

Current trends in Study Abroad: The U.S. Perspective

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Introduction

This is a very exciting time in international education in the U.S. and across the globe. Increasingly, and some would argue at long last, American leaders, in education, business and government, are recognizing the profound value that results from studying abroad – international knowledge, intercultural awareness and global perspectives. This increased interest has led many universities to focus on global education, expanding the opportunities abroad for students to experience foreign cultures by diversifying the program models, destinations and fields of study. This is all good news and the current rates of growth are likely to continue. Yet, rapid internationalization also creates its problems and rhetoric often outstrips reality. Issues of quality control, oversight, risk and safety, as well as the challenges posed by managing an increasingly complex portfolio of programs, are becoming of paramount importance.

In this paper, I review general patterns in changes in U.S. study abroad over the past decade or so, illustrating some of these issues from the experiences of my own university, Washington University-Saint Louis. My focus will be on undergraduate students and on study abroad. Although I will not specifically be examining the many other forms of internationalization at American universities (including attracting international students and faculty), many of the new and innovative programs that are being developed work with many different parts of the educational institution. I will talk about one such program, the McDonnell International Scholars Academy at my own university that combines undergraduate and graduate education, as well as international students and study abroad into the same overarching program.

As we are all swept along by the tide of global education, and increase our efforts to meet the needs of our students and the interests of our faculty in this arena, we must remember to keep a clear view of what the educational value and quality of the programming is and to continually ask ourselves how best to use scarce, or at least shared, university resources.

Simon Act

Many of you will have heard of the Simon Act that is working its way through the U.S. Congress. The purposes of this act are to significantly expand study abroad opportunities for U.S. college students by establishing an endowed grants program. At the moment, the act has passed the congress but has not yet passed through the senate.

I am going to use some of the language in that Act to make some general points about study abroad. The legislation emphasizes the general recognition in the U.S. that in order to enhance our global competitiveness we need to enhance the international knowledge of our students. It goes on to argue that Study Abroad has proven to be an effective way of imparting international and foreign-language competency to students.

It quotes President George W. Bush as saying, 'America's leadership and national security rest on our commitment to educate and prepare our youth for active engagement in the international community.'

Study Abroad is defined by the Act as "An educational program of study, work, research, or internship that is conducted outside the U.S. and that carries academic credit toward fulfilling the student's degree requirements." Note how broad this definition is and describes a field that has moved well beyond the sit-in-a-classroom for a semester or a year program model. We will return to some of these points about "work, research and internships" later in the talk.

The Simon Act has four primary goals. I will look at these each in turn, noting the current status and the goals set by the act. They are:

- 1) Making study abroad a cornerstone of American Higher Education
- 2) Increasing participation in quality study abroad programs
- 3) Encouraging diversity in student participation in study abroad
- 4) Diversifying locations of study abroad, especially in developing countries.

1) Importance of study abroad. Although the benefits of studying abroad seem self-evident to those of us in this field, our cause now has the support of leaders in government, the private sector as well as in education who recognize the life-long effects. Not only do they gain substantial language skills, but they have measurably greater perspective (historical and philosophical), are more able to question beliefs, achieve personal growth and enhance their careers.

2) Increasing participation in quality study abroad programs. Despite the attention to international education, U.S. students still study abroad in relatively low numbers. Only 1% or about 200,000 U.S. students study abroad in any one year. Still there has been impressive growth over the past 10 years, increasing nine percent a year. (see chart)

3) Increasing diversity: This is an area of considerable concern in the U.S. The typical profile of a study abroad student is a white female from an affluent family who attends a four-year college or university. The students from minority groups, less affluent backgrounds, in community colleges, are much less well represented. (see chart)

4) Diversifying the locations of study abroad, especially in developing countries. Most U.S. students are studying in Western Europe and they are concentrated in 4 countries (see chart). But still there has been an increasing shift to Africa, Latin America and China. China is now the 8th leading host destination for American students.

Moving Beyond the Rhetoric

Setting goals of sending 1 million more diverse students abroad each year to more diverse locations sound like reasonable, albeit ambitious goals, yet the business of study abroad is a complex one and these broad strokes hide many other forms of diversity.

I am going to speak about diversity of disciplines, of program design, of duration of program, as well as level of study. All of these enrich, or complicate the landscape of study abroad and put particular management demands on study abroad offices as they try to accommodate these various interests.

First, is the very profound shift in the fields studied abroad. The “traditional” model of the area studies and language students dominating the study abroad population is certainly not true today, if it ever was (see chart). We are sending social scientists abroad in bigger number than any other fields, followed by business and management. Fields we had thought dominated study abroad – foreign languages and humanities represent a smaller share overall. This has very significant implications for the faculty oversight and management of study abroad programs. The faculty who tend to sit on governing committees, setting policy and deciding on program design, are often drawn from the language and humanities departments given their own training and interests. Yet, the students they are

designing programs for are often not the ones in their classes. This becomes especially problematic, when designing new programs for natural science, premedical and engineering students whose training often does not allow for the extensive preparation in language and area studies. Developing high standards of preparation and academic rigor abroad that make sense by the standards of their own disciplines, is a high priority.

This change in student demographic also puts into question the model of program we adopt. Increasingly, for example, students, and faculty, are interested in programs of shorter duration, accomplished during a summer or even a mid-term break. The Simon Act proposes a balance between longer-term programs which maximize foreign-language learning and intercultural understanding and shorter-term programs which maximize the accessibility of study abroad to nontraditional students. This tension is a creative one, but one that requires tolerance and flexibility across these disciplinary divides.

These new fields and durations of programs also allows for an evermore complex landscape of academic designs. Increasingly, we see students searching for programs with a thematic focus. Rather than choosing a program at a French university to study French language and culture, they choose a program on Immigration and Identity in France that explores issues of multiculturalism and ethnicity in contemporary France. We have seen a huge increase in interest in public health, in development studies and in peace and conflict studies. These new thematic programs may also incorporate volunteer or service learning activities, or internships, all of which are on the top of student's interests and challenging the standard models.

Furthermore, the era of the "junior year abroad" has almost disappeared. We are still sending you more of our third year students than any others, but rarely for a whole year, and more and more students going abroad in the summer do so after their first or second year.

While this is all very exciting and brings new ideas and people into the field, it also puts a strain on existing management resources and oversight. Although there is much more attention to quality control, and academic integration, these new, often shorter, programs are often difficult to evaluate and to award credit for. It takes a patient faculty and a determined study abroad officer to wade through these complexities.

These new programs in less traveled locations, often, also represent new risks and potential for health and safety problems. We have become much better as a field in managing and planning for such

problems, but this requires constant vigilance and attention. It is a rapidly changing landscape out there – as all of us who send students to Kenya know right now.

The expectations of our students and families for very high levels of medical care, often psychological as well as physical, or at least medical care that is familiar to them, and other kinds of support abroad is a whole new area of professional development for my field of study abroad. Not only do we have to do our best to prepare our students for what they will find abroad, in each location, but we have to communicate with our partners on our own campus and abroad to make sure everyone is well informed.

Many of these new responsibilities indicate the increasing professionalization of the field of study abroad and are positive additions to our toolkits. We used to send students off with very little preparation. Now, we have designed a course “Study Abroad 101” that introduces our students not only to the practicalities of traveling abroad but to issues of cross-cultural communication, to differing gender expectations and behaviors.

Implications for OPIR universities

The very good news for the Asian universities represented at this workshop, is the increasing willingness for U.S. students to venture beyond Western Europe and explore other parts of the world. Enrollments in Chinese language at our universities have increased dramatically in recent years, and our Washington University-Saint Louis is scrambling to keep up with this demand and to provide study abroad opportunities for these students. There is, furthermore, an increased interest in Asia from other fields, whether that is international studies, economics, and political science. The challenge there is that many of these students will not have advanced language skills and will need instruction in English. They will also be looking for both depth and breadth in the English coursework to meet their specific interests – say in traditional medicine – but also their broad interests in politics and society. We are taking a closer look at what our students are taking while abroad, putting more expectations on them to explore advanced study whenever possible in a major field. More challenging, in many ways, is the entry of engineering and natural science students who have are attracted to the excellent facilities and depth of your faculty and course offerings, yet have very stringent requirements in their degree programs in the U.S. and very little flexibility in exploring culture or language. Cooperation of our faculty as well as study abroad staff is crucial to allow for joint planning and programming for these students.

Another area that is increasingly complex is the funding structure of study abroad, exchange programs and short-term programs. Very few U.S. universities want to see their tuition dollars, and financial aid

monies, shipped overseas in significant amounts and with the growth of numbers; we must be sensitive to those concerns. Funding sources like the Freeman, Gilman and Boren Scholarships can make a significant difference in the affordability of study abroad in Asia for both students and universities.

A final area I would mention is the integration of U.S. students into your universities and your own domestic study abroad programs. We are always trying to get our American students out of the U.S. bubble and are very appreciative of programs of housing, co-curricular activities, and short-term travel opportunities that integrate U.S. students with Asian counterparts. We know you work very hard on this already, and appreciate your efforts, but I am just emphasizing how high a priority this is for our faculty and staff.

Washington University example

I want to give you a quick snapshot of my own university to illustrate some of the general points I have made above. Washington University in St. Louis was founded in 1853 and is ranked in the top twenty of U.S. research universities. We have about 12,000 students, nearly half are graduate students.

Quick Facts about Study Abroad at Washington University:

- Approximately 500 A&S students study abroad during a calendar year
- About 320 students study abroad, mostly for 1 semester, during the academic year
- Another 180 or so study abroad during the summer
- This represents a 105% growth in numbers of students in the last ten years
- 35% of Arts & Sciences graduating seniors report having participated in a study abroad program for a semester, a summer or a year
- 90 programs are offered in 50 different countries
- Most popular destinations by country during the academic year (06-07): United Kingdom (98 students), Spain (30), Australia (24), France and Italy (22 each)
- Most popular destinations by country during the summer (06): France and Spain (21 each), England (20), China (19), Mexico (18)
- Summer programs are increasingly popular, many focusing on intensive language learning as well as area-specific content courses, and are offered in China, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, and Spain. Summer programs have grown by 34% in the last five years.

Strategic Planning at Washington University-Saint Louis

Over a ten year period (1997-2007), we had dedicated most of our energies to develop and strengthen the traditional model of study abroad in the junior year. This model of has had many advantages – it maintained high standards of academic excellence and oversight, emphasized cultural and academic immersion, allowed for advanced academic work by our students while abroad, and exposed our students to the different pedagogical and academic traditions abroad. We continue to be dedicated to this model (and the KCJS program is an excellent example of this model and our commitment to it).

While nearly 500 students currently benefit from our nearly 90 study abroad program options each year (compared to 300 students a decade ago –see attached tables), this model has not specifically promoted those attitudes and skills being discussed in the next strategic plan for Arts and Sciences within our university - namely leadership, civic engagement and global reach. We believe that we can continue to strengthen our existing programs abroad while strategically innovating to extend international opportunities to a broader student population, in support of the University mission statement's emphasis on preparing students "with the attitudes, skills and habits of lifelong learning and with leadership skills, enabling them to be useful members of a global society."

So we have begun several initiatives to diversify our offerings: 1) funding. We are working to generate gifts to the university for study abroad development and scholarships to help diversify our student participation and programming; 2) Faculty involvement. We are continuing to involve as wide a group of faculty as possible, because their support and belief in study abroad is so critical to our mission. We have developed a number of short-term summer programs, such as this program in a small village in India, that is small, research and service oriented, and builds on faculty research; 3) To promote civic engagement we have launched a new service learning in Chile that will place students in internships in community health organizations; 4) we continue to try to offer professional internships for our students. This one pictured is in the Arts. 5) The McDonnell International Scholars Academy, which was established in 2005, has the goal of producing leaders in the international academic world. It currently has 23 partner universities, including 16 universities in Asia and many represented here today. Fourteen global corporations sponsor the Academy and allow it to fund graduate students with scholarships to attend Washington University-Saint Louis as well as research and conferences, focusing on Energy and Environment. From that strong basis we are developing study abroad opportunities for our undergraduates at a number of the partner universities, hoping to establish close links at both the undergraduate as well as the graduate level. These kinds of multi-sector activities that span multiple schools within a university, multiple faculties and student groups, as well as have diverse activities (conferences, workshops, as well as degree programs) hold great promise for the future of Washington University-Saint Louis and others.

As you can see, we have come a long way but still have many more avenues to explore.

The Future

The future is bright for study abroad. Increasingly, Americans believe that it is important for their children to learn other languages, study abroad, attend a college where they can interact with

international students, and generally be prepared for the global age. Study abroad, in its many and varied forms, has a great deal to contribute to this goal. New areas that deserve further exploration, I believe are thinking more clearly about career skills and how study abroad, beyond the generalizations, specifically enhances their development. In the meantime, the contribution by Asian universities to the education of American undergraduates is deeply appreciated and I look forward to many years of fruitful collaboration.

Current Trends in Study Abroad:

The U.S. Perspective

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The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act

Program Goals:

To create a more globally informed American citizenry



International Knowledge

“America's leadership and national security rest on our commitment to educate and prepare our youth for active engagement in the international community.”

President George W. Bush



Study Abroad Definition

“An educational program of study, work, research, or internship that is conducted outside the U.S. and that carries academic credit toward fulfilling the student's degree requirements.”



Simon Act Goals

- 1) Making study abroad a cornerstone of today's higher education.
- 2) Increasing participation in quality study abroad programs.
- 3) Encouraging diversity in student participation in study abroad.
- 4) Diversifying locations of study abroad, particularly in developing countries.

1) Making study abroad a cornerstone of today's higher education

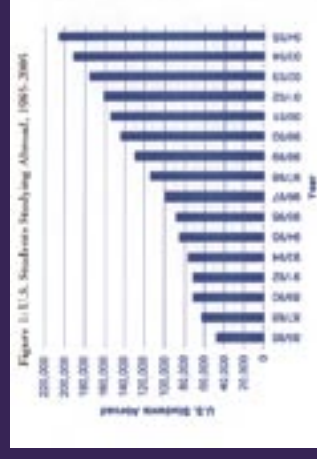


U.S. universities placing a high priority on internationalizing undergraduate education

2) Increasing participation in quality study abroad programs

- In any year, only 1% of all students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education study abroad.
- Less than 10% of the students who graduate from U.S. universities with a BA degree have studied abroad.

Growth in Study Abroad

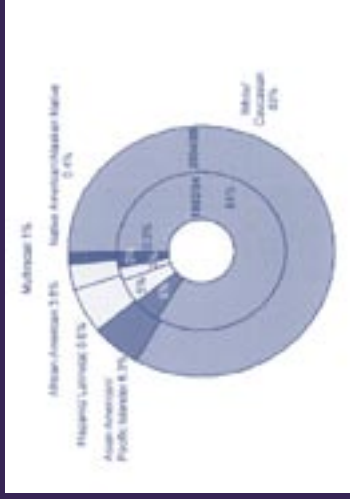


3) Encouraging diversity in student participation in study abroad



WU student on KCJS Program

Race and Ethnicity, 1993/4 and 2004/5



4) Diversifying locations of study abroad, particularly in developing countries



- In 2004-5, 60% of U.S. students abroad studied in Europe
- 45% studied in 4 countries (UK, Italy, Spain and France)

Top Ten Destinations, 1985/6, 1994/5, 2004/5

Rank	1985/6	1994/5	2004/5
1	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
2	France	France	Italy
3	Spain	Spain	Spain
4	Italy	Italy	France
5	Germany, Fed. Rep. of	Mexico	Australia
6	Mexico	Germany	Mexico
7	Israel	Australia	Germany
8	Australia	Israel	China
9	Japan	Costa Rica	Ireland
10	China	Japan	Costa Rica

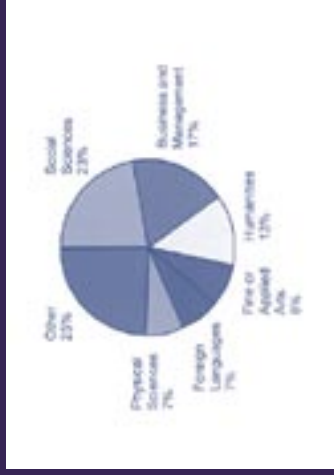
Goals Set by Simon Act

- > 1 million students per year
- > Demographics reflect undergraduate population
- > Non-traditional locations



WU student in Kenya

Fields of Study of U.S. Students Abroad, 2004/5



Duration of Study Abroad, 1993-2005



Thematic Programs Abroad

Gender Roles in Fiji



Implications for OPIR Universities



Student Photo Contest
Erhai Lake, Dali, China

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Washington University Destinations

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Washington U.'s Mission Statement

Places emphasis on preparing students “with the attitudes, skills and habits of lifelong learning and with leadership skills, enabling them to be useful members of a global society.”

Faculty-led Summer Programs

In rice field, Andhra Pradesh, with Wash U students



Washington University in St. Louis

International Internships

Bunraku training



Washington University in St. Louis

McDonnell International Scholars

Trip to Washington, DC



Washington University in St. Louis

The Future is Bright!



WU students in Australia

Washington University in St. Louis