

Chapter 15

Faculty Memoirs: Study Abroad Business Program in China

Devi Akella
Albany State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The global nature of a contemporary economy emphasizes the need for business graduates to possess a global perspective, cultural sensitivity and the knowledge of language and culture of more than one country. Consequently, faculty driven, short-term, university study abroad programs allow students the opportunity to step outside the classroom and learn about the world in a safe, controlled and faculty regulated environment. ‘Learn by going’ (Keese & O’Brien, 2011) happens to be the most effective learning strategy. This chapter describes the experience of the author as an instructor and team member of a study abroad program to China. The author discusses the program, curriculum, pedagogies adopted, and learning outcomes of students. Critical reflections of her own involvement in this educational tour to China are also shared.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s global economy, it is essential for all business graduates to possess a global perspective, cultural sensitivity and the knowledge of language and culture of more than one country (Keese & O’Brien, 2011; Di Pietra, 2015). The wave of globalization is impacting not only business practices, customs, working environments, but also diversifying the entire labor force. More corporations, including US businesses, are now entering international markets, setting up factories in other countries and entering into alliances with foreign companies (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2013). Simultaneously, foreign companies are entering the US market. Employers are seeking business graduates who know about business principles, language, and culture of more than one country. In this context, a university study abroad experience provides ‘students with the opportunity to learn about the world and study critical global issues first-hand’ (Keese & O’Brien, 2011; Reynolds-Case, 2013; Wright & Larsen, 2012).

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Studies related to study abroad experiences have documented a variety of positive outcomes such as: cross-cultural awareness; heightened critical thinking and problem-solving skills; intercultural communication; maturity; openness to diversity; personal growth;; and tolerance (Mapp, 2012; Reynolds-Case, 2013; Gesinski, English & Tyson, 2010; DeGraaf, Slagter, Larsen & Ditta, 2013; Cai & Sankaran, 2015). Students are able to reduce their ethnocentrism and embrace the ideology of global citizenship (McCabe, 1994). The entire process involves ‘learn by going’ (Keese & O’Brien, 2011, p. 21). Even though long-term study abroad experiences are (more) effective, short-term programs ranging from 1-8 weeks allow students with financial constraints to travel abroad (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Short-term programs have been found to be effective in providing focused learning in a foreign location on a subsidized budget (Graham & Crawford, 2012; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Eckert, Luqmari, Newell, Qureshi & Wagner, 2013). A faculty-led program where faculty create programs for their students and accompany them as teachers and trip leaders, ‘proves a unique opportunity for students to step outside and learn about the world first hand’ (Keese & O’Brien, 2011; Clarke, Flaherty, Wright & McMillen, 2009; Graham & Crawford, 2012) in a controlled and faculty regulated environment. However, detailed descriptions of short-term faculty-led study abroad programs are limited in the associated literature.

This chapter describes and offers insights of staff and students from a faculty-led study abroad program to China in the Summer of 2013. It aims to contribute towards the limited literature on the overall impact of short-term study abroad programs on students’ cultural adaptability. The contents will be focused on the story of the author i.e., her journey to China as a study abroad instructor and team member. The author describes the program, curriculum, pedagogies adopted, and learning outcomes of students. This chapter concludes with her own perspective and reflections on this educational tour to China.

BACKGROUND

It is no longer possible to ignore the role of diversity and concept of multiculturalism. ‘[The] US has become so richly diverse that one does not need to travel more than a few blocks from campus to have a cross-cultural exposure, hear other languages spoken, meet people from different cultural traditions and discover religious practice different from our own’ (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009, p. 23). To survive and be successful as a business entrepreneur, executive or professional, all business graduates require multicultural competencies grounded in an understanding of international issues and settings (Di Pietro, 2015).

It is an advantage if business graduates possess cultural competency. Cultural competency is the ‘ability to respect cultural differences and shift to another cultural worldview’ (Abram & Cruce, 2007; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). Cultural competency involves becoming more sensitive to other cultures worldwide i.e., cultural sensitivity. Students are required to learn about themselves, reflect on their cultural values and how these values influence their decisions, and interpretation of events. Cultural sensitivity requires ‘recognizing what is common in common sense is what is shared in common with others from one’s culture’ (Condon, 1986, p. 19). Courses on cultural sensitivity and multiculturalism involve a process of disruption and critical awareness. Students are encouraged to reflect upon and challenge established ideas and beliefs. All taken-for-granted ideas and ideologies are deconstructed to expose the reality existing behind these age-old customs, traditions and habits (Alvesson, 2002).

The challenge in any study abroad program is to improve student’s multicultural and global competence. There is something powerful about being in a foreign country; constantly being exposed to novel experiences (Levine & Garland, 2015). These novel experiences challenge one’s common sense mode of

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