

Embedding international experiences in business curriculum design: cultivating a study abroad program

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ABSTRACT

In business education, the impacts of the globalization of markets, financial institutions, and economies exert increasing influence on the curriculum in business schools. Schools of business recognize the need to embed international experiences into their curriculum in order to prepare students for global context of the marketplace. Often, developing a study abroad program provides an excellent venue for achieving the aim of incorporating a focus on global and international business into the curriculum. This research outlines experiences in developing a study abroad program within the College of Business at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU). A comparison and contrast of six faculty-led study abroad trips is given in order to demonstrate how faculty-led study abroad programs provide both rigorous and relevant educational opportunities that increase the global and international competencies in students. As is the case with many colleges of business seeking or maintaining AACSB accreditation, developing and providing a global focus in the curriculum is an imperative. The research demonstrates that faculty-led study abroad programs are a viable venue for achieving this mission. Important aspects of designing a study abroad trip such as location, cultural immersion, academic rigor, and linking learning goals and objectives to the college mission and learning objectives for each trip are discussed.

Keywords: curriculum, assessment, study abroad, global, faculty, business culture, AACSB

INTRODUCTION

In the last century, various new technologies have made the world smaller by allowing cultural, political and business transactions across different time zones and countries. For business educators, this transformation creates new imperatives for educational goals and for the design of curricula. As a result, many universities have recognized this change and have responded by adding courses which emphasize international and global issues in business. While much can be achieved in classrooms, students may have the best opportunities to appreciate aspects and facets of the internationalization of business by developing first-hand experiences outside of their own culture and context. A means of achieving this end exists in developing study abroad programs which encourage students to experience business and life in other countries. Traveling to other countries not only gives students a chance to see how businesses operate differently, but also exposes them to other beliefs, value structures, and attitudes. Recognizing and reconciling with these differences provide a foundation for a business student to truly develop a global perspective in their education. While the face validity of extending business education with a study abroad program is fairly apparent, the form and method of delivery for these experiences varies significantly. Therefore, it is difficult to recommend a best practice for study abroad programs designed to increase global awareness for business students. These opportunities hinge significantly on the mission, educational goals, and overall disposition of the institution. Additionally, as this research is written from the perspective of West Texas A&M University (WTAMU), a small to medium sized regional institution in North America, experiences may not compare to schools situated differently.

This research examines strategies and alternatives which can be used to develop a study abroad program to meet the need to increase global awareness and perspectives in business education. The research stresses the importance of designing a study abroad program which is tied to the mission, goals, and objectives of the college. The research stresses the external validation for such programs from the perspective of accreditation bodies, such as The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). For example, a study abroad program which anchors students' experiences within the normal college-wide curriculum is preferential. In order for a viable study abroad program to develop and flourish, it is also necessary for the approach to be consistent with the tendencies, intentions, and desires of the faculty. Thus, when coupled with accreditation efforts, faculty interest and mission alignment are most likely to be synchronized. The research provides a reflection of past faculty experiences, and it is proposed that faculty-led study abroad programs meet all of these considerations.

This research proceeds as follows: First, the paper provides a background and experiences account of developing a study abroad program. The paper speaks to opportunities and alternatives available for the study abroad program. A SWOT analysis is then performed to provide insight for the rationale driving the design decisions and learning opportunities from WTAMU program efforts and the proclivity towards faculty-led programs. The paper then describes and explains why aspects of some faculty-led excursions are shown more effective than others. These experiences have provided a rich context from which further illustration presents a key conundrum and challenge for study abroad program design: that is the balance between rigor and relevance. Next, the paper provides discussion of key design considerations which address the need to balance rigor and relevance in a study abroad program. It is important to plan a trip that is rigorous and relevant to course content; one that could not be mistaken as a

vacation. The paper provides concluding remarks for moving forward with study abroad experiences which maintain a focus on providing global experiences for students.

BACKGROUND

Overview of Study Abroad Programs

Every year, the Institute of International Education and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs partner to produce the Open Doors Report. This report provides statistics about students who studied abroad during the previous academic year. According to the 2011 report, "Study abroad by students enrolled in U.S. higher education has more than tripled over the past two decades (Open Doors, 2011)." During the 2009-2010 academic year, 270,604 students from the United States studied abroad and of those participants, 21% were business and management students. While it may seem that study abroad has become very popular, it is important to remember that there are around 20 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States. This means that only about 1% of students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities study abroad during their academic career. The report revealed that the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and China were the top destinations for study abroad. There is little doubt that Europe is a popular destination for North Americans. Knowing this, perhaps it is unexpected that, "Fifteen of the top 25 destinations were outside of Western Europe and nineteen were countries where English is not a primary language (Open Doors, 2011)."

As a business professional, it is best to describe and discuss the nature of study abroad programs in the language and lexicon of those who are involved in the industry. There are several ways to approach this. This study considers the value and shortcomings of various types of study abroad programs currently offered and being developed in the United States. There are two main types of study abroad programs: Academic year/semester abroad and faculty-led, short-term trips. Both types of trips have distinct differences, meaning there are advantages and disadvantages of each style.

Strategies for Comparing Study Abroad Programs

In this section, the research presents a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis to examine the differences between long-term study abroad programs and faculty-led, short-term study abroad programs. This analysis was chosen because it is a known industry-wide method of decision-making and strategic planning and analysis (Pickton, 1998; Rudzki, 1995). Using SWOT for this analysis is an effective means of integrating the educational objectives of a business school given the focus of this paper. A summary of the SWOT analysis information is provided in Table 1 Appendix A.

Academic Year or Semester Abroad

Students that choose to take part in a study abroad program that will last for an academic year or semester are more likely to travel alone with little or no supervision from their academic institution back in their home country. Because they are traveling by themselves and for a longer period of time, this category of student will be more likely to fully experience the culture and potentially learn the language. Being gone for at least three or four months gives students a chance to become completely immersed in the way of life of the host country. This can give

them a taste of what is it like to be a citizen instead of a visitor of that country. The obvious strength here is the level of immersion to which the student is subjected. In a completely new environment it is axiomatic that a longer exposure will result in more well-developed perspectives and ideas concerning language, culture, politics, business and any other element including, but not limited to, the original objectives of the program (Hadis, 2005).

Semester and academic year programs are more expensive. This restricts participants to those students with more money or those that are willing to take out large student loans. This restriction limits the number of individuals who are willing and able to participate in a program which otherwise displays obvious strengths (Toncar, 2006). While some students may not participate for financial reasons, others, who have never traveled abroad or who are shy, are not likely to choose to study abroad if this is their only option. Long-term commitments to international travel can be unappealing to students who have not often left their comfort zone. An unpredictable weakness of the long-term program is that courses taken while abroad may not meet the curriculum standards of the home college. This would cause the student to gain credit for a course without learning the necessary learning goals and objectives needed to succeed with a business degree upon graduation. While the student may gain valuable experience and life lessons from another country, they may be deficient in a particular area of study. This deficiency is prevented through standards and accreditation of the home school, but these controls are not necessarily present overseas. Similarly, programs may advertise criteria and curricula similar to the home college, but the possibility exists that these programs may not be very academically rigorous. A student may leave the program with a cursory knowledge of specific principles and practices without a thorough understanding of their importance. Again, without the controls of domestic accreditation and standards, it is difficult to ensure consistency and rigor.

Students choosing this type of experience are also more likely to experience personal development while away. Their maturity level and understanding of the world are likely to expand giving them a new perspective when they return to their home country (Hadis, 2005). These students are also more likely to develop a network of friends and acquaintances while abroad that could lead to incidental opportunities to experience something special or unique while there. New friends are more likely to invite the student to their home to share a meal or holiday. It is also likely that they may meet someone that can provide the student with an experience they will never forget like an outing on a sailboat or a tour of a local business. The opportunities being discussed here are organic in nature, and do not lend themselves well to the tight scheduling found in trips of short duration. These are opportunities which require time and the development of personal relationships in order to be realized.

Economic and geopolitical instability is the most serious of the threats to this type of trip. Unlikely as it may be, the possibility of social, financial or governmental collapse in the host country is a threat to the program. This could happen to anyone while on any trip but it is more likely on a semester or year-long study abroad trip due to the length of time that the student would be in a different country; longer exposure permits a higher likelihood of such an event. In the same vein, students on these long trips are more likely to experience some sort of natural disaster while away. Even though individuals may have the chance of experiencing this at any time, it would be more stressful while in a new country away from friends and family. Overly cautious parents and family members are less likely to support this type of trip due to perceived safety and security concerns for their child or loved one (Toncar, 2006).

Faculty-led Study Abroad Trips

Faculty-led study abroad trips are usually much shorter trips where the student travels with a group of students from their own university. Advantages of this type of trip are that the course is taught by a faculty member of their own university and the course content is specific to the learning goals and objectives of that course. Because a faculty member is leading the trip they can custom tailor the trip to be focused on a specific topic and they have the opportunity to make sure the course is as rigorous as it would be if it were taught at home (Duke, 2000). The trip is also likely to be relatively inexpensive due to economies of scale. Because large groups are often given a discount and a chartered bus costs the same regardless of the number of passengers, students are likely to travel to and within a country for less money than if they had traveled to that country alone.

Of course, as with academic year and semester abroad trips, faculty-led trips have their own disadvantages. The most obvious weakness is their short length. The standard study abroad trip at WTAMU is fourteen days with two or three of those days being spent traveling to and from the destination. This is a very short amount of time and does not allow students to be immersed into the culture of the country. Limited exposure prohibits well-developed perspectives, and could, in some cases, merely reinforce negative stereotypes. Another weakness is that students are more likely to have less freedom on this type of trip. Most trips have rigorously scheduled days, as the instructors are attempting to provide as much content as possible in a short amount of time, and the students are expected to be on board with the structure and time constraints of the trip. This does not allow them very much time to explore on their own and limits their interaction with any elements of the host country not included in the itinerary. Internal group conflict is another disadvantage to these trips. Because students and faculty are together for fourteen days, it is very likely that there will be some problems due to different personalities and the way people react to changes in the schedule (Younes, 2003). It has been observed that most trips develop cliques which invariably lead to people feeling left out or secluded. While it is easy to recognize that there are problems with group dynamics, it is also important to recognize the impact an individual can have on the program. If a student has physical or emotional problems while on the trip, their issues will affect the value of the program for every other person on the trip; a student that is not used to walking long distances may hold up the group when going from place to place. Students with health problems may need more attention or help from the faculty leader which can in turn make it hard for the faculty member to lead and educate the rest of the group. The group, like a chain, is only as strong as the weakest link.

The faculty-led trip is unique in that people outside the group often recognize it for what it is. Knowing what to expect on the part of individuals in the host country can open doors for faculty-led trips which would potentially be closed for the individuals participating in long-term programs. Some businesses may be more receptive to showing a group around their office/space/warehouse than they would be to show individuals around. Also, because the faculty member leading the group chose the location of the trip, they are likely to have some personal contacts in that location. Those personal contacts have their own network of associates, and so on. This professional-to-professional level of networking can offer the students of the faculty-led trip opportunities which would be unavailable to a student alone in a host country.

There are also outside threats to this type of trip. Since the group is being led by someone else, there is the opportunity that the trip could be cancelled at the last minute due to an emergency or illness of the leader. If the group is traveling to a country that requires a visa, it

would be nearly impossible to find a replacement in time for the trip. The reliance on the individual in charge, as well as the contacts of the faculty members creates a choke point in the program: one issue, complication or unexpected cancellation by one person will have an impact on the entire program. Depending on the flexibility and contingency plans of the program, the unexpected failure of a single person could have a resounding impact on the value of the program. Another potential threat is that the group would be more likely to stand out as tourists due to the number of people traveling together. Certain destinations are safe enough that this would not matter but it is certainly something to consider when choosing a location.

While there are certain differences between the two main types of study abroad programs, it is easy to see that faculty-led trips offer more focused instruction in line with the learning objectives of a course. When considering the weaknesses of a long-term program in regards to relevance and academic rigor, it is clear why faculty members are more comfortable giving credit for a trip and course over which they have more control.

Once a college commits to providing faculty-led study abroad trips for students, the institution must then decide what type of faculty-led trip to offer. The College of Business at WTAMU has utilized three types of faculty-led trips: a partnership with another university, trips based on personal contacts, and a pre-packaged trip developed by a third-party travel agency. The next section will conduct a SWOT analysis for each type of trip. A summary of the SWOT analysis information is provided in Table 2 Appendix B.

Partner with Another University

The biggest advantage of this style of program is that the foreign university has local contacts with local businesses. Because they are familiar with the industry of the area, they know about some of the unique businesses that may not be common or even known in the home country. Another advantage is that the two schools can develop a reciprocal agreement allowing students from both universities to travel abroad (Green, 1996). This is advantageous to participants traveling to the United States, as they have the opportunity to can talk to many different classes/students about their own culture and bring an international perspective to the courses that they take in the US. Also, because two school administrators are working together, they are more likely to have similar needs and goals for the trips for their students.

As with all partnerships, there are also weaknesses to consider. One partner can contribute less than the other partner leaving one side feeling like they have been taken advantage of (Green, 1996). Difficulties in communications and in cultures will invariably generate misunderstandings which, while to be expected, can have a negative impact on the program and the students who wish to participate. The flexibility of the instructors in question will determine whether or not this is used as a “teachable moment,” but the likelihood of such differences resulting in a negative outcome necessarily makes them an administrative weakness.

This type of trip facilitates exposure to what would be otherwise considered inaccessible, or at the very least less accessible places. Because some countries require a visa in order to visit, they seem more intimidating, unfamiliar and threatening. Having a reciprocal agreement between two educational institutions makes the receipt of a visa more likely. Similarly, knowing and having established contacts in a region which was previously unappealing makes them not only more accessible, but more appealing. This means that students who would have otherwise not been able to travel to a particular place will be able to and the experience will be more meaningful as a result of the continued cooperation of the home and host countries.

It is also possible that the university/partner in the foreign country could experience budget problems or policy changes that could affect the agreement between the schools. Because the exchange of students did not occur at the same time, it is also possible that one school allow students to come for a semester and then the problems/changes mentioned above could occur before the other school had a chance to send their students. This would create a breakdown in the reciprocal nature of the program, and end it as a matter of necessity. This program relies on the good will and equal participation of both sides, and the failure of either of those elements on either side will destroy the program and lessen the impact and utility of a study abroad program (Green, 1996).

Personal Network

Another style of faculty-led trip is one that is based on a personal contact/network. One of the obvious advantages of this type of trip is that the trip leader has a contact for local businesses in the home country and area of interest. Also, because the faculty member developing the trip knows a contact in the host country, the associate(s) of the host country can collaborate with the leader from the home country to find businesses and/or cultural sites that are tailored to the needs of the trip and the objectives of the home country's institution. While this style of trip is similar to a partnership with another university, the strengths lie in the flexibility of the individual contact to meet the requests of the group.

One disadvantage of this type of trip is that it is less likely for there to be a traditional classroom environment. While borrowing a space is possible, a classroom is not necessarily built into this style of program. If the local contact does not have access to a classroom setting, it will be important for the faculty leader to find time to meet with their students to discuss what they have seen and are learning each day. This could take time away from the program, since the leader must meet individually rather than collectively. The personal contact style has some of the same weaknesses and limitations as other programs discussed above, as much of the success or failure of the trip is dependent on individuals. Individuals, while they can exhibit more flexibility than institutions, are also more susceptible to illness or accident. If the contact for the program is indisposed, the progress of the program stops, and value is lost.

Flexibility, as mentioned before is a definite advantage associated with this style. Because the faculty member developed the schedule, it is possible for them to change the schedule as needed. If, for example, the local contact hears of a good opportunity for the students while they are on the trip, the faculty leader and local contact can make arrangements to take advantage of the new opportunity. It is the flexibility within the parameters of the already known and understood goals of the program that make incidental opportunities more viable for participants in the program. Without this level of flexibility, the likelihood of a group being able to take advantage of said opportunities diminishes.

Institutions have more than one person that can help facilitate the trip if your personal contact becomes indisposed. Personal contacts often do not have this alternative available. This would generate obvious problems during the trip. The more the group relies on the personal contact, the more at risk they are for the trip to fail. It is also possible that a personal contact may not meet expectations of the group, the instructor, or the home institution. There is a great deal of trust involved in the personal contact method of developing a study abroad program. All of the elements of any other international negotiation must be considered when planning this type of program. The threats which come from culture and language are the same. The unintentional

failure of a program or element of a trip can be the consequence of a misunderstanding, illness, or lack of interest on the part of an individual.

Pre-packaged Trips

While the research has discussed trips which have been planned by instructors, institutions and their associates, one should not forget the available package trips organized by a third party. Using a pre-packaged trip allows faculty to have more time teaching and interacting with the students instead of worrying about logistics. Similarly, package trips often have built-in contingency plans. The package organization is a business, and as such, needs to be able to cover any losses in personnel, any lapses in planning, or any failures in logistics. The pre-packaged trip is often guaranteed by the full weight and good will of the organization. This kind of guarantee is unavailable in other types of study abroad programs, and is a reassuring factor for parents when considering the cost of study abroad.

Pre-packaged trips are not traditionally associated with university study. As a matter of course, they are not likely to meet the needs and objectives of the college. The likelihood of a classroom environment for the group to use is low, and there is little room for tailoring to the needs and objectives of the program. This could be detrimental to the trip if the faculty member cannot find a good place to reflect and discuss the trip with the students. Similarly, there is less opportunity for this type of trip to be as customized to the needs of the faculty and students; these businesses make their money on tourists, not students from accredited universities. Travel agencies may not have many contacts with local businesses for a behind-the-scenes look at how the business is run, as this is not their forte; travel agencies are more likely to have shopping and tours scheduled. These are not often wellsprings of educational opportunities.

This could also be a good opportunity for students because the trip may end up being cheaper this way due to the purchasing power of the third-party travel agency who might have deals with local hotels and restaurants. The opportunities from this style of program lie mainly in their ability to include students which may not otherwise be involved in a study abroad program. Students who have limited resources will be met with a lower price point. Students and parents who shy away from uncertainty are met with an established service program with good reviews. Participants who may worry about the availability of time to explore retail opportunities as a way to investigate entrepreneurial options can often be assured, at the very least, ample shopping time.

Travel agencies may have business problems of their own that could affect the trip. Financial problems or personnel changes could make a big difference in how well-planned the trip may be. How well does the travel agency respect the requests of the college? How well does the college communicate its requests to the travel agency? It is also possible that the third party agency may not have as high of standards as the faculty member had hoped. The standards and expectations of such an enterprise are often not well known until they are tested. If the travel agency ignores the requests of the college, and chooses to sell a format program which does not focus on education, the trip could end up being very frustrating for the faculty, as well as the students.

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS STUDY ABROAD

The need to cultivate a study abroad program at WTAMU arose from the commitment from the college's administration to pursue AACSB Accreditation (The Association to Advance

Collegiate Schools of Business) in 2006. According to the AACSB website, schools wishing to become accredited must first meet seven criteria before being accepted into the accreditation process (AACSB International Website). One of these requirements states that the institution must be, “consistent with its mission and its cultural context, the institution must demonstrate diversity in its business programs (AACSB International).” The WTAMU mission explicitly mentions the importance of a global perspective (West Texas A&M University) and the initiation of a study abroad program was key to meeting this standard. The college also recognized that the increasing globalization of our world has made the importance of teaching international business practices vital for business students (Fulgate 2001).

In the past five years, the WTAMU College of Business has planned and successfully designed and delivered six different study abroad programs. With these experiences, the research compares and contrasts the trips to make decisions about what is believed to work well for faculty-led study abroad trips. The following section gives a brief synopsis of study abroad destinations within the college and some of the sights visited.

The first College of Business trip occurred in 2008 and was planned in conjunction with another business school located in Russia. The two schools developed a reciprocal agreement that allowed four Russian students to study at WTAMU for one long semester and twelve WTAMU students to study in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia for a two-week period. Because students did not speak Russian and needed a translator at all times, it was not possible for them to stay longer. Students were led by one Economics faculty member and one administrative staff member and the course taught was Comparative Economic Systems. The partner school, Nizhny Novgorod Commercial Institute (NNCI), planned the two-week itinerary and incorporated visits to local businesses and cultural sites. These excursions included the local legislative body, the state bank of Russia, a car dealership, an outdoor history museum, as well as other local businesses. Most days consisted of lectures from Russian faculty in the morning and a cultural/business excursion in the afternoon. Students and sponsors were housed in the institute’s dormitory and all meals were served at the school cafeteria and were comprised of authentic Russian food. Over the weekend during the trip, NNCI took the group to Moscow for a short visit.

The second trip occurred in 2009 and was a repeat trip from the year before. This trip was led by a faculty member from management as well as an administrative staff member. The delivery unit for this trip was a course in Diversity and Cross-Cultural Management. Additional and new cultural and business activities on this trip included visits to IKEA, the Volga Beer Brewery, and the Ariel glass ball company. This trip was further enhanced by the inclusion of a group of German students visiting at the same time. This gave students a chance to interact with both German and Russian students. While both Russian trips were very eye-opening for students, many experienced culture shock. As such, after two-weeks, everyone was more than ready to return home to their normal customs, including familiar food and other cultural norms.

In 2010, the university decided to take a different direction and led a group to British Columbia, Canada. The course taught was Diversity and Cross-Cultural Management and was led by the same two individuals as the year before. This location was decided based on a personal contact in Vancouver, BC and this trip was drastically different from the first two years. Students moved to three different locations throughout the two-week trip: Vancouver, Vancouver Island, and Whistler. Students and sponsors stayed in local hotels and transportation was provided through three vehicles that were rented for the trip. Since the focus of the trip was diversity, the group visited Chinatown, a Punjabi Market, and a museum about the First Nations

People. Students really enjoyed this trip, and while it might not seem too different from the United States, it was a great trip for first-time travelers.

Two study abroad trips occurred in the summer of 2011. The first was a trip to London to study international sports marketing and the upcoming Summer Olympics. One Marketing faculty member and two Mass Communication faculty members led twenty-five students on this trip. Students visited the Olympiad, Westminster Abbey, the BBC, the River Thames where they took a water taxi tour, and even took a day trip to Stonehenge. The trip logistics for this trip were planned by a third party travel agency.

The second 2011 trip was located in French Canada and was a combination of students from WTAMU and Tarleton State University. Three faculty members led fourteen students to Ontario and Quebec. Students on this trip visited Bombardier, a botanical garden, a microbrewery, many different museums, and even went whale-watching. Participants also visited two Canadian universities where they received lectures about the Canadian political system and NAFTA. This trip also had a very culturally diverse group of students with only five students from the US, five students from Taiwan, one from China, one from Thailand, one from Mexico, and the last from Mauritius.

The final, most recent trip occurred in the summer of 2012 in Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden. Two faculty members and one administrative staff member led twenty-two students to study at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) and to explore the Øresund Region. One of the faculty members leading the trip had a personal contract with a faculty member at CBS, thus giving us an opportunity to visit Denmark. Students stayed in a hostel and were given subway passes that could take them anywhere in the city. This gave students more freedom to explore on their own. Some highlights of the trip included the Microsoft Development Center, Lund University in Sweden, Tivoli Gardens, LEGOLand, and Kronborg Castle.

WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

As important as it is to embed international experiences into business curriculum, it is not feasible to send the entire student body on study abroad trips. As shown above, only about 1% of the students enrolled in higher education participate in study abroad during their academic career (Open Doors, 2011). With numbers this low, how does one extend these benefits back to the rest of the students? College administrators and faculty members need to work together to make this a priority. Students that have studied abroad could easily be asked to share their experiences with other classes once they return. It would also be possible to ask international students that are studying abroad in the United States to share about their culture during international courses. While these ideas do not solve the problem, it is a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, experiences, while successful for the WTAMU College of Business study abroad program, may not extend to the situation experienced by other colleges of business. Perhaps other college missions do not emphasize this aspect of a global mission, or do not share the same situational context. The WTAMU College of Business approach has been consistent with the context of our institution, college, and programs as situated in a smaller, rural, geographically isolated school. For an urban university in a “world city,” such as New York or Los Angeles (Doel & Hubbard, 2002), the structure and motivations for study experiences may vary based on experience. Students from a more complex and diverse metropolitan area may seek other study abroad experiences that are more independent as compared to faculty-led study abroad courses.

FUTURE WORK

Based on nearly five years of faculty-led study abroad experience, efforts can be synthesized to describe perhaps a model or framework which organizes lessons learned and best practices. Perhaps a model is needed for study abroad planning and assessment which can be used to define and refine study abroad as a means of augmenting and enhancing the global component of any college of business mission statement designed to increase global awareness among students.

Additionally, these experiences yield the conclusion that need and willingness alone are not sufficient to create embedded study abroad programs which are consistent with a mission. To the contrary, it is found that true synthesis of the benefits of these programs require an overarching method and/or model to ensure learning experiences are tied to curricular outcomes and assurances of learning. Moreover, an overarching model for faculty-led study abroad programs would help ensure study abroad experiences can be designed to deliver both rigor and relevance. It is imperative that we ensure faculty-led study abroad experiences maximize curriculum enhancement when these experiences tap into the network of faculty contacts and faculty liaisons. It is possible, the greatest potential for high impact study abroad experiences occur when both new and existing contacts are leveraged toward the aim of long-term associations with corresponding institutional and business affiliates in the destination countries. Realization of these possibilities experienced in Russia and recently experiences in Canada, the U.K., and particularly Denmark, stand a high chance of bearing fruit in this regard. In reflection of the inter-connectedness of business in most sectors across national and cultural boundaries, the opportunities to connect with institutions such as the Copenhagen Business School bode well for deepening the embedded-ness of global experiences in business curriculum.

The most important research opportunity in future work is related to the need to balance rigor and relevance such that both students and faculty successfully engage in study-abroad as an ongoing process. It is recognized that a fine line exists where a faculty-led study abroad program must present an appealing excursion for the student, but also be designed with in-country experiences which are academically rigorous. Achieving this balance is a serious responsibility for both the faculty and institution if the credibility of faculty-led study abroad programs can be presented as a viable strategy to ensure the achievement of global awareness as a learning goal and mission aim. Clearly relevance is important if these programs will remain feasible and attractive to students. However, a lack of rigor can rapidly threaten the credibility of a business curriculum which holds the faculty-led study abroad as a strategically key component. Unfortunately, there is no “silver bullet” to achieve this balance between rigor and relevance and, perhaps more than the need to strike this balance within scholarly work, is actually getting this balance right for study abroad programs and can be a difficult task at best.

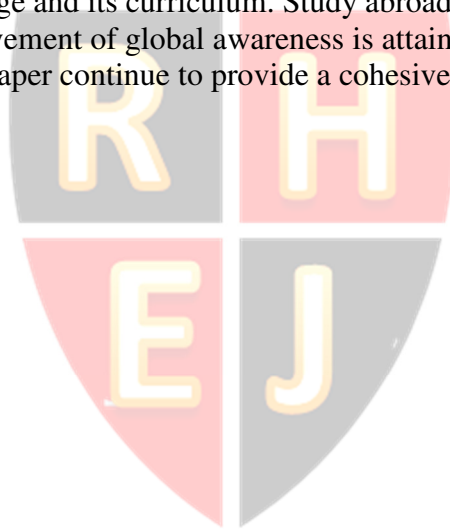
CONCLUSION

This research made the case that business students studying in a rural and/or regional institution require additional opportunities to understand and appreciate the increasingly global and international context of business. Whereas one can argue that the business world that students learn about is both smaller and flatter on account of advances in information technology, concern remains that students will not fully understand this, in a meaningful and

visceral manner, without opportunities to embed international experiences in the business curriculum.

Whereas study abroad courses may only reach a small percentage of students, the enhancements these experiences bring to both faculty and students who participate can and do have an impact on the culture within the college. With at least one study abroad offered each year since 2008, these trips have increased student and faculty awareness of, and willingness to, participate in these experiences. This increased willingness has increased the culture of awareness of these opportunities and has increased the willingness, among both students and faculty, to engage in these opportunities.

Overall, WTAMU COB experience with faculty-led study abroad programs has been successful and positive. Lessons-learned derived from faculty-led study abroad programs will be explored in order to assess past, present, and potential study abroad programs. Willingness to increasingly tie study abroad programs to college mission, learning goals, and assessment activities has brought the benefits of these programs closer to the core of curriculum and has developed new expectations among and between faculty and students. There exists little doubt that study abroad programs have strengthened curriculum within the WTAMU College of Business and have played a key role in achieving the academic excellence commensurate with solid accreditation of our college and its curriculum. Study abroad programs are not the only means by which student achievement of global awareness is attained, however, given the experiences presented in this paper continue to provide a cohesive direction serving to both focus and amplify other efforts.



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APPENDIX A

Table 1-SWOT Analysis of Study Abroad Types

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Academic Year or Semester	More time to experience culture; time to learn new language	More expensive; shy students not likely to travel abroad; may not fit business curriculum; not much control over rigor of courses	Personal development; develop a network that increases incidental opportunities	Economic and geopolitical instability; natural disasters; parents less likely to support
Faculty-Led Short-Term	Course taught is specific to learning objectives; more focused; have opportunity to be rigorous; decrease in trip cost due to economies of scale	Short length; less freedom; internal group conflict; only as strong as the weakest link	Personal contacts used as networks; businesses more receptive to group visits not individuals	Opportunity for trip cancellation; group makes it obvious that you are tourists

APPENDIX B

Table 2-Types of Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Partner with another University	Local contact for local businesses; can be reciprocal; two school administrators working together	One partner can contribute less than the other	Easier to visit inaccessible places; makes typically unappealing destinations appealing	School budget problems or policy changes
Personal Network	Flexible; local contact for local businesses; more tailored to your needs	Less likelihood for traditional classroom environment; depending on individuals not an institution	Flexibility allows for incidental opportunities	Personal contact could become indisposed; personal contact may not meet expectations
Pre-Packaged Trip	Trip logistics already planned; faculty can spend more time teaching students instead of worrying about logistics	Less likelihood for traditional classroom environment; less opportunity for customized experience	Cheaper trip; travel agency has more purchasing power	Dealing with another business that could have its own problems; agency might not have high standards