

Education Abroad Quality and Security: Learning Culture and Exercising Care

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Reiteration of the Session Purpose

- ▶ As colleges and universities launch education abroad programs, two of the most significant tasks will be improving *program quality and assessment*, and *assuring student safety and security*. With increasing emphasis on program learning outcomes and career enhancement, greater focus on definition and assessment of quality is essential.
- ▶ Promoting deeper cultural understanding can set turmoil abroad in context and assist students and families in seeing the critical value of learning abroad for career and citizenship. Assessment can also contribute to program growth, providing students and families information demonstrating the value and purpose of intercultural learning.
- ▶ In this session, program goal setting and assessment, methods of data collection and analysis that are critical to assessments of learning abroad, safety and security provisions, and exemplary program models emphasizing cultural knowledge.

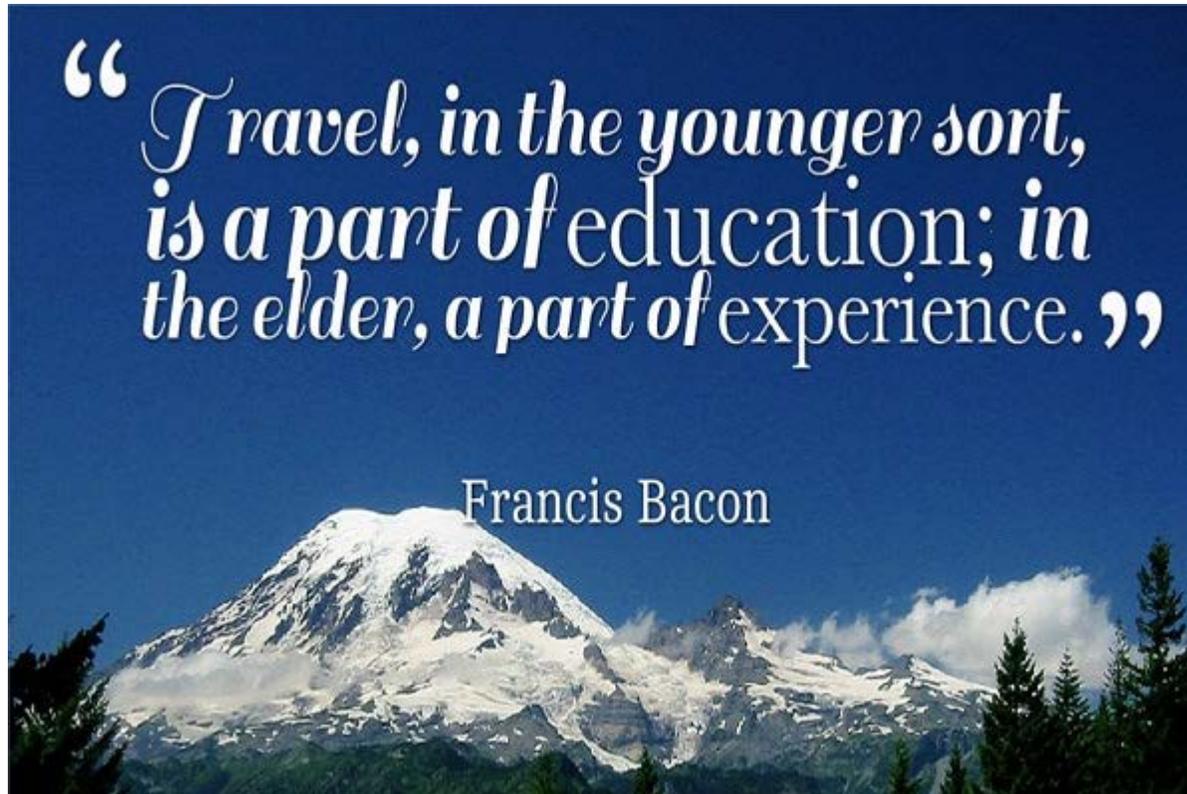
What is the effect on traveler of cross-border journeys?



“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.”

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*

And Francis Bacon (1600's), Empiricist and Father of the Scientific Method



Contemporary rationales for study abroad

- ▶ Self awareness and development of independence—personal growth
- ▶ Language learning
- ▶ Cross-cultural skills for living in a diverse society
- ▶ Career enhancement

Do we deliver on these promises in study abroad programs?

- ▶ Program Intentionality: For study abroad to become a broadly accepted and integral element of undergraduate education, a clearly drawn set of theories, learning goals, and methodology is essential.
- ▶ What body of knowledge and theoretical structure, underpins study abroad activities?
- ▶ What does research tell us about outcomes, including effect of different models?
- ▶ What is the value of intervention, before, during, and after the study abroad experience?

Challenges



Critiques of Study Abroad—Quantity PLUS Quality

- ▶ “But American students expect a standard of food and housing (and sleep) that is not typical in West Africa. So New York University has imported the creature comforts of home.” (customers to be satisfied)
- ▶ “The number of students going abroad may be growing but their profile has not changed.” (lack of diverse student participation)

Critiques of Study Abroad

- ▶ The new demand has yielded programs that are “half spring break and half really serious learning.” (short-term superficial experiences)
- ▶ “I didn’t feel the need to go out and meet Spanish people, just personally,” she adds. She did return home with a new circle of Syracuse friends she’d met in Spain.” (Island and short term programs)

What is to be done?

- ▶ Academic content and methodology
- ▶ Program Evaluation and Participant Assessment
- ▶ Student Safety and Security

Quality: Academic Focus and Methodology

- ▶ Clearly stated mission statement for study abroad as a field, incorporating theory and expected learning outcomes.
- ▶ Differentiation of programs specifying level of challenge, distinctive learning methodologies, and expected outcomes.
- ▶ Student academic advisement, support and instruction via program orientations/coursework, interventions throughout the experience, and re-entry programs extending and evaluating learning

Quality: Program Evaluation

- ▶ Can study abroad prospective applicants see evaluations of past programs?
- ▶ Do prospective participants receive material defining learning goals, specifying activities abroad that can be expected to yield greatest knowledge and skills?
- ▶ Do returnees have available a “debriefing experience” that allows them to thoughtfully evaluate the program and take part in an assessment process?

Quality: Student Safety and Security

- ▶ Is the program appropriately staffed at the U.S. office and in the country abroad to protect students' health and safety?
- ▶ Does the program provide adequate insurance and services for its activities and for individual students?
- ▶ Are safety and security policies and procedures up to date and consistent with changing conditions and threats?
- ▶ Is there continuous monitoring of potential dangers and threats at program sites?
- ▶ Is a fully detailed emergency/evacuation plan in place?

Recognizing Theories Underpinning Study Abroad—Why?

- ▶ Anthropology
- ▶ Contact Theory
- ▶ Intercultural Communication
- ▶ Disciplinary heritage provides program model guidance—long term engagement, immersion, intervention, etc.

Heritage: Anthropology

- ▶ Anthropology at end of 19th century developed and advanced the idea of “culture” from linear evolutionary thinking (stages) to cultural relativism—deep knowledge of culture
- ▶ Theory that acquaintance with daily practice of culture allows for positive interaction and participation—value of first-hand experience
- ▶ Methodology: Learn a culture while enmeshed within it---field study and participant observation—clear antecedent of study abroad
- ▶ Focuses on knowledge of historical, social, religious, ideological and economic structures and their interaction within a culture and idea that understanding of these forces promotes respect—knowing self and other

Heritage: Contact Theory

- ▶ Gordon W. Allport (1950's): Contact hypothesis: Interaction between groups reduces prejudicial feelings among individuals of both groups
- ▶ Study Abroad: Assumption that students who live in another culture for a period of time will develop intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and communication skills that they could not acquire through home campus activities
- ▶ Contact theory requires equality of interacting groups, shared goals, level of contact sufficient to eliminate stereotypes

Heritage: Intercultural Communication

- ▶ Intercultural communication (1960's) is focused on developing the ability to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in another culture; intercultural skills that facilitate interaction
- ▶ It also focuses on cultivating openness and respect of cultural differences. Techniques of intercultural communication aim to enable one to adapt quickly to a new culture.
- ▶ A related concept is that of global-mindedness, which is an orientation toward an international understanding of human problems and responsibilities rather than a national focus (Kehl & Morris)

Study Abroad Learning Theory: Experiential Learning

- ▶ Experiential learning theory provides a holistic model of human adaptation through the transformation of experience into knowledge
- ▶ Dialectics of action-reflection and experience-conceptualization
- ▶ Learning is a process with advancement milestones

Summary

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