

# SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS: FACULTY EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The number of short-term study abroad programs has risen dramatically in recent years. They play a vital role in the internationalization of an institution and have tremendous impact on students. However, there is little research on how these programs impact the leaders themselves. The goal of this master's research paper was to investigate short-term programs from the perspective of the leader in order to gain a better understanding of the experience and impact of leading a program abroad.

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of short-term programs by investigating them from the faculty leader perspective. The study explored how leaders perceived an impact on a variety of areas. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What impact does leading a short-term program have on faculty?
- Do faculty believe that leading a short-term study abroad program contributes to internationalization?
- Do faculty believe that leading a short-term study abroad program has a positive impact on university faculty?
- What expectations do faculty have about leading a short-term study abroad programs, and how do those expectations contrast with the reality on-site?
- What impact, if any, does leading a short-term study abroad program have on approaches to teaching?

## METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted on the UMTC campus; the population used for the study included faculty who led a program during May Session 2007 (N=29).

A mixed methods approach was used:

- Leaders who agreed to participate (N=10) completed a brief on-line survey and the Teaching Perspectives Inventory developed by Pratt & Collins from the University of British Columbia.
- Leaders were also invited to participate in optional in-person semi-structured interviews; 7 out of the 10 participants did so.

## TEACHING PERSPECTIVES INVENTORY

- Consisted of 45 questions about views on teaching
- Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about beliefs, intentions, or actions related to teaching
- Upon completion, participants were given a profile that yielded their dominant, back up, and recessive perspectives on teaching
- The five perspectives are Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform
- The majority of study participants (6 out of 10) had the Developmental perspective as their dominant teaching perspective. From this perspective, teachers must know and understand how learners think and reason about content, and help them develop more sophisticated levels of reasoning about it.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Faculty believe that leading a short-term program abroad contributes positively to internationalization efforts.** Although the time period is brief, leaders felt that students gained a more globalized view of the world. Consequently, leaders become key advocates for internationalization efforts.
- **Leading a program abroad impacts faculty in many ways:**
  - The role itself is demanding—the hours are long and there are many “hats” to wear
  - It can contribute to research and assist leaders in developing a network of overseas colleagues
  - It provides leaders with a deeper understanding of student development
  - It enables leaders to develop deeper relationships with students than what is possible here on campus
  - However, it should be noted that involvement in this kind of activity is not always looked upon favorably by leaders' academic departments
- **The expectations and reality of leading a program abroad vary widely.** New leaders' expectations often focus on students rather than on themselves—which can be a surprise once on-site! Experienced leaders indicated that the experience is more demanding than teaching an on-campus course.
- **The degree of impact on teaching is subjective and therefore varies:**
  - For some, the experience underscored the importance of teaching to the “whole student” and acknowledging factors that affect student learning
  - For some, the experience confirmed the importance of incorporating an international perspective/component into on-campus courses
  - Experiential education can reinvigorate one's teaching style
- **There are many personal impacts of leading a program abroad:** gaining a deeper understanding of the host culture; being away from family commitments; and adding a new dimension to their professional lives, just to name a few.

## SUMMARY

This study sought to gain a better understanding of short-term programs from the faculty leader perspective. Leaders of study abroad programs are affected in many different ways, both professionally and personally. It is important for study abroad administrators to know and understand the effects, as it will inform how to provide leaders with the best preparation possible.

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