From Expectation to Reality: How Pre-Departure Messaging Can Encourage Deeper Student Engagement

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"For my junior year abroad, I'm going to learn how to party in a foreign country."
There’s A Problem with Study Abroad

“As annual enrollments continue to soar – data shows that more than five times as many U.S. undergraduates now study abroad as did 25 years ago – voices inside and outside higher education are persistently asking questions about what all of those students are in fact learning over there. Faculty and staff at home have long questioned whether coursework at study abroad sites is as academically rigorous as it ought to be...Studies on cultural learning have shown that students enrolling in most education abroad programs are, at best, making quite modest gains”

Positivist: Learning Through Experience

- Experience will necessarily lead to learning
- Students travel to privileged places to learn desirable social skills
- Geared towards more academically serious and socially mature students
- Failure to learn is the result of poor student selection process
- Grand European Tour
Relativist: Learning Through Immersion

- Greater immersion will lead to true learning
- All cultures are equal, focus on common humanity
- Geared towards more academically serious and socially mature students
- Learning is the result of greater depth of experience
- Failure to learn is the result of poor student involvement or commitment to full immersion
Constructivist: Learning Through Mentoring

- Learning is co-created by interaction between the student and the host culture
- Educators must actively intervene in the learning process
- Geared towards students at various levels of maturity and academic accomplishment
- Failure to learn is the result of a combination of the program and the student
“...the data show that students learn and develop considerably more when educators prepare them to become more self-reflective, culturally self-aware and aware of ‘how they know what they know.’”

But what do we want our students to learn?
Which is the “real” London?
Michigan State University

- 45,000 undergraduates
- 17 academic colleges
- 2,941 students studied abroad
- 52% participation in Europe
- 85% participation on short-term programs

College of Arts and Letters

- 2,000 students in 24 majors
- 80 programs in 40 countries
- 45% study abroad or away
- Emphasis on education abroad and experiential learning
- Diverse student body with wide range of interests
Marketing Challenges

• Varied branding and recruitment tactics

• Recruitment varies based on program type
  • Faculty-directed info sessions, classroom presentations, marketing materials
  • Exchange/direct enroll not “championed” by dept./faculty

• Hitting numbers vs. realistic expectations
  • Ability to focus on expectations depends on:
    • student demand
    • pressure from upper administration
    • knowledge base/experience of student body
    • level of internationalization on campus
Marketing Initiatives

- Emphasis on experiential learning
  - Incorporate “Spartans Will” mantra

- Focus on the “what” and “how”

- Evolve marketing materials and terminology
  - Resist clichés and stereotypes...when possible

- Establish support network and create incentives
  - CAL Citizen Scholars Program
    - Distinction program: requires experiential learning & global engagement
    - $5,000 guaranteed scholarship; Open to all CAL students
    - Focus on importance of deep engagement
Pre-departure Advising & Support Challenges

- Varied messaging and support
  - Depends greatly on program type and point of contact on campus

- Limited time and resources

- No mechanism to require orientation
  - In-person and online orientation offered but not always required
  - Faculty able to require due to grades
Pre-departure Advising & Support Initiatives

• Office of Study Abroad
  • Additional “Europe Programs” pre-departure orientation
  • New developed faculty workshop on trends & safety concerns in Europe
  • Education abroad language shifting to more academic focus

• College of Arts and Letters
  • “Contemporary issues in Europe” pre-departure session
    • Freshman Seminar Abroad in Germany
Study Abroad: BUDAPEST

Gitta Pestalits
International Study Programs
Corvinus University of Budapest

Photo by Csaba Toth
Marketing

10 yrs ago: Budapest was unknown to most US students – they needed help finding it on a map...

- Today: growing number of visitors & US students
- It is better known (still not as much as Prague & Vienna)
- Most tourists visit the triangle of these 3 cities
- Budapest is still “off the beaten track” and not on the radar for most US students

Viking and other river cruises
Movies filmed in Budapest
(Grand Budapest Hotel – NOT filmed in or about Budapest)
Who is the program for?

- Our motto: *Explore, Discover, Experience*

- Attract **challenge-seeking** students:
  setting the right expectations – what are the challenges?

- **Cost conscious** students (still not on euro) euro countries are much more expensive

- Students who desire to **mix with local & international** students in classes & in activities outside classes (Erasmus Student Network)

- Want to **explore Europe**: classes are Monday-Thursdays – 3 days for travelling on budget airlines, trains & buses
Planning

• Classes – different teaching style!

  Hungarian style: Less hand holding
  Fewer guidelines – figure it out!
  Emphasis on midterms / finals

• Classes focus on culture & the region

• Beginners’ Hungarian: Throughout the semester
  Practical knowledge
  Deeper engagement with culture
• Contemporary Literature, Film and Visual Arts:

Site visits (Monument Park)
Oscar winning movie
Nobel prize winning book

• Group projects in business class:
  With non-native English speakers (tolerance & patience)
Tandem partners

- Replaces the homestay experience:
  - Deeper ties with locals
  - Peer support
- Hungarian student contacts the US student a few months before arrival
- Voluntary program, very enthusiastic local students
  → Gateway to local & new friends:
    - Sunday lunch with Grandma
    - Pig killing
    - Bringing US students along to their activities
Advising

• Pre-departure orientation at students’ home university – Budapest/Corvinus specific

• Cooperation with partner universities in raising awareness about learning and preparing to be involved ahead of time

• Difference between: tourist and a traveller
  ➔ NOT vacation ➔ GIVING BACK
NOT a guide book:

- Local customs & traditions
- Impact of history, religion & politics
- Hungarians at home, work and play
- Eating & drinking, Hungarian style
- Dos, don’ts and taboos
- Business practices & communication
“Travel isn’t always easy. It isn’t always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that’s OK. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind.”
Heather Funk Theodoridi
Director of International Programs, Student Services & Student Activities
130 Years History
K through BA, MBA & MS
SA since 1997
2+2 Degrees
Custom Programs
First Year Programs
Internships & Practicums
Service Learning
Learning in ACTion
Pre-Departure Support
American-style Res Life
Excursions
Safety Network
24-hour Assistance
How do we shape expectations through program design and marketing?
Come to the student hub of Greece
Study Abroad in Thessaloniki
Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

Are you ready for your next adventure?
Experience Greek hospitality, heritage, and culture during your time at ACT!
Choose from a variety of programs and courses that focus on your interests and help you reach your goals.
Gain hands-on experience through service learning, internships, and practicums; explore ancient and modern Greece through organized trips, clubs and events; live the local customs and traditions throughout your time at ACT and build lasting relationships.

Join ACT’s Study Abroad program today!

Learn more at www.act.edu/studyabroad • email: abroad@act.edu

Anatolia Elementary  Anatolia High School  American College of Thessaloniki
Mixed Pre-Departure Messages

- Personal Experience, Opinions & Hopes
- Friends
- Parents
- TV / Media / Internet
- Classrooms
- Study Abroad Advisors
- Marketing Materials & Study Abroad Fairs

Grant Terzakis, 2012
Survey Says

• 5 Years of End-of-Term Survey Results show that **SAFETY** is top.
  – I feel safe at ACT.
  – I feel safe in my housing.
  – I feel safe in Thessaloniki.
  – I feel safe in Greece.

• **On average 92% of students Strongly Agree or Agree.**
Messages ➔ Expectations ➔ Goals ➔ Outcomes

• Host School
  • Study Abroad Guide
  • Academic Liaisons
  • Special Offerings (SL, Internships)
  • Social Media Campus Connect
  • Study Abroad Fairs

• Home School & Host School
  • Study Abroad Alumni
  • Pre-Departure Orientation

• Cultural Associations / Events
  • Tourism Bureau
  • Embassy & Consulate
External & Internal Outcomes

• Increased Participation
  – Service Learning
  – Custom Student Placements
  – Service Learning Practicum course
  – Business Internship course
  – Research Projects
  – Michael & Kitty Dukakis Center for Public & Humanitarian Service

• Customized Programs
  – Seminars & Workshops

• Student Reflections:
  • [I learned] how hard living in a different country can be and how that relates to immigrants and refugees in the US.
  • I think I see the world as a much bigger place than I used to. Although Greece is such a small country, it seems much bigger to me now.
  • The world is not my hometown.
Learn what it's really like to "Go Greek!"

Connect with other Greek chapters from various institutions across the US, while earning 3 credits and enjoying an experience like never before, studying abroad at ACT.

Experience Greek hospitality, heritage and culture in Thessaloniki, the student hub of Greece. Explore ancient and modern Greece through organized trips and events; live the local customs and traditions throughout your time at ACT and build lasting relationships.

Discover "philotimo" (Greek for "paying it forward") and the true meaning of Greek Life. Give back to the community through service learning projects, gaining valuable experience along the way.

Join ACT’s Study Abroad program today! Experience Greek Life at its fullest.

"Go Greek in Greece" Program Begins Summer 2017

For more information visit www.act.edu/GoGreek
Join us at ACT.
Discussion Questions

• What is your pre-departure messaging? Can you share some example of effective/ineffective pre-departure messaging at your institutions?

• How do you use current events in modern Europe to challenge students' perceived stereotypes and manage expectations?

• How do you balance accurate portrayals with attractive marketing?
Further Discussion

• What learning/experiential goals do you have for study abroad students?

• What post-program survey questions have you found to be beneficial on the topic of deep engagement? What helpful responses have you received?
Takeaways

• Frameworks that assist students in understanding and filtering experiences need to be established well before departure
• Stereotypically touristy images and language need to be used sparingly – as a first step - to avoid oversimplifying the host country and culture
• Use local resources to broaden students' preconceived expectations
• Diversify the representations you use
• Current events are an opportunity to open new conversations
• Home and host institution need to work together on pre-departure messaging to improve student engagement