USING CULTURAL FIELD STUDIES TO ENHANCE STUDY ABROAD LEARNING

Johanna Hunsaker, School of Business Administration, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110, 619-260-4866, hunsaker@sandiego.edu

Phillip Hunsaker, School of Business Administration, University of San Diego, 5998 Alcala Park, San Diego, CA 92110, 619-260-4870, philmail@sandiego.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper describes some innovative activities for study abroad programs that allow students to experientially learn about the culture they are encountering. “Paris: Walking on the Wild Side,” “Rome Challenge Information Hunt,” and “Zagreb, Croatia City Challenge” are based on the premise that experiential activities lead to more meaningful learning and applicable take-a-ways. For many students, the foreign setting is very challenging as the safe structure of normal classroom learning is yanked away. The field studies described in this paper are opportunities to approach learning in a new way that challenge students to “get out and do it!”

Key Words: Culture; experiential learning; study abroad

INTRODUCTION

As colleges and universities in the United States prepare students to enter an ever-increasing global society, the pressure on these institutions to provide culturally sensitive educational programs is growing [3]. We are now living in an unprecedented era of study abroad programs. Estimates extrapolated from UNESCO statistics suggest that more than 2 million students participate in these programs on a yearly basis [4].

Although study abroad programs are an increasing feature of university life, the study abroad experience, in and of itself, does not necessarily lead to the development of a global citizenship mentality. Having been faculty members for over twenty-five years in such programs, we have come to the firm belief that the best experiences for students is to immerse them as deeply as possible into a foreign culture by engaging them in experiential learning. Some might argue that all study abroad programs hold the possibility of experiential education. However, in our experience some programs simply move the course from the home university to another campus in a different country and transfer the academic units without necessarily utilizing the international experience as a basis for learning. Those courses in which we have incorporated aspects of experiential learning have been the most successful ones we have taught for enhancing students’ cultural appreciation.
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential education is a philosophy of education rooted in physical experiences followed by reflection and critical analysis. A fundamental belief of experiential education is that experiences alone are not educational in and of themselves. Dewey [2, p. 25] argues “Activity that is not checked by observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But intellectually it leads nowhere.” Dewey [2, p. 87] goes on to argue that carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection and critical analysis lead to deeper and lasting learning. Experiences must be reflected upon to lead to knowledge so that the experience may become transformative.

David Kolb’s model of experiential learning in Figure 1, illustrates how learning is a complex interaction of experiences and reflection, that is both active and passive. Experiential learners go through a four-stage cycle of testing in a concrete experience followed by observation and reflection, leading to the formation of abstract concepts that result in hypothesis to be tested, which in turn may lead to new understanding [5]. In this model, experiences alone are not enough: reflection and analysis are an essential component of experiential learning. Our experiences teaching abroad have deepened our belief in this concept. Any educational endeavor studying abroad that does not structure reflection and critical analysis of the international experience as an integral part of the curriculum is missing the point.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Students who do not engage in experiential learning are missing the opportunity to enhance in the host culture to acquire learning and understanding. John Wallace, [6] gives an insightful example of this process in his own work. He writes about a course in geography and a paper he wrote on drought and famine. He passed the course and thought nothing more about it until an experience he had when studying in Calcutta. Here as he watched victims of drought and famine die, his learning changed forever.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Experiential learning in study abroad programs offers opportunities for students to develop enhanced self-discovery and ownership in the learning process through inquiry and self-reflection. As instructors in different locales teaching abroad (e.g., Italy, France, Croatia, Spain, Turkey, Germany, Mexico, China, Korea) we now try to design activities that challenge students a little bit, often beyond their “comfort zone,” but not to the point of panic. This idea is based on the Yearkes-Dodson Learning Curve principle that “maximum learning is promoted when the student’s anxiety is at a moderate level. When anxiety is too low, motivation to learn is limited. When anxiety is too high, motivation is inhibited as well.” [1]

Many faculties in study abroad programs tend to emphasize content over process. Although this is understandable, especially in some fundamental courses, it provides little that the same course at home would offer. For courses hoping to promote increased
cultural learning from international engagement, experiential field experiences are imperative. Faculty aiming to enhance their students’ international awareness need to facilitate students reflecting and analyzing their experiences in the foreign culture by building adequate time into the syllabus and class meetings. Citron and Kline [1] conclude that “Allowing adequate reflection time is vital for study aboard experiences.”

EXAMPLES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS IN THREE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Students in study abroad programs in major European cities often gravitate to the familiar. They take the classes and then seem to gravitate to the iconic site, take photos and “selfies” to post on social media, and often leave without any deeper knowledge of the foreign culture. Following are three sample team assignments given to undergraduate students in a study abroad programs held in Paris, France, Rome, Italy and Zagreb, Croatia. These team assignments are followed up with individual assignments that encourage students to reflect about what they have experiences at a deeper level and to develop take-a-ways for future experiences abroad. Over 150 students have completed these assignments and the feedback regarding engagement and cultural awareness enhancement has been excellent in all locations. Portions of these assignments are presented below. The complete assignments are available upon request.

WALKING ON THE WILD SIDE OF PARIS

This group activity is a self-guided ethnic neighborhood exploration. Your group will give both oral and written reports about your experience and what you learned. Further individual opportunities for reflection on this experience will be provided at the conclusion of the course.

Form groups of three or four. Choose one cluster from the following Country Cluster Groups and Visitation Sites. Then pick a minimum of three addresses to visit within the cluster. Groups will randomly draw numbers to determine the order of cluster choices so that there will be different experiences to share with the class. The places you visit may be large or small, the employees and/or volunteers may or not speak English, but this is part of the discovery activity: to gather information in an environment that you are unfamiliar with.

This is not a tour of classical Paris monuments and museums, but rather a visit of the Paris kaleidoscopic of multi-ethnic enclaves that will demonstrate the multi-cultural nature of Paris. Paris is a hotbed for international migration, but it is easy to miss this fascinating aspect of the city if one sticks strictly to the tourist track. The ethnic communities you will visit generally surround the core of the city.

If you have a Paris street guide, it will be useful. Please be careful of using mobile devices in public, as you do not want to draw attention to yourselves or your possessions. There is a map of the immediate areas at each metro stop that will allow you to find the streets indicated. At each location you visit, look for written materials to take along with
you and do not be afraid to ask questions or to explain to those on-site what the goal of your assignment is. As a part of your assignment, find out how the cluster group came to settle in Paris.

Please visit other sites in your area, and include a general description of the neighborhood, the people, the merchants, the street life and other things you observe. It may be fun and informative to eat a meal in each neighborhood, try an unusual pastry or drink some coffee or tea.
Take pictures and talk to as many people as you can about what you are observing. You may have to ask permission to do so. Write up your findings in a four to five-page group paper. After these field trips are complete, groups will present their adventures and discoveries to the class in a creative manner (e.g., provide ethnic food, demonstrate an interaction through a skit, etc.).

**Paris Country Cluster Groups and Visitation Sites**

Only three of twelve clusters are shown below. Others are available upon request.

**Cluster One: The Maghreb (North Africa: Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco)**

**Addresses to Visit**

Centre Cultural Algerian (Algerian Cultural Center)
171 rue de la Croix-Nivert
Metro: Boucicaut or Felix-Faure; M-Sat, 1-17h30, evenings with special exhibits

Nina Bazar (Arab market)
35 boulevard de Belleville
Metro: Bellville; Tues-Sat, 9h30 to 19h30

The Goutte d’Or district (neighborhood in the 18th arr)
Commonly known as Little Africa. Generally, this neighborhood is avoided by most Parisians, but if you take normal precautions and go during busy daytime hours you should not encounter any trouble.

Barbes Market
Under the metro tracks on Blvd. de la Chapelle
Here you will encounter Africans dressed in brightly colored robes. The crowds reflect the diversity of the Arab world. This is the biggest bazaar in France where total chaos prevails. Not for the faint of heart, this dense and always packed market runs along Blvd. de la Chapelle and Blvd. Roucheouart, just under the metro tracks. Food, fragrant piles of fresh herbs, clothing, housewares, and textiles, just about everything is for sale here. You will find lots of ethnic food, crafts and spices. Keep an eye on your belongings. The market is also next to the giant TATA discount store which is also worth a visit.
Metro: Barbes-Rochechouart; Weds and Saturday: mornings until 2:00pm
Marche Dejean
18th arr: open Tuesday to Saturday
At this West African market, you will find food stalls filled with deadly chili peppers, exotic fruits and pungent spices, halal butchers, cosmetic parlors and boutiques with inexpensive African textiles. You might want to have lunch at one of the traditional Senegalese or Ivory Coast restaurants.
Metro: Chateau Rouge

Cluster Six: India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan

Addresses to Visit

Sri Manika Vinayakar (Very friendly Hindu temple, you must leave your shoes at the door)
72 rue du Phillipe-de-Girard
Metro: Max Dormoy
Everyday, 9h30-20h30

Centre Mandapa (Indian Cultural Center)
6 rue Wurtz
Metro: Glaciere
M-Sat, 11-19h

New Shamina Super Market (Indian bazaar)
184 rue du Faubourg Saint Denis
Metro: La Chapelle, Gare du Nord
Sat, 10h-20h

VT Cash and Carry (Indian supermarket)
14 rue Dail
Metro: La Chapelle
9-9 everyday but Monday

Ganesha Corner (Indian and Sri Lankan bakery, snack shop and restaurant)
16 rue Perdonnet
Metro: La Chapelle

The Pakistani neighborhoods can be found in the Rue de Jarry and the Passage Brady. You may also choose one or both of these sites for this cluster.
Metro: Gare de l’Est and Strasbourg Saint-Denis

La Chapelle (Little Sri Lanka)
On the cusp of the 10th arrondissement know as “Little Safna” this neighborhood is bursting with activity, culture and color. Here you will find shops and restaurants reflecting the Sri Lankan and South Indian culture. You will hear Tamil language in the streets, find chai tea, samosas and can go shopping for saris if you choose.
Main Streets: Rue du Fauborg, St. Denis, Boulevard de la Chapells
Metro: La Chapelle, Gare du Nord

*Cluster Seven: Quarter Chinois*

This area is the largest Chinatown in Europe, filled with hidden charms and includes an impressive diversity, drawing on the heritage of the French colonies like Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The area is best visited Wednesday through Saturday, as many shops are closed from Sunday through Tuesday.

*Addresses to Visit*

Metro: Place d’Italie

Tang Freres
48 Avenue d’Ivry
This is one of the largest Asian supermarkets in Europe, filled with many exotic ingredients.

Thai Fruit Center
189 Avenue de Choisy
Here you will find all sorts of unusual beverages such as canned bubble tea from Taiwan and Bourbon-brand beer from Reunion, the French speaking island off of the coast of Madagascar.

Les Olympiades
44 Avenue d’Ivry
Stalls filled with kitsch and knick-nacks from Asia.

Hua Name
51 Avenue d’Ivry
Inexpensive and delicious vegetable and bahn-min sandwiches starting from 3 euros.

The following two places are not in the Chinese Quarter.

La Maison de l’Indochine (Cultural Center for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia)
76 rue Bonaparte
(Note: staff only speaks French and Chinese. Chinese students can communicate)
Metro: Saint-Sulpice
M-Sat, 10-19h

Galerie de la Maison du Viet-nam (Vietnamese art market)
28 rue des Bernardins
Metro: Maubert-Mutualité, Cardinal Lemoine, Cluny-La Sorbonne
Sat, 11-19
ZAGREB AND CROATIA INFORMATION HUNT CHALLENGE

After reading “Culture of Entrepreneurship – Croatia case,” your team is to explore Zagreb city, visiting the places mentioned, talking to people you meet, taking pictures and making notes of your field observations. Take note of your own feelings as you complete these activities, and also observe the nature of your interactions with the people you come into contact with. All team members must participate together in all visitations and interviews, help answer all questions and participate in the class presentation (both preparation and performance). The 30-minute class presentation on June 13th should include your question answers, your reactions and feelings during the exercise, and what you learned about Croatians and your teammates.

1. One of the most celebrated holidays in Croatia is June 25th. What holiday is it? Talk to some Croatian people your own age about what it means to them and how is it typically celebrated.

2. What are the major religions in Croatia? Visit and take a picture of your team in at least two different religious places of worship in Zagreb. Talk to some parishioners about the importance of their religion. What are your observations?

3. Ask at least three Croatians who their favorite Croatian athlete of all time is and find out why.

4. The Croatian Kuna is the currency of Croatia. What is the Croatia Kuna (HRK) exchange rate with the USA dollar? Every team member should purchase something with the Kuna and explain how they felt adapting to its use.

5. Zagreb is the home of dragons. The city is full of reptiles and medieval statues of snakes and dragons abound. Rumor has it a cursed snake queen is buried deep down in the tunnels of Zagreb's medieval mountain fortress, Medvedgrad. Ask at least three Croatian people if this is the true Medusa? How many images of reptiles, snakes and dragons did you find as you traveled around the city? Ask Croatian people you meet near these dragons what their significance is.

6. What is the Museum of Broken Relationships? Visit this museum with your team and share your impressions. For example, why was this museum created? What were some of the unsettling surprises you discovered? Talk to at least three other visitors and find out their impressions.

7. Croatia invented the necktie. What is the nature and history behind this most successful export? Talk to some salespeople and find out why the necktie is such an important accessory.

8. What are some cultural taboos in Croatia? For example, why is raising the thumb, index and middle finger at once offensive? Has anyone on your team mistakenly engaged in a verbal or nonverbal cultural taboo while in Croatia? What was the outcome?
9. What name is the Dolac Market affectionately called? Visit this market and note what foods are different than the foods you are used to. Take pictures of your team members trying some new foods. What is your reaction?

10. Read the “Culture of Entrepreneurship-Croatia case” (Blackboard / Course Content / Readings). Find at least one example of a local business in Zagreb that fits the criteria outlined in the article and interview the founder, or a current employee, to determine what it is like working there.

**ROME INFORMATION HUNT CHALLENGE**

You will participate in an “information hunt” with your assigned team. This should be a fun, challenging, creative experience involving Italian business, issues and culture.

There are 11 Challenges for your group to complete. During the information hunt your group will need to capture the experience in a digital presentation. Plan with your group before the trip so you can coordinate picture taking and recording of events/names/facts.

1. **SPANISH STEPS:** What makes the famous Spanish Steps “Spanish?” At the base of the Spanish Steps you will find a sculpture done by Pietro Bernini and his son Gian Lorenzo called the “Fountain of the Old Boat. Have your photo taken standing on the boat dock…and be sure not to fall into the water. And from there climb to the top of the Spanish Steps and count the number of steps.

2. Legend has it that if you throw a coin into the TREVI FOUNTAIN, you’re destined to return to Rome someday. What do you think—a fact or fiction? Can tossing a coin into the fountain determine your future? Organize your team with your backs to the fountain. Make sure everyone has a coin. On the count of three everyone must throw their coin over their shoulder and into the fountain…but, oh there are so many people!! Stand with your back to the fountain and as you toss in your coin, have your photo taken. Any idea how much money people throw into the fountain each day? Where does the money go?

3. Getting hungry? Time for a break…. hunt down the most unusual gelato flavor you can find. Not in the mood for gelato? Have some pizza! Try “pizza Bianco.” Remember to greet your server “Buon Giorno,” and say think you after you have been served your gelato or your pizza “Grazie.” Report some facts about the gelato manufacturing artistry in Rome.

4. **VISIT THE CATS AT THE SCENE OF A MURDER!** Roman cats have found shelter amongst the ancient ruins at Torre Argentina Roman Cat Sanctuary. Visit this unique outdoor cat shelter-open 7 days a week from noon until 6:00pm and staffed by volunteers. Donations accepted for entrance. Who was murdered at this
site? Entrance is at Largo di Torre Argentina, on the corner of Via Floridia and Via du Torre Argentina.

5. **THE ROME BUSINESS SCHOOL** located @ Via Salaria 44, Rome, Italy 00198, is a managerial training and research institute operating on an international scale. Have your photo taken with some of their international students standing in front of the sign that says “Rome business School, Better Managers for a Better World. What is the school’s mission and competitive niche? Why do they claim their graduates will be better managers for a better world?

**DISCUSSION**

Although many students are initially nervous and tentative of this activity, it has proven to be a most memorable learning assignment. We take care in forming the groups, so that there are at least one or two extroverted and adventurous types of individuals in each group. The assignment challenges them to learn in new ways. It gets them out of their comfort zones and with the support of their teammates, the students become adept at interviewing, making detailed observations about the unfamiliar communities resulting in valuable insights into multi-cultured global cities.

Students have fun and unexpected adventures while completing this assignment. Here are some examples. One group was invited for dinner at the house of Armenian Culture, a meeting place hidden in an apartment complex. A group of four young women spent the better part of a day having their hair corn-rowed in an African hair salon. New foods have been tried, a lonely Asian-American student found cookies and sweets he had been craving in Chinatown, and lovely ethnic clothing and tchotchkes have been purchased. Most significantly, students have had opportunities to bond with each other, diminish their fear of unfamiliar cultures and have learned about rich aspects of cities they probably would not have experienced as tourists.
Figure 1. David Kolb’s model of experiential learning

Source: Hunsaker, 1980.
REFERENCES


