Building Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Programs: Best Practices for Successful Collaborations

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Building Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Programs: Best Practices for Successful Collaborations

Disciplines
Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education | Engineering Education | Higher Education | International and Comparative Education | Science and Mathematics Education | Spanish Linguistics

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“Building Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Programs: Best Practices for Successful Collaborations”

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Languages and Cultures for Professions (LCP)

- Second major concentration for students in engineering, business, and agriculture
- Specialized coursework that focuses on technical skills and contemporary cultural literacy
- Requires study abroad or international internship
- The initiative was funded with a Title VI in 2004 for business and engineering. A second Title VI (currently) allows integration of topics related to sustainability and biodiversity and other “green issues” into the curriculum through modules, new courses, or study abroad and/or internships.
• **ISU on the Mediterranean – Summer in Valencia, Spain**
  
  – Combine Spanish with other academic disciplines to offer international experience, cultural training, and language skills to students who would not likely study a language otherwise
  
  – Provide an international experiential opportunity: study abroad, international internship, service learning.
ISU on the Mediterranean – Summer in Valencia, Spain

• History
  – 2001: Language and culture program for advanced students; change of venue from a language school to a university
  – 2005: Cross-disciplinary collaboration with Colleges of Business and Engineering (part of first Title VI)
  – 2006: Internships for advanced Spanish students
  – 2009: Cross-disciplinary collaboration with Department of Genetics, Development and Cell Biology. Stay tuned, more in a moment…

• Management 310 (Principles of Management)
• Business Administration 291/491 (Business in Spain and the EU)
• Industrial Engineering 305 (Engineering Economic Analysis)
Spanish Courses

- Spanish 195: Beginning Intensive Spanish
- Spanish 295: Intermediate Intensive Spanish
- Spanish 301: Grammar and Composition
- Spanish 303A: Conversation
- Spanish 304: Spanish for Business & Professions
- Spanish 314: Intro. to Reading Hispanic Texts
- Spanish 321: Spanish Civilization and Culture
- Spanish 323: Spain Today
- Spanish 352: Phonetics
- Spanish 395: Study Abroad
- Spanish 490: Independent Study
- Spanish 499: Internship
Courses (English)

- Industrial Engineering 305: Economic Analysis
- Management 310: Entrepreneurship in Spain and the European Union
- Business Administration 291/491: Business in Spain and the European Union
- Biology 394: International Programs in Biology
- Management 367: International Entrepreneurship
- Psychology (2013) – Drugs & Behavior or Cognitive Processes
BIO 394: International Programs in Biology

• Developed and Coordinated by Steven Rodermel, Professor of Biology, Development and Cell Genetics and Prof. Beatriz Spalding, Lecturer in Plant Biology and Food Science

• 2 Modules:
  – Module 1: full-immersion laboratory experience under the guidance of a University of Valencia faculty member and grad student team
  – Module 2: field work with Valencia faculty around the region
Albufera Lagoon: fresh vs. salt water amalgamation, pollution impact on birds, eels, and rice farming as well as local livelihoods
BIO 394 Field Work

Oceanographic Aquarium: sea turtle and dolphin rescue, alimentation of marine animals, commercial aquarium operations
BIO 394: Field Work (Javea)

- Javea coastline:
  - coastal erosion, pollution
  - and their effects on sea life
BioParc Zoo: animal science, habitats, how a commercial zoo operates
Where we are today
The Best Practices Part of the Presentation

Getting you Ready and Up to Speed
Best Practices

• Acknowledging Realities
  – Recognize the significance of other campus entities and disciplines
  – Changing Mentalities and Reversing Trends of English-only programming: Stay true to your mission!
  – “Another Day, Another A”

• Location
  – Attractive location of smaller cities
  – Make sure it is somewhere YOU want to spend time
Choosing an Educational Venue

- Private language school vs. a university
- Does it have support staff with contacts and connections? Lots of bureaucracy and turf wars?
- Experiential learning?
- Campus Facilities
Program Goals

• Make your *language and culture learning* goals transparent to your collaborators

• Design programs with students in mind: consider what they might want, but don’t forget about what they need.

• Be smart about course scheduling, especially when experiential learning is involved
Making Connections: Involving other Disciplines

- Choose to partner with disciplines that are also high priority campus initiatives
- Consider underrepresented majors
- Utilize existing knowledge: a potential collaborator may have contacts or expertise you can draw on
- Seek out complimentary experiences for integrated study that connects to a variety of majors
- Communicate clearly the goals and expectations with other faculty for the program.
- Make sure student expectations are the same across disciplines.
- Do you like this person? Can you spend a great deal of time with him/her?
Coursework and Language Proficiency

• Make sure that courses taken abroad count toward major or minor requirements
• Consider Home Stays
• Try to design unique courses/experiences – things you cannot do on the home campus
• Involve collaborators in choosing/designing courses
• Draw on strengths or innovation of the host faculty
Preparing Students

• Extensive pre-departure training a must!
• Develop mechanisms to maintain meaningful contact with students while abroad:
  – One-on-one or small group meetings, particularly for interns
  – Facebook and Twitter
  – Blackboard or Moodle, etc.
• Re-entry advising or courses are helpful
Findings and Recommendations

• Cross-disciplinary programs can offer these advantages:
  – Advanced language and culture training in the target country
  – Unique coursework and hands-on training; Engineering opportunities
  – Opportunities to work with faculty who have been trained very differently than you
  – Increases student enrollments: many students continue taking some disciplines upon returning to the U.S.
  – Increased proficiency and comfort in the target language for everyone
  – Increased competency with regard to social, cultural and political factors
  – Eye-witness view of difference
  – Put your department on the map! The program raises visibility of your department and you!
Best Practices

• Parting insights: REMEMBER...
  – Work with others for the good of the program and for the good of the students
  – Allow students time to learn and to explore
  – Design unique courses or experiences
  – Make language learning a cornerstone
  – Students and faculty in different disciplines can work meaningfully together
  – With larger groups, cost savings can be significant. Always keep your eye on the bottom line! Extra money allows for expansion and innovation
  – Roll with the punches!
ISU on the Mediterranean – Summer in Valencia, Spain

Survey Data 2006-2012

(338/475 reporting = 71.15% response rate)
### Survey Data (2006-2012)

#### Percent who “Mostly Agree” or “Completely Agree”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am more receptive to different ideas</td>
<td>95.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained better insight into myself</td>
<td>90.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater sense of self-confidence</td>
<td>88.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My tolerance of other people and customs has increased</td>
<td>86.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the U.S. better</td>
<td>71.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interest in social issues has increased</td>
<td>83.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interest in world events has increased</td>
<td>90.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interest in the arts has increased</td>
<td>68.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ability to adapt to new situations has increased</td>
<td>93.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language Proficiency
“Good” or “Excellent”
(71% Response Rate)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE</td>
<td>17.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTER</td>
<td>64.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>