

Chapter 4

Preparing Culturally Competent Teachers Through Faculty-Led Study Abroad

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ABSTRACT

A review of national trends and best practices informs this analysis of key factors for high-impact teacher education programs abroad, particularly short-term faculty-led programs. Challenges faced by such programs, as well as criticisms of short-term study abroad are addressed and strategies proposed for fostering successful faculty-led programs including discussion of concerns regarding sustainability, curriculum integration, partnerships, student engagement, career integration, and safety and security.

INTRODUCTION

Study abroad grows as a focus of interest and importance within higher education as universities respond to the charge to prepare “global ready” graduates. In the 2012-2013 academic year, a record 289,408 U.S. students participated in study abroad (“Open doors data,” 2014). No longer viewed as principally relevant to students of foreign languages, international studies, and the humanities, a global education incorporating international experience is increasingly recognized as a vital component of higher education in the 21st century across all disciplines, including teacher education. The tangible value of the knowledge, skills, and experience acquired through study abroad is often demonstrated by students’ increased marketability upon graduation. In addition to increased knowledge of their field of study and, often, a foreign language, students return from abroad with increased intercultural skills, adaptability, ability to deal with ambiguity, ability to work and collaborate with diverse peoples, understanding of diverse viewpoints, cross-cultural sensitivity, curiosity about the world around them, and a stronger sense of independence and self-confidence. (“AIFS study abroad outcomes,” 2013).

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Preservice teachers face a potentially significant disadvantage without the opportunity to participate in such enriching educational experiences during their university training. As the world grows ever more connected and cities and towns across the United States host growing communities of recent arrivals including many English language learners (ELLs), the need for teachers equipped with the very skills earned through study abroad--cross-cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, foreign language skills, etc.--grows ever more acute. The classroom is a principal site of socialization; and without a workforce of culturally-competent teachers, the future potential of the most diverse United States ever known is reduced.

As study abroad enrollments grow, the variety of options available expands beyond the traditional semester and academic year programs to include the more flexible and increasingly popular short-term format. Unfortunately, most preservice teachers face more limited options than their non-Education major counterparts due to the more rigid sequencing in many teacher education curricula and restrictions within state licensing requirements; however, short-term models can be an effective solution to providing high-quality, accessible study abroad (Mullens & Cuper, 2012). Despite the short length, programs such as faculty-led summer study abroad experiences have high-impact potential (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007) and are an excellent fit for what can often be difficult curricula in which to integrate a study abroad experience. This chapter presents an overview of the faculty-led program model as a best practice for advancing teacher education through study abroad.

BACKGROUND

Despite an 87% increase in the overall number of U.S. study abroad participants since 2000-2001, the percentage of preservice teachers represented in the overall number of U.S. study abroad students has neither increased nor decreased, but rather remained a steady 4% since that time ("Open doors data," 2014). Possible explanations of why teacher education students do not study abroad as often as their counterparts include challenges previously mentioned such as rigid sequencing in the teacher education curriculum and restrictions due to state licensing requirements. A lack of viable study abroad program options for preservice teachers is another likely explanation. Some existing program models, such as exchanges and third-party study abroad programs, present specific challenges to students in teacher education that limit their potential for enrollment and participation.

Historically, the semester or academic year exchange format has dominated study abroad at most U.S. universities (Mullens & Cuper, 2012). An exchange program is born of reciprocity between two institutions in both sending and receiving students. Exchange programs typically require the participating student to pay the equivalent cost of tuition, room, and/or board at the home institution in exchange for similar benefits at the host institution. Although relatively affordable, exchange programs are often limited in scope because of the nature of the agreements. An exchange agreement may be signed between two institutions without much consideration as to whether the agreement will be mutually beneficial across a wide spectrum of disciplines. Many agreements are signed between two institutions based solely on the interest of one or two academic units. Therefore, many institutions offer exchange programs that are limited in scope and which may only benefit students from those one or two participating units.

Institutional and disciplinary barriers are cited as a major challenge for internationalizing teacher education programs (Cushner, 2009). The challenge of mapping the curriculum is another concern for teacher education students participating in exchange programs. In participating in an exchange program,

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