

## **Study/Teach Abroad Programs for Higher Education Faculty**

**Osman Özturgut**

Hua Li Vocational and Technical College  
People's Republic of China

### **Abstract**

With all the benefits of study abroad programs for students in higher education, as suggested in the literature, this study proposes promoting study/teach abroad programs for faculty members. Through such programs, institutions will benefit from diversity and promotion of study abroad programs for students will be much more efficient with faculty members giving the account of first hand experience of their studying/teaching abroad

### **Introduction**

Thomas (2006) explains that many of the colleges and universities in the U.S. have developed some form of study abroad programs to enable their students to receive a learning experience outside the U.S. Zachrisson (2004) confirms that the study abroad programs continue to grow in the U.S. There is comprehensive list of research studies on the benefits of study abroad programs for students in the U.S. These studies focus on study abroad programs and explain that study abroad programs enhance students' worldview and thus cross cultural effectiveness; provide a global perspectives, increase self-reliance, self confidence and personal well being (Carsello & Creaser, 1976; Kuh & Kaufman, 1984; Carlson & Widman, 1988; McCabe, 1994; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002). These and many other similar reports provided evidence to students' reporting higher levels of openness and flexibility, emotional resilience, and personal autonomy (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Nash, 1976; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Further, findings demonstrated that study abroad programs significantly contribute to the preparation of students to function in a multicultural world (Kitsantas, 2004). However, these studies focused on the benefits of studying abroad for students and do not mention that faculty members would also benefits from studying and/or teaching abroad. In this study, the researcher first explains that benefits of studying abroad and then suggests that studying and/or teaching abroad programs for faculty should also be promoted.

### **Benefits of Studying Abroad**

Teichler (2004) explained the benefits of studying abroad in three categories. First one is Knowledge Transfer where knowledge in normal disciplines is more frequently and rapidly transferred from one country. Second, International Education and Research provides an understanding of different cultures regarding their socio-cultural, political,

economic, and educational systems. There is a high demand for foreign language proficiency and field knowledge from other countries and these skills will be more in demand in the labor market when these students graduate. Third benefit is Border-crossing communication and discourse where learning and research in an international setting is one way of experiencing different views, which will then broaden one's horizon and promote global perspectives as a leap forward in students' developing critical and reflective thinking skills.

Carlson et al. (1991) found that the students participate in study abroad programs to improve their cultural understanding, to improve their career prospects, and join their friends also participating in such programs. They concluded that the students who participated in study abroad programs showed significant differences in global perspectives and cross cultural cosmopolitanism. These results are consistent with that of McCabe (1994), Carlson and Widaman (1988), and Kitsantas and Meyers (2002). Further, students who study abroad benefit from this experience by their increased commitment to peace and international cooperation. They develop a transnational understanding regarding their empathy of viewpoints of other nations (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990). Hadis (2005) explains that the higher education faculty in the U.S. found the students who return from study abroad programs to be more appreciative of different cultures, more mature, independent, and self-aware. That is, students returning from their study abroad experiences provided evidence of positive changes.

Undsey (2005) explains that when students live in and observe a different society than their own with different concepts of social justice where the dignity and worth of individuals and human relationships are more highly valued, it helps U.S. students develop a deeper sense of appreciation for these values. She further commented that:

The study-abroad experience seems to enhance students' self-awareness, especially with respect to recognizing and, at times, challenging their own values, biases, beliefs, and ways of thinking as well as those of their country. In addition, by being exposed to a different culture, they developed more sensitivity to and appreciation of diversity, which they could directly relate to social work practice. (p. 245)

In short, students who participate in study abroad programs come back as different people with different perspectives and most importantly with a greater empathy towards other nations. There is a significant change in their commitment to peace by living in and observing other cultures.

Banks and Banks (1993) use the term "ethnic encapsulation" to refer to the cultural deprivation that results from the limited knowledge of any culture other than one's own. Not knowing other cultures significantly handicaps the attempts to help them. More importantly, misconceptions and stereotypes about other cultures limit the solutions to the problems created by cultural differences. Antal (2002) argues that misunderstandings and conflict occur when people interpret and judge what they see, the

tip of the iceberg, according to their own norms, values, and assumptions. Thus the behavior of others may seem strange, illogical, or “barbaric” (Barnlund, 1998, p. 39).

Howard Gardner (1995), in *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* explains that in order for a leader to lead a country or an organization, he or she needs to be aware of the presence of other opinions, ideas, and alternative solutions to the problems. He claims that traveling abroad “opens one up to the perspectives of different cultures and ideologies” (p. 248). He reports that Churchill traveled widely to Cuba, India, Sudan and South Africa; Chiang Kai-shek traveled to Japan and Soviet Union; Tojo Hideki (prime minister and military leader of Japan during much of the WWII) completed military training in Berlin; Lenin first traveled voluntarily and then was exiled to Europe; and Roosevelt made the European tour. He then argues that what stands out is that the individuals who did not travel. Stalin traveled entirely within the Soviet Union; Mao traveled widely within his own country but did not go abroad. Young Hitler traveled only in Germany and Austria. He further explains:

It is more difficult to maintain a monolithic perspective—a simplistic, often exclusionary story—when one has been exposed regularly to contrasting viewpoints. Those individuals who have not traveled widely are therefore in a more favorable position to see everything from the perspective of their compatriots, most of whom are also parochial, if not xenophobic. (p. 249)

However, Gardner notes that the traveling is facilitated by the possession of wealth. The decision not to travel is the problem in this context. Even when one has the opportunity to do so, one deliberately might wish not to be exposed to experiences that might complicate his/her view of the world. One of the most important qualities of a leader is his/her adaptation to the world, and thus his/her response to the change. As Gardner says, “Those who would lead in the world of the future must be aware of, and find ways of coping with, new and often complexifying trends” (p. 303).

There are various academic, financial, and other personal reasons affecting the number of students participating in study abroad programs, and their choice of target country, should they choose to participate in a study abroad program. It is not the intention of this author to analyze the reason behind the choice of participating in a study abroad program for students or which country to travel, should they choose to participate in one. However, this study is a proposal for the higher education administrators and faculty in the U.S., nevertheless a modest proposal; to promote “studying and/or teaching abroad” programs for the faculty members in their respective institutions.

### **Study Abroad Programs for Higher Education Faculty**

If we agree with what the current literature suggest, participation in study abroad programs enhances academic, social and cultural skills of students, makes them aware of transnational issues, and makes them better leaders of tomorrow, I propose to send higher education faculty to study abroad (or to teach abroad). If we want more students to participate in study abroad programs, first we need to educate our faculty. Sending

faculty members to programs outside the continental America would greatly enhance their academic capabilities, and also send a positive and encouraging message to students with their instructors being role-models. How can we expect a strong promotion of study abroad programs in U.S. classrooms if instructors have not experienced a study abroad – teach abroad first hand? To confirm the benefits of teaching abroad programs for faculty members, one of the few studies on the effects of study/teach abroad programs for faculty, Wilson (1984) conducted four studies on the impact of overseas faculty exchanges and found that such exchanges also enhanced their classroom teaching upon their return. With all the proven evidence of the positive impact of study abroad for students, Hser (2005) argues that, “Many university administrators do not support internationalization even though there is an increased awareness of the impact of global change on the university” (p. 39). I also argue that if teachers promote such study abroad programs to their students in their classrooms, while giving account of first-hand experience, the number of students participating in study abroad programs, in any given institution, would increase.

### **Current Study Abroad Programs in the U.S.**

Study Abroad Offices in universities across the United States have been promoting their basketful of options for students to pick from, but it is not necessarily that the students do not have enough options to choose from, but it is partly lack of faculty participation and their willingness to promote such programs in their classrooms. It is usually one or two faculty members leading various weekly trips around the world, however, such trips do not go beyond a sight-seeing experience, whether it is a conference presentation trip or leading a group of students in a study abroad program or a short term research trip. Kay & Watson (1982) explain that:

We must get inside the skin of other people as nearly as we can. We must learn the ‘language of life’ as far as possible. We must ‘make sense’ of their conditioning and concern in their idiom. (p. 133)

Postlethwaite (1988) says:

When well done, comparative education can deepen our understanding of our own education and society, it can be of assistance to policy makers and administrators, and it can be a valuable component of teacher education programmes. (p. xix)

Participation in international conferences or conducting short term research does not necessarily replace a well planned extensive study or teach abroad program for higher education faculty. To explain this further, Bresler and Ardichvili (2002) argue that being a tourist in a foreign country is different than conducting a long term research in a foreign country. The main difference is the time the person spends in the foreign country, including the rhythm, pacing of intensity, and activities involved during that period. For a tourist, taking a photograph would be sufficient to describe what has been happening, but international scholars describe the picture within that picture and go far beyond, including historical, cultural, and personal reflections regarding the same photo. Another

consideration is that people spending longer periods of time spend time observing the insider's life, sometimes participating in it, while surrounded by the locals. Last but not the least is the purpose of the visit. Purpose is important in the sense that it shapes the person's observations and directs-redirects the purpose of the visit and its interpretation. It is not where we go, and who we talk to, but how we go and how we talk that are significant.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and explained:

The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products, but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptional well-trained men and women. It is no longer. (p. 6)

### **Recommendations for Implementation of Study-Teach Abroad Programs for Higher Education Faculty**

Tenure Track assistant professors can be required to spend a semester abroad teaching or studying abroad while doing research which would result in scholarly publication(s). This could be achieved through exchange programs with various sister university relationships. While the assistant professor is spending a semester abroad, a faculty member from the sister university could be invited to teach his/her classes, so, the U.S. institutions would not need to hire an adjunct professor to take over his/her classes. This way, while U.S. institution could benefit from having its faculty member enhance his/her academic, social and cultural skills and gain a global perspective, students could benefit from having a foreign professor who would bring a different perspective. Having a foreign professor could also diversify the departments with their expertise while also exchanging ideas with the faculty members at the host institution would benefit other faculty members in the department.

Universities could promote faculty members' spending his/her sabbatical leave at a foreign country – studying or teaching. This could also be promoted with various incentives (travel and research support) while helping the faculty member locate an institution to spend a semester or a year doing research and/or teaching and/or participating in professional development programs including language programs.

Family will be the biggest concern for the faculty members to spend a semester or a year abroad. However, once the study-teach abroad becomes a requirement for the junior faculty and if they are hired knowing that they will have to study-teach abroad should they choose to accept the employment offer, they will have to make the necessary arrangements with their family, and thus life. And of course, institutional support regarding the financial arrangements in this case is imperative. For example, when promoting study-teach abroad programs among faculty, incentives could include paying

for the traveling expenses for the family and helping them find schools in the host country for their children ( If they do not want their children to change schools, Summer programs could be arranged, which could also enhance their children's social, cultural, and academic skills).

Exchange programs, sabbatical leaves, professional development semesters, foreign language programs, are just few of the many possible programs for higher education faculty. They could spend a semester or a year at a university, a private research institution, a think-tank, or a government institution. Alternative programs and institutions could be found to make their experiences academically, socially, and culturally productive and enhancing. The questions here is, are U.S. institutions willing to support such programs, mostly financially, and are the U.S. higher education faculty willing to model a "global citizen" for their students? Internationalization of U.S. campuses is not only recruiting and retaining international students, but also providing opportunities for current faculty members to improve their understanding of the world. International students would certainly enjoy and benefit from being taught by someone who also has some knowledge of their countries. Sending faculty abroad is not only beneficial for U.S. students and faculty, but also is a key for retaining international students on their campuses.

Fulbright Scholar Program provides extensive program for higher education faculty, scholars, and administrators. However, with its detailed application guidelines and selection criteria, it has become a tiresome process for most faculty, but provides an entrance to "higher academia". Even though Fulbright programs usually last two months, and in some cases less than two months, it should provide the starting point for the higher educations to plan their own "Fulbrights".

### **Conclusion**

It is explained through this study that study/teach abroad programs have benefits to both institutions and individuals. Also, sending faculty members abroad whether to study or to teach, would help promote study abroad programs for students while students benefiting from their faculty members' experiences abroad. There are many considerations while planning to study/teach abroad programs for faculty members, but, with necessary commitment and serious planning, it is possible.

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