Grassroots, Strategic Student Outreach

INTRODUCTION

When trying to communicate with a vast student audience, it’s difficult to juggle the various channels we use to deliver our messages and to measure effectiveness accurately. An explosion of social media tools has further complicated things. As a result, the Learning Abroad Center has refined communication processes to use our time and money more efficiently. To reach students where they’re at, rather than where we assume they’ll find us, we put our resources into focused initiatives, rather than trying to cover them all. This is particularly important for us, since we are located on the West Bank in Heller Hall, away from areas of heavy student traffic. The development of these resources requires a delicate balancing act to avoid being repetitious or inundating students with study abroad messages. While we consider these strategies as “cost-effective,” it’s important to note that considerable staff time and planning is involved to maximise efficiency and return on investment.

MyU Undergraduate Portal

SCOPE: All UMTC Undergraduate students and incoming Freshman
STATS: On average, about 620 students per day browse the pages where our content is placed
STRATEGY: We have increasingly relied on MyU portal to get directed messages to the undergraduate student population. It’s a great (free) opportunity to increase exposure.

Student Experience Videos/YouTube

SCOPE: Online, using our UMadroad YouTube channel
STATS: For all our videos, we’ve had 14,000 viewers in about a year, averaging nearly 1,200 per month.
STRATEGY: We generate all of our own content for these. With a digital video camera, we interview students who have returned from study abroad experiences. We also send video cameras out with Learning Abroad Center staff to bring back footage from site visits overseas. A student employee cuts and edits the videos for uploading to YouTube.

Classroom Visits

SCOPE: 1000–3000 level classes in various departments across UMTC campus.
STATS: Meet with an average of 5,900 students per semester.
STRATEGY: These are 5–10 minute, in-person presentations about learning abroad delivered by students who have returned from a study abroad experience. We have a few programs to engage returned students for this project (classroom visit internship, Global Ambassador internship or a program consultant program). Leveraging student voices for peer-to-peer targeted marketing is crucial to our overall communications strategies.

Global Crossroads Study Abroad Student Blog

SCOPE: Online, using a Wordpress platform
STATS: Averaging nearly 100 hits per day
STRATEGY: With their permission, we combine several students’ personal blog content into one place. In doing so, we channel authentic student voices from various programs into one blog.
The blog links from our homepage (UMadroad.umn.edu) and is connected to Twitter, so we can post Tweets on the fly about blog updates.

Twitter (in combination with Hootsuite)

SCOPE: Online, using Twitter in combination with Hootsuite
STATS: Average 3–5 posts per week. Currently have 400 followers (Account: @UMabroad).
STRATEGY: The importance of Twitter is not only to spread the word about our programs and events, but to also engage in a more broad-based dialogue, since the audience is comprised of students, education abroad professionals, study abroad alumni and other interested parties. The Global Crossroads blog and YouTube channel help fuel Tweet content, which is efficient and provides for a consistent social media presence.