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11th Forum on Education Conference

New Orleans, March 25, 2015

New Challenges for Directors Abroad in a European Context

In the past thirty years students studying abroad have developed new needs and have exhibited changing attitudes towards what they expect to find in an experience abroad. The development of technology and of instantaneous communication through the use of cell phones and computers, - Face book; tweeters has played a key role in changing student's mentality and behavior. We feel that the programs abroad many institutions of higher learning currently propose to their participants – especially programs in Europe- have not followed the same curve or at least have not introduced changes that reflect today students' expectations. We would like to propose in this session a few insights based on our personal, direct experiences as directors of the Dickinson College Program in Toulouse to adapt programs to their stated goals.

As many other private institutions, Dickinson College has operated for many years successful programs in Europe (England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain). Now is the time to take a good look at what has been done traditionally and to question the models in place to seriously consider how to bridge the gap between what today's curricula abroad offer to their participants and the demands of a globalized world. On-site directors are the first persons to experience on a day to day basis this discrepancy and the onus of adapting current curricula to make them more relevant is directly on them. We hope to suggest here a few strategies that could

enhance the study abroad experience and possibly help restructure programs to take into account the complexities of an increasing cosmopolitan culture that requires innovative analytical skills coupled with a great deal of cultural empathy and tolerance. We will present in this session some concrete suggestions on how to best implement curricular choices that could prepare participants in programs abroad to understand their role and their responsibilities as citizens of the world. We want to encourage participants in the session to react and respond to the changes we have envisioned, hoping to make this presentation a flowing and enriching conversation.

Originally most programs were created by modern language departments willing to give their majors an opportunity to have a first hand experience of the language and the culture they were studying. The faculty used to design curricula according to the structure of the requirements leading to a major in the field. The selection of courses offered to students abroad closely reflected the academic priorities of a given department. While courses were usually taught by native instructors, the syllabi were mostly conceived to reflect the structure of an American major. Classes were, most of the time, held in the same building where the American institution had its administrative office, leaving American students together, in an academic and cultural context very similar to that of the home campus and with practically inexistent contact with the host culture.

The evaluation of students had to conform to the traditional assessments used by the American academic community, reproducing the grading and credit systems. Most of the time, faculty members from the sponsoring departments served as directors abroad on a rotating basis. This type of “island program” had its advantages and its shortcomings. The overseas director’s responsibilities encompassed all aspects of running a program abroad, but the goals of these programs were clearly defined, making the job of the director less complex than today. The huge

drawback of this type of “island “program is that students have little contact with native students or institutions, resulting in very limited and biased views of the target culture, and, in some extreme cases, a comforting of cultural and racial stereotypes .

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we find programs that enroll students directly into a foreign institution with no mediation on the part of the home institution, except for an introductory language course. It is more or less the model used in the ERASMUS Programs that fosters international mobility among European universities.

Today, the original prototype has evolved and the prevalent model is the “combination/hybrid program” meshing the “island” notion with the direct enrollment type, allowing students to take several courses in foreign universities alongside in - house courses. However, in most cases, there is still little respect in this formula for the host country’s academic structure that almost always is based on a pre-set “menu” of required courses in a curriculum leading to a degree, instead of a kind of “à la carte” practice, where students choose courses on an often *ad hoc* basis and for an array of reasons going from an instructor friendly to foreigners, to fitting one’s schedule (no classes on Fridays), instead of strong academic motivation. Additionally, American students enrolled in a host-institution are immediately identified by their instructors and peers alike as “special cases”, a factor that forbids a true integration within the students body of the host country, and does not foster independence nor a sense of responsibility in participants who are led to believe that whatever they do will be mediated by the fact that they have a different status. Both of us have experienced first hand the challenges they pose to an on-site director.

A survey of the mission statements disseminated in Study Abroad literature by most American colleges underscores the necessity to prepare students for living in a “globally interdependent and culturally diverse world” (Smith) to “engage the world” ” (Dickinson), to

“challenge students ... to grow as a global citizen (Wellesley), to “cultivate the intellectual, creative, physical, ethical and social qualities essential for leadership in a rapidly changing community” (Middlebury). We all agree that these are worthy objectives that should be at the core of every curriculum, but we must keep asking ourselves: Do American colleges and universities truly foster a proper internationalizing of their curricula? Should not the process already start on the home campus in order to ensure its successful maturation? Do programs abroad provide a consciously worked out integration of students into the cultural context of the foreign academic culture? Do they promote students growth as “global citizens” “engaging the world”? How can a program director facilitate the attainment of these goals? What type of offerings could be proposed in the off-campus context to integrate rigorous academic work with hands-on, concrete experiences of cultural integration? These are some of the current ethical, programmatic, and concrete challenges rotating or permanent directors abroad are faced with. We believe that now is the time to shape a type of experience both on-campus and abroad that will emphasize a more authentic integration of students into the host culture, making them more autonomous, impartial and flexible individuals, endowed with the willingness and the ability to recognize the idiosyncratic value systems of different cultures without passing judgments, and underscoring one’s responsibility in the learning process and the development of one’s own intercultural understanding and mutual tolerance.

We are not going to address here the challenges posed by the new means of communication and use of social networks; how they have changed the way programs abroad are run. It is a complex topic in itself. Our purpose here is rather to look at how to adapt our programs to an ever changing situation that evolves extremely rapidly. We have grouped our remarks in four categories of challenges: 1) what to do on the home campus; 2) who owns the

programs abroad and thus has the authority of making the necessary changes; 3) how to streamline the advising of our students abroad as to make the process more efficient and more consonant with our goals; 4) How could we imagine and shape an updated curriculum .

Challenge #1: Internationalization of the Home Campus

The experience abroad is too often considered on the home campus by faculty, administrators and students alike as a “frill”, as a “year off”, even as an impediment to complete the majors considered as most demanding. These preconceived notions are divisive and constitute an obstacle to the development of a cohesive, integrative, internationalization of academic goals. Past, present and future directors of programs abroad must work hard with their on-campus colleagues and their administration not only to articulate a statement on the advantages studying abroad bring to all students in all the disciplines, but to propose concrete steps to implement these objectives through curricular initiatives and administrative measures. Different venues could be imagined:

On the curricular side, we will never insist enough on the importance in any strategy of internationalization of developing and refining the linguistic skills of students who plan to study abroad. Recently, we have seen an increasing number of programs adopting what they call a “non –language-based format”. In the best of cases, these initiatives expose students to different ways of conceiving space and time. In the worse scenario they are glorified tourism. In our opinion a true internationalization of programs requires cultivating linguistic skills in order to penetrate the cultural core of any given culture. The study of modern languages on the home campus is the essence of any effort of internationalization.

Today, many institutions propose in a piecemeal fashion courses sensitizing students to the issues of multiculturalism, and the process and consequences of globalization. However,

there is often little curricular dialogue between these courses. We would like to suggest that offering a cohesively designed cluster of courses around the notions of cosmopolitanism, sustainability, citizenship and the concept of individual responsibility towards others would give students the necessary tools to critically understand and actively engage in a foreign culture. It would enhance the home campus curriculum for all students, especially those who will not study abroad.

The other suggestion is to offer at the beginning of a student's academic career a first-year seminar focused on the issues just mentioned. The syllabus could be developed through the collaborative effort between faculty representing not only different disciplines but integrating the traditional three divisions: humanities, social sciences and "hard" sciences. After discussing in a faculty workshop how their respective disciplines consider these issues, self-selected faculty members would create a common syllabus for a multi section course. Individual instructors would teach a section of the course, eventually organizing plenary sessions over the semester, thus allowing students from the different groups to get together and to present and discuss their own points of view. This type of endeavor would provide for the faculty involved in the process a good opportunity for examining, and discussing among themselves, how different culturally constructed approaches to problems have enriched the scientific discourse in the humanities, the social sciences or the sciences, sensitizing them to intercultural conversations. In turn, it would teach students to accept the fact that there are different ways of looking at problems, and that finding solutions involve often the ability to negotiate between divergent points of view instead of imposing one's univocal view, an essential feature for a successful intercultural integration while studying abroad. Furthermore, such an academic initiation to cultural differences and cross-cultural perspectives proposed during the first year of college would allow students for whom a stay abroad is a priority, to refine their linguistic proficiency, and to broaden and deepen

their understanding of what studying in a foreign setting entails in order to engage in the experience with realistic expectations once they find themselves in the host country. It would help lessen the culture shock and the sense of inadequacy many students feel in the first few weeks of their immersion abroad.

On the administrative side, internationalization of the home campus entails faculty exchanges. Traditionally, these exchanges have consisted in swapping American faculty members with foreign counterparts, following the pioneer track established after the Second World War by the then innovative Fulbright Program. While the main objective set by the Fulbright commission to “increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” is still at the core of study abroad, we believe that these exchanges could be even more beneficial and effective if they were a more focused. Today, there is very little follow up once faculty members go back to their respective countries. An improved model would be to shape these exchanges around sister institutions. For example, an American institution with a program in Aix en Provence or in Barcelona would give preference to a visiting scholar from the University of Aix. This extra effort would ensure ongoing contacts between institutions, and hopefully, a continuing academic conversation between programs and scholars.

Another type of exchange would be to provide opportunities for the faculty of the home institution to be short-term guests of its programs abroad. Coming from any discipline across the three traditional divisions, these instructors could, while abroad, give lectures, intervene in courses, or organize and run field trips (in art history, geology; archeology for example). It would allow participating faculty members to better understand what their institution does abroad, what courses are available at the partner university/ies, to evaluate the academic needs of students, to familiarize themselves with the academic culture of the host country and to be exposed to a set of

priorities different from those of an American campus. Upon their return to campus, they would be prepared to participate knowingly in the recruitment of future students and in their advising before they leave the home campus.

These two proposals entail an important financial commitment on the part of the administration but it is what it takes to support a true internationalization of a campus.

Challenge #2 Ownership of the Programs Abroad

In the past twenty years, the structures that oversee programs abroad have increasingly become independent administrative units, with the creation on many campuses of Offices of Study Abroad dedicated to the day- to-day management of on site programs, shaping budgets, dealing with recruitment strategies and taking charge of exchange students studying on campus. While this new model has taken over some of the less pleasant aspects of directing a program abroad (for example dealing with visas or travel arrangements) and has established a helpful set of best practices in many areas, the involvement of individual departments in the curricula they had originally shaped when the abroad programs were first established has diminished. We have heard more than once colleagues complaining about loosing the ownership of their department's program abroad.

The shift noticed in the past ten years from programs structured along strict disciplinary and departmental lines –like the language/literature-based programs or the International Studies Programs of the past - to more academically inclusive programs can be explained in part by economic factors, as a response to the dwindling number of students engaged in language and/or single majors. Concretely, it now constitutes a new, serious challenge for directors abroad. Broadening the scope and modalities of studying abroad to include a large array of disciplines is

definitely a way of attracting more students, thus maintaining a healthy flow of tuition dollars. In a less crass perspective, it also opens up the opportunity of an experience abroad to a greater number of students, a change we all support, even though a number of these new recruits lack skills in foreign language and have limited intercultural awareness.

In order to accommodate this new pool of students, directors abroad must be able to guide program participants in a great many disciplines they may not be familiar with while remaining sensitive to the needs of students and to their preparation. This new situation makes the responsibilities of an on-site director extremely fluid and somewhat uncomfortable. It would be extremely helpful to establish clear guidelines about who is ultimately in charge of deciding which courses taken in a host university will be validated as acceptable for the major in a given department, and an agreed upon protocol on how these decisions will be reached. Are these issues the ultimate responsibility of the on-campus Director of the Office of Study Abroad, or could they be resolved through a collaborative agreement between departments and the on-site director? It would be advisable to have open, on-going conversations between the on-site director, the director of Study Abroad and the heads of the departments sending their students in the program. In the case of permanent on-site directorships, regular visits to the home campus on the part of the on-site director are a must. They permit him or her to meet in person with colleagues on campus, to establish personal contacts, and to keep the pulse of the changing curricular priorities on campus. A clear understanding of the rationales behind the creation of new programs or of the changes in the courses required in some majors is important in the recruiting of future cohorts of students. It is a process in which the on-site director could play an important and decisive role. We would strongly recommend that he/she be closely associated into this process.

Challenge #3 Academic Advising

The expansion of the pool of students going abroad has an important impact on a director's advising responsibilities and makes the task extremely complex. In order to effectively guide students in their academic choices, a director abroad must have a deep understanding of the academic requirements of his/her home institution and of the possibilities offered by the foreign partner institution in which students will take courses. A superficial look at course offerings on the internet does not suffice. It is important to follow up a first selection of possible courses with a personal contact with the instructors in charge to assess the level of the course and its position in the sequence of the courses required for the degree. This is particularly true for courses in the sciences-especially mathematics and economics-disciplines in which certain topics are taught in a different sequence in the USA and abroad. We must also remember that the notion of what constitutes a syllabus is often different in a foreign country. We all have stories about the well-meaning French/Italian/German professors who would send us a reading list of forty "essential" books associated with another hundred titles as their syllabus. So it is important to be very explicit and to ask for clarification when needed. Having personal contacts with foreign colleagues is always the most efficient and satisfactory way of obtaining accurate information.

At the same time, the on-site director must keep in touch with the various departments on the home campus, and be apprised of on-going departmental curricular changes, a step that is often neglected by colleagues who are not sensitized to the situation of their majors who study abroad. In many ways, the on-site director has become the key facilitator between the home campus, the program abroad and the foreign partner institution. In these circumstances how can students be best helped with their selection of courses? One first step is to convince students to avoid courses that are already taught on the home campus and to entice them to try out courses

that could give breadth and depth to their major. Developing through contacts and regularly updated agreements with on-campus colleagues from various departments a pre-set list of courses abroad that will be automatically approved by a given department is a practice that benefits both on-site director and students. It allows the director to have concrete, accurate recommendations to give students during the advising period and it lessens students' anxiety about finishing his/her major on time, allowing them to explore fields not represented in the on-campus curriculum and to reflect on the idiosyncratic and culturally constructed nature of the academic discourse and preparation. This is a real, concrete step in the direction of becoming a citizen of the world. At this point, I will let Professor Toux present to you her successful collaboration with the Dickinson Department of Psychology that resulted in a harmonious relationships and decision making between the Psychology department and our Toulouse Program.

Another feature of advising is to assess without any bias the real academic achievements and the true motivations of students. Too often, letters of reference are too vague or too general, or even sometimes not totally honest about the academic potential of a student. We are sure many of us have been mystified by glowing reports about an individual who turned out to be poorly equipped for an experience abroad. It may not be possible to totally eliminate this pitfall, but once again, establishing trusted and personal channels of communications between the on-site director and the faculty on campus and involving both of them closely in the advising process are ways of generating genuine input.

Conclusion

We have traced some of the many changes that are reshaping today the philosophy and the priorities of programs abroad. Among the themes that have emerged from our considerations, two are pivotal:

1) The integration of students into the cultural context of the country they study in through a program blending academic performance, enhancement of language skills and experiential features fostering intercultural understanding and communication.

2) Developing in participants a sense of autonomous thinking, and a keen sense of responsibility towards their own personal growth and towards their fellow human beings as well as the natural world that surrounds them. “Engaging the world”, as the Dickinson’s mantra goes, or any other wording in the mission statements of study abroad today means to find ways to instill in participants the notion that they are citizens of the world.

I am not letting Professor Toux present a model of curricular options and social interactions that could bring us nearer to these goals. After her presentation, we will greatly welcome and appreciate to hear your reactions and to have your input, but feel free to interject at any point since we hope to work with all of you in a collaborative and mutually enriching way.

Challenge #4: Imagining an International Curriculum Abroad (see powerpoint)

Tentative Program which will give students the necessary tools to fulfil their academic, pre professional and social tools to become a world citizen.

Orientation (1 week fall and spring semester)

Colloquium taught each semester (2 hours per week).

This course will define and explore the concept and process of Cosmopolitanism at different levels (local, state, inter-state, regional and global). It will incorporate students' social and academic experience (home stay, community service, excursions, courses at host institution) to help them to develop not only intercultural analytical and critical skills but also to build a "savoir être", essential abilities necessary to become "citizen of the world, that is a citizen concerned by the future of the world (demographic, immigration, ecological, environmental, terrorism, issues and social inequalities) and its inhabitants. This course will include a community service (30 hours per semester), a one day workshop on citizen of the world and two excursions.

Community service provides a hands-on approach to the local community

French Methodology (3 hours per week)

Courses at Host institutions carefully chosen according to student's majors. The past three years, I carefully worked with my French colleagues to better immerse our students in the French academic system and we decided to encourage them to choose their courses in one department and one year.

Research Internship (four weeks, 35 hours per week, year long program and spring semester). These internships, coupled with related research via the *Internship Seminar*, have resulted in several students choosing to continue on to honors' theses upon their return to campus. It also gives students a real pre-professional experience.

European conference on a predefined theme (climate, gender, immigration issues, etc) in collaboration with European programs.

- Academic Supports: Individual tutoring led by professors and students from host institutions but also by exchange students trained on campus by our American colleagues.

Administrative office will also provide:

- Individual Home stay
- Advises on health, security, etc. issues, extracurricular activities

To regenerate the traditional model applied in Europe, I would very humbly advance the following strategies:

- Encourage all departments to take an active role in the effort of offering study abroad opportunities to all fields of study
- Make academics and students' intellectual engagement priorities in study abroad. In order to allow the study abroad experience to serve as an "on-switch" to help students become intelligent agents of their own learning", the College community as a whole must better prepare students to assume responsibilities for their personal and academic choices in the semesters leading up to their study abroad.
- Reflect on student preparation. The college community should provide an environment in which students are expected to evolve both academically and socially, beginning their first semester on campus and all throughout the College education. Students should take responsibility for their actions, their social behaviour, their choices, their engagement in the community, their creativity, etc. Pre-departure session should be organized to make the above priorities apparent. As mentioned before, even first-year seminars could provide an appropriate intellectual setting for promoting the values of study abroad from an academic standpoint.
- For all programs, identify best courses for students across a variety of "curricular pathways," appropriate for students' language level (when applicable), etc.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration across European programs, such as common readings, academic excursions, research projects with a corresponding conference and publication, etc.
- Identify ideal "pairings" of complementary study abroad opportunities (ex. Toulouse – Cameroun) to coherently respond to some students' objectives to choose several destinations.
- Plan regular visits for the director on home campus.

SYNOPSIS PART 1

1. An Ethical Problem: Are we doing what we claim we do?

2. Historic Development of Programs Abroad:

- **“Island Programs” vs. Direct Enrollment Programs**
- **“Combination Programs”**
- **Is There an Alternative Model?**

3. What Can Be Done?

On the home campus:

- **Challenge #1: Internationalization of the Campus**
 - * **Strengthen study of a foreign language**
 - * **Offer clusters of carefully thought through, interdisciplinary courses dealing with international issues**
 - * **Convince colleagues to collaborate and to test themselves an experience abroad**
- **Challenge #2: Ownership of Programs**
 - **Results of the professionalization of Study Abroad structures**
 - **What are the respective roles of Study Abroad/Office of Global Studies/ individual departments and resident director?**
 - **How to avoid conflicts**
 - **Importance of keeping channels of communication open**

In the Program Abroad

- Challenge #3: Advising

- *Have a clear perception of on-campus programs/curricula**
- *Have a clear perception of what is offered by the foreign host institution**
- * Be realistic about the potential of students**
- * Be a negotiator between the two cooperating institutions**
- * Keep channels of communication open**

- Challenge #4: Structuring a New Type of Experience Abroad