

University-Based Partnerships: Designing Short Term Study Abroad Opportunities for Graduate Students

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Original Articles

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Abstract:

University-based partnership provides an excellent foundation upon which to build graduate study abroad opportunities. A closed examination of specific phases in the study abroad model are discussed.

Assessment and evaluation of outcomes provides data to modify the design for continued success in different countries. Study abroad opportunities can be built into graduate level courses to strength global healthcare management education.

Introduction

Designing and building a University-based partnership model that allows for short term study abroad learning experiences requires a functional framework. Brazil is a country in South America that lends itself to short term study abroad (Vettori 2015). It is a country with unique health reforms for post graduate students to examine including the design of healthcare systems, institutions and organizations, as well as special services designed to meet specific needs of the population (Grag-nolati, Lindelow & Couttolenc 2013). Like most countries in the world, Brazil spends the majority of its healthcare budget on hospital care. Recent gross domestic product indicators show that healthcare spending is approximately 9% of the GDP (OECD, 2014). Brazil's health system is a mix of public and private funding streams and the government is the source for approximately 45% of spending. In today's global society, it is critical that post graduate students are exposed to international learning opportunities in areas of the world where healthcare systems are more developed and functional, as well as systems that are not well developed. This paper describes how to design study abroad experiences; structure various phases; and suggests teaching methods that enhance student learning outcomes (SLO).

The papers included in this special issue of the Journal of Clinical Social Work reflect research that was conducted by graduate students in preparation for a study abroad opportunity to Brazil in January 2016. The graduate level course used for study abroad is HAD 517 - Global Health Management (3 credits). This course is specifically designed and used to increase knowledge about the

goals of globalization; global health; and examine progress that has been made in improving global health over the last 50 years. The course utilizes the definition established by the World Health Organization that "... health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946).

Students are exposed to determinants of health; measurement of health status; the importance of culture to health; the global burden of disease; risk factors for different health conditions; epidemiologic and demographic transitions; and the overall organization and design of health services and systems in various countries. Use of the millennium development goals (MDGs), as formulated in 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, provides for targeted activities that are important for understanding global health issues (United Nations, 2016).

Preparation for study abroad also entails developing an understanding and appreciation for health, education, poverty and the economy. Cross cutting cultural themes involve ethical and human rights, and appropriate use of research methods. Each student is required to select a very specific area for focused research in preparation for the study abroad opportunity. This requires a more comprehensive understanding of the health systems services, culture and environment of health in a specific region or country. The course further examines women's health; children's health; adolescent's health, communicable diseases; non-communicable diseases; and ways of working together to improve global health.

Designed Phases of Study

The course on Global Health Management has a well-designed and articulated educational process that is composed of 3 distinct phases. The model design includes the pre-phase, which is approximately 2 to 3 months, involving academic preparation and research prior to actually traveling to another country. The study abroad phase, which is composed of 10 to 14 days, involves the actual visit to the country and participation in cultural activities, educational site visits and presentation of lectures at a University and healthcare institutions. The post study phase, which is approximately 1 to 2 months, is completed after the study abroad visit to another country. Each of these phases has specific educational activities and outcomes that develops graduate level skills, competencies and knowledge.

General Considerations

Short term study abroad is very different from more extended periods of academic study in another healthcare system and country. Certain universities utilize a semester study abroad opportunity (15 weeks) and other University based partnerships utilize a more extended period of time engaging in the provision of the healthcare and interventions usually as part of a larger project. Short term study abroad reduces the amount of time in another culture. Consequently, significant preparation is required in advance of the actual study abroad opportunity to prepare the student and structure learning opportunities. The University of Scranton in the Department of Health Administration & Human Resources, Graduate MHA Program, has developed a specialization in Global Health Management and utilizes elective courses for purposes of study abroad in different regions of the world. These courses have specific learning objectives that are outcome based and focus on developing

a specific applied body of knowledge. The course is competency-based with a results orientation. The study abroad opportunity occurs during semester breaks or at the end of an academic semester so as to not interfere with other regular academic courses. An essential ingredient of the success of these study abroad courses is the careful selection and nurturing of international peer University partners and their collaborating healthcare organizations that play a pivotal role in the design and implementation of this learning experience.

It is important to note that the study abroad elective courses and teaching requires rigor and relevancy. Normally 8 to 10 students, who are in post graduate training, travel with 2 to 3 faculty members. The ratio of students to faculty is intentionally designed to be small so that there is a high degree of faculty-student interaction, teaching opportunities during the course, reflection and exposure to culture.

Organization and Structure

The Pre-Phase

In this phase of study, faculty are meeting with the students in the classroom and attempting to build a foundational knowledge base and group cohesiveness. Readings and texts are assigned and discussed in class. Lectures are conducted. Each student is required to develop a professional topic related to their area of interest and to engage in self-directed research in order to fully develop the topic for presentation to professional audiences. Each student is also required to prepare, in advance of the study abroad, a PowerPoint presentation that is clear and concise. These presentations are designed for a 15 minute presentation to be given to professional audiences at universities and while visiting healthcare institutions.

It is during this pre-phase that attention is also devoted to travel preparation. Faculty members provide briefings on the countries that will be visited during study abroad, videos are presented from prior travel abroad experiences' and issues related to Visas and Passports are covered as well as insurance coverage, security, legal disclaimers and culture specific behaviors and norms. Students are required to make several presentations to the faculty and fellow students in advance of the study abroad. This provides an opportunity for refinement of the actual research presentation so that it is appropriately developed and referenced in the PowerPoint presentation.

The Study Abroad Phase

The study abroad phase involves traveling to the designated country and spending time on the ground in applied settings. During this phase students are required to keep a daily journal to document specific activities, thoughts, impressions and reflections. Members of the student delegation have an opportunity to take photographs that will be used to prepare a PowerPoint presentation upon return to the University. During the actual study abroad, students make presentations of their research to academics at universities and to healthcare providers in the community. Some of this research is also augmented with lectures from the host country. Professors at local universities in the host country are utilized to provide additional in-depth knowledge about healthcare services and systems. Site visits are conducted to healthcare facilities, interactions occur with professionals in the healthcare facility, and at the end of each day students are asked to reflect on the educational opportunities. It is important to note that during the study abroad phase reflection is an important teaching tool that requires faculty involvement. Time is spent with the students helping them to appropriately

digest and reflect on what they have seen, examine how they feel about what has been seen, and discuss what the implications are in terms of their own healthcare professional careers and future development.

The Post Phase

The post phase can last 1 to 2 months upon returning to the University. It is during this phase that students finalize their manuscript for presentation to the faculty as a course assignment for grading. It is also during this phase that students consider presenting their professional paper at a national or international conference or to further develop their research as a manuscript for publication in an appropriate journal. Students are assigned to 3 member teams to present their study abroad experience to first year MHA graduate students entering the MHA program. They are also asked to make presentations to undergraduate students in a cultural diversity class. Finally, each student is required to undergo an oral examination at which time all of the research, reflection papers, journal entries, assignments and readings for the course are examined.

Assessment and Evaluation

Study abroad opportunities need to be carefully designed and implemented. They also need to be evaluated. This requires the use of assessment and evaluation processes whereby student skills, knowledge and competencies are evaluated, as well as looking at the overall course experience in Global Health Management. Students are asked to assess the course and instructors in addition to assessing their own skills, competencies, knowledge and abilities. During this assessment and evaluation phase the research topic selection is evaluated, PowerPoint presentations reviewed, debriefing sessions assessed as well as grading the actual presentations that are made internationally and

domestically. Students find that the oral examination, which usually lasts 45 to 60 minutes, is an appropriate assessment process of the Global Health Management course learning experience.

Conclusion

A well rounded Jesuit education requires that students be provided with opportunities for learning about the larger community (the world) in which they live. Students need to understand the global aspects of healthcare and that there are no country borders when it comes to health. The internationalization of health requires that students develop specific knowledge, skills, and competencies that enable them to understand and appreciate complex healthcare systems. Students are also exposed to learning opportunities in healthcare systems that are in low- and middle-income countries. They need to understand poverty and complex social problems. Furthermore, students need to be exposed to models and frameworks that enable them to appreciate the constraints that are placed on healthcare systems, and have an appreciation for how access, cost and quality is organized and addressed in another country or region of the world. The Global Health Management course (study abroad) provides an opportunity for post graduate training programs to address global health issues; to provide students with an understanding of government systems and private payer systems; social health insurance;

communicable and non-communicable diseases. Finally, Global Health Management enables students to study governance, leadership and management structures in different countries that are used to improve and strengthen health systems.

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