

Future Shock: Welcome to the New World of Study Abroad

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Abstract

Study abroad programs face a number of new challenges and opportunities. This research reports on a recent survey of 49 directors and assistant directors of study abroad programs at colleges and universities in the United States. With more students than ever before studying abroad (Van Der Werf, 2007), concerns about terrorism, sexual assault, and safety have increased. Moreover, as the global economy shifts to the East, towards countries such as China and India, it is increasingly difficult for colleges to find meaningful programs to meet the needs of students. The impact of a weak U.S. dollar and the move toward use of study abroad contractor-providers raises concerns for keeping costs down while meeting high standards of quality (Farrell, 2007). Academic departments at some schools are now requiring students to have an international experience prior to graduation (Fischer, 2008).

Survey Methods

Our goal was to get feedback from Directors and Assistant Directors of Study Abroad offices about their own institution's policies and procedures for contemporary study abroad issues. This exploratory study will assist study abroad professionals in the development of policy and new opportunities for students to have an international experience. Directors and Assistant Directors of Study Abroad from one hundred forty universities were asked via email survey to respond to questions about contemporary issues in study abroad: "Europe vs. Far East destinations," "required study abroad," "Faculty and Staff led abroad programs vs. externally contracted led programs" and safety concerns. Participants were offered the option to complete the survey online, with the Web address link available in the email. To improve the survey response rate, a second "reminder" email was used.

Survey design encouraged participants to provide comments and feedback about the various topics of interest. These responses provide texture and qualitative richness to the findings. Forty-Nine participants responded (35%).

Findings

Study Abroad offices are as different as the institutions that house them. In most cases the opportunities were limited by the size of the study abroad office. We found that in cases of small colleges, the study abroad offices had to rely on external resources more so than internal faculty and staff due to lack of resources. Larger institutions tended to have a more complex and mixed approach. Some schools put a philosophical emphasis on study abroad and dedicated the resources necessary for success. These schools used exchange programs and faculty members to ensure the highest quality programs.

The issue of going to the Far East instead of Europe appears to be based on the type of program in which the student is studying. Business programs are making big moves to the East. More traditional study abroad programs continue to promote European destinations.

Comments & Feedback

"Our university has a one-person Study Abroad Office. Using external contractors is the most efficient use of time, energy, and available resources...and it allows a larger number of students access to a larger variety of locations throughout the world."

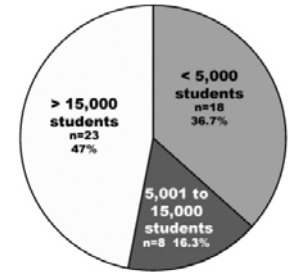
"Europe has consistently been the most popular destination, but EURO exchange rates, cost of living in European cities, and airfare increases, coupled with the general downturn in the U.S. economy, are having an influence. If passed, the Simon bill will encourage more study abroad in Asia and Latin America."

"In my personal opinion, certain programs, like foreign languages or international affairs, can easily benefit from a required international experience. Being a state institution, the university is concerned that requiring it may prevent some students from choosing these majors for financial reasons. Another concern is that study abroad requires GPA of 2.5, while graduation requires only 2.0. Requiring study abroad would raise the graduation requirement for certain majors, which creates inequity among the programs."

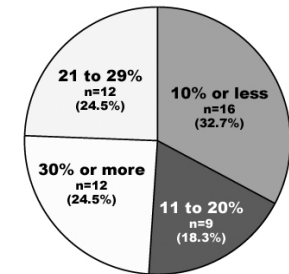
References

- Farrell, E.F. (2007). Study abroad blossoms into big business. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(2), A49.
- Fischer, K. (2008). All abroad! Overseas study required. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(41), A1.
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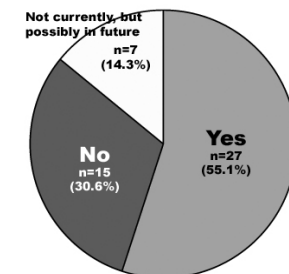
What is the size of your institution?



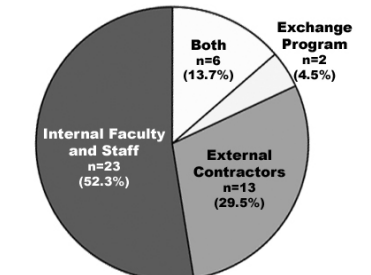
What percentage of students at your institution participate in study abroad?



Do any programs at your institution require students to complete an international experience before graduation?



Does your institution prefer using contractors or internal faculty and staff for study abroad?



"3P" Framework for understanding contemporary study abroad issues

