student affairs and assimilation into the hosting institution.

### **Consortium Agreements**

A second type of long term program could be described as consortium based. The consortium is usually centered on a nonprofit organization that specializes in facilitating student exchanges among a number of partnering institutions. One example of a nonprofit centered organization that facilitates consortiums is the Magellan Exchange. The student exchange program facilitated by Magellan Exchange includes institutions in twelve different countries including areas of North America, Central America, Europe and Asia. The institutions in the consortium pay a small annual membership fee and in return are provided with the necessary administrative support to offer successful student and faculty exchanges.

### **Overseas Campuses**

The third type of semester long opportunities is provided by university owned campuses in an overseas location by some larger universities. These serve as satellite campuses for the home institution, providing the full range of student services and education similar to that offered at the home institution. These tend to necessitate an upfront financial commitment from the home school.

### **Transfer**

There are some other creative ways a student might be able to custom design an international long-term experience. These, however, require a considerable investment of time up front. One option would be to determine if other universities in the same state offer a program in the desired country. Thus, a student may be attending one university in their state, then transfer to a second university in the same state (or domestic school consortium) that has an exchange with an international partner school the student finds interesting.

### **Direct Application Possibilities**

In addition, universities in some countries do not charge tuition to foreign students. If the student can identify such institutions, they could apply directly to the out of country university for a semester. The student would be faced with the task of gaining admission to that university as well as the need to transfer grades back to their home university. The authors are aware of a recent situation where a student at a state university in the United State who wanted to study in Paraguay was able to spend a semester overseas at no tuition cost by using such a technique.

### **SHORT TERM PROGRAMS**

In addition to the traditional semester long international study program, programs of a shorter duration need to be part of mix of opportunities that universities provide to students in this ever changing world. Short term program, usually 2-3 weeks in duration, provide students with an opportunity to participate in an international experience without investing an entire semester or year for the experience. There are a number of contributing factors that make short term international study programs appropriate for many students.

#### **Students Background and Focus**

As mentioned in the considerations section, the background of students needs to be considered when designing both full semester and short-term international study programs. The prospective students' background considerations include their age and maturity, past travel experience, financial capability, and academic background. Short term programs might be an attractive alternative to semester long programs, for students with limited travel experience, limited financial resources, and those who are younger, less mature with a fear of the broader world.

Especially for upper level students, short term programs need to be academically focused. For example, this may mean short term programs designed specifically for business students. Incorporating the usual visits to cultural and historic sites with visits to businesses and presentations by business leaders will provide the richest learning experience. The use of alumni and the international affiliates of local businesses greatly facilitate the arrangement of speakers and plant tours at their affiliates in international locations. Many times, the international affiliate is excited to host faculty and students from the "sister facility/city".

#### **Costs**

One advantage of short term programs is the cost, which is usually less than semester long programs. The financial capability of prospective students will impact the actual budget of the program. In order to keep the cost of a program as low as possible so as to appeal to the broadest possible range of students, institutional/faculty planned programs can be arranged for student international experience, but necessitate faculty members planning that is far greater than pre-packages programs. Included in these planning items are travel, sightseeing, dining and lodging arrangements. Pre-packaged programs from commercial providers, such as Education First (EF) Tours and Casterbridge Tours, provide excellent educational tour programs, but at a cost which is usually higher than that of institutionally arranged programs. Again, developers of international programs need to look at their institution and both the demographics and social economic makeup of the student body attending the institution.

#### **Faculty Background**

The faculty members involved with a school planned international travel program must first consider the level of personal involvement they will need to invest in organizing the experience. Organizing faculty members need to check on travel policies of their university. Some schools have pre-established policies and procedures for such travel. Policies related to bidding, contracting and payments on travel arrangements must be clarified. Additionally, the faculty must be familiar with the policies for

reimbursement of travel expenses incurred by the faculty in possible program planning as well as actually traveling with students.

Next, the faculty organizer should then investigate if their school has an in house travel office to assist or maybe even complete this entire step for the faculty. The main role of the faculty member in such a case is to establish an effective communication channel with the travel office to assure the intended travel plans are in agreement between both parties and to follow up on a regular time frame to assure the arrangements for the travel are completed.

### **Price and Location**

Determining cost/price is the next step. Related questions include the following: are there grants or scholarships established to support such travel by students? How does the institution pay for the expenses of the accompanying faculty members?

The organizing faculty members need to consider if they want a program that involves primarily one international location with possible day trips out of that location or do they want a multi country/ multi-city experience. Each possibility has its own advantage. A single location allow for more in depth emersion into one international culture. This also substantially cuts down on pre-trip arrangements, hotel check-in and check-out responsibilities and likely reduces between country travel costs and the need for obtaining multiple travel visa for certain students. Students can also become familiar with their surroundings and gain a substantial level of independence with the one culture visited.

For short term programs, the faculty member has to consider when is the best time for students to get one, two or three weeks of time away from their responsibilities of work or family. The breaks between semesters, during January and May/June appear to be a good time to arrange one to three week short term programs, while summer is best for programs of three weeks or longer.

### **Travel Arrangements**

If there is no travel office on campus, the faculty member has the choice to make arrangement on their own or to go through some type of travel broker. The advantage of going through a travel broker that specializes in these arrangements is the significant time savings for the faculty member. The major disadvantage is the extra financial costs associated with a broker. Some companies have pre-established travel dates for groups and they will likely consolidate your group with another group if you expect a number of students that is short of a full coach (usually about forty or more students). Avoid the consolidation of your university group with a group of another age, such as high school students or senior citizens.

If the arrangements are not made with a travel broker or travel agent, then the faculty member needs to make all travel arrangements. Again, the arrangements need to include the following: air travel, reservations at hotels in all the cities visited, travel to and from departing and arriving airports, travel between hotels, travel within cities, museum passes and tickets, guest speakers and location for these speakers, all meals that are included, and all other scheduled events for the group. The primary advantage of organizing everything on your own is the assurance that arrangements are done correctly and the costs are usually lower because you are not paying broker fees. The disadvantage is the time expense for the faculty member to make all of these arrangements.

### **Program Promotion**

Faculty members then need to promote the international study by way of open information sessions, posters, emails to prospects, and presentations in classes (Heischmidt, Gordon, and Dobson, 2000). They also have to dedicate the time to personally talk with every student that considers these study opportunities as well as to get the student excited about international travel. Recruiting of students is a reflection of the support of the institution and advocacy by interested faculty; it is a year-long process with prior successful programs allowing favorable word-of-mouth to future students.

## **Curriculum**

Students will be evaluating an international program and applying this experience to their degree requirements. A semester long experience will likely have a student completing a semester worth of classes at the host institution that will need to be transferred back to the students home institution. Will all of the courses completed by the students count toward degree requirements.

For students on short term programs, decisions need to be made as to the credit the student is to receive – typically three hours. Are students most interested in general studies credit, credit in their major, or credit in their minor? The type of course credit will also depend upon the intent of the program. Is the program mostly cultural in nature or are there a substantial number of business visits and mostly business students involved with the international experience? The former focused primarily on culture may be best suited for general studies credit; the programs with a major dimension on business visits are appropriate for business credit.

## **Classroom Experiences**

Once the overseas program is organized and students are enrolled, the utilization of pre-departure classroom sessions is necessary. Students need to attend a number of sessions prior to departure that will allow them to get to know one another as well as the faculty members accompanying them on the program overseas. In these sessions, many day to day issues related to international travel need to be covered. There will be a lot of experiences significantly different (behavior, governments, foods, people, words, languages, etiquette, customs, airline travel, weather, foreign language, etc.) than the student is accustomed to at their home institution. In addition to the classroom information, a web site should be established for students to visit to become familiar with the countries, cities and businesses they will be visiting.

Along with the itinerary that is used both in recruiting and student orientation, the class should have a set of academic expectations of students. Generally speaking, there should be multiple pre departure assignments that allow a student to become familiar with the countries, cultures, business conditions, and companies that will be visited. Whatever work the student puts in on the front end of the program (pre-departure) will likely enhance their experience while they are traveling overseas, especially for the first time traveler. During the overseas visit and upon return home, the students should be required to maintain a daily diary of their travel observations and a reflective written narrative of comparisons between home cultural, economic, social environments and the corresponding environments of the countries visited.

## **Overseas Opportunities for Faculty**

While the above discussion has focused on the needs of the students in higher education, another consideration is the potential for faculty internationalization associated with participating in international exchanges. Perhaps multiple faculty members want to participate in international study programs so they can bring international experiences back to their classroom. The semester long or short term international study program allows the facilitating faculty to bring an international experience to many more students at their home institution who otherwise miss out on this internationalization of the classroom.

## **COMPARISON SUMMARY**

A large number of items have been discussed in this article. As a way to synthesize many of the points from this article, Table 2 is provided as a quick comparison of the semester long and short term international business study programs. The table may be used to provide a quick background related to decisions by a school related to the development of international programs at the institution.

**TABLE 2**  
**COMPARISON OF SEMESTER LONG AND SHORT TERM INTERNATIONAL**  
**BUSINESS STUDY PROGRAMS**

International Business Study Programs	Semester Long	Short Term
Time Frame	56-365 days	7-55 days
Costs (Excluding Tuition)	\$5,000 - \$25,000+	\$1,400- \$6,000
University Support	Necessary	Necessary
University Program Partners	Necessary	Not Necessary
Students International (Globalization) Background	No Experience Necessary	No Experience Necessary
Necessary Student Maturity	More Advanced	Limited
Parental Support (Financial and Emotional)	Necessary	Limited Necessity
Faculty Involvement (Sending Institution)	Limited to Moderate	Moderate to Extensive
Faculty Background	Less Experience Required	More Experience Required
Travel Arrangements Support	Medium Needed	Limited to Extensive
Curriculum Flexibility	Greater Level Needed	Moderate Flexibility Needed
Faculty Overseas Opportunities (Professional Development)	Moderate	Moderate to Excellent

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of the authors providing international study opportunities for students during the last two decades suggest these experiences can be some of the most rewarding learning experiences in a student's entire higher education experience, especially in a challenging global economy. Many of the students that have participated in these experiences have indicated significant changes in cultural understanding, receptiveness to people different from themselves, and personal growth that exceeded anything they had ever experienced in a classroom setting. If a faculty wants to really impact a student's life, providing an affordable (in time and money) international study opportunity may be the most beneficial and rewarding experience they will ever facilitate.

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