

Study Abroad

Getting On With Your Task: Enhancing Your Image Where It Counts--Within Your Academic Institution

by Dr. Joan Solaun



Another academic year has begun and with it an opportunity for you to work with your administration and faculty on implementing those Task Force recommendations we talked about in our last column.

If your institution has just named you as study abroad director, or if you have been in the position for a while and sense that you have only made a dent in the potential on your campus, you will have realized that your own approach to your job is an essential ingredient to successfully promoting study abroad within your academic institution.

Helping your institution latch on to a huge amount of money for study abroad may focus attention on your goals, and running fiscally sound and even profitable programs is obviously a priority in any institution today. But is this enough to buy you respect as a professional? Running a study abroad office may seem, on the surface, to be a job that everyone would love to have, but unless certain precautions are taken you can end up being taken for a campus tour director and camp counselor, overseas division.

There are ways in which you can work with your own faculty and administration to ensure that what you are doing is perceived as helping to promote a credible academic experience for the students at your institution as well as providing them with an opportunity to expand their cultural horizons. Because ultimately, if study abroad is to achieve the level of acceptance necessary for it to have equal status with on-campus offerings, academic credibility is the key. Your worth as a study abroad director is directly related to the image you are able to project and maintain as a person who supports the academic integrity and goals of the institution which employs you. This means that for study abroad and your role in it to be taken seriously, the emphasis must be clearly upon the word *study*.

The underlying rationale for belaboring this point is that not everyone at your institution believes in what you are trying to do. There are faculty members out there who feel that what you are doing—sending students abroad and emptying their classrooms—is simply not academically

sound. This will be a suspicion most academics harbor until you prove otherwise or provide an opportunity to involve them in a way which satisfies their unjustified envy or resentment of all the perks you seem to have (principally travel).

Here are a few suggestions that might be useful in this respect; some may work better than others, depending on the type of institution you represent and its goals.

Show Your Support for the Academic Mission of the Institution

The first mission of our institutions is to educate. This may explain why many administrators suspect that academics look upon them as something less than equal. Thus it is extremely helpful for your cause if you send the signal that you yourself buy into this concept by establishing or maintaining your academic connections and interests. I realize that an academic appointment, or the opportunity to teach on a non-tenure track or even volunteer basis may not be possible, or even appealing to many who have chosen to enter academic adminis-

tration precisely to avoid the hassles of further education. I firmly believe that this is a mistake. You are entitled to educate yourself, albeit at a very slow pace if you hold down a full time appointment, and the field you choose to study is not as crucial as the fact that you are inching toward an academic goal.

Even without departmental status, you can be the instigator of what really counts in the eyes of most institutional movers and shakers--research! You may have ideas of your own, but if not, others will, as there are many questions to be asked about the real value and impact of study abroad from a multitude of angles.

Effects of study abroad on academic performance, motivation, graduate school and career choices and opportunities, awareness of issues, etc. are all topics being studied at other institutions and funded by one or another of the national associations and funding sources (NAFSA coop grants) which can be duplicated at your institution for comparative purposes or that you can plug into. Get faculty to work on this as pilot projects with their own

students, graduate and undergraduate, if there is no money around to get started. Workshops and practicums lend themselves well to these topics.

Get Faculty Involved in Oversight at All Levels

This can begin with forming a small blue ribbon committee on your campus to come up with a campus "mission statement" which reflects institutional short and long range goals for internationalization. Such a committee, if properly sponsored and anchored, can generate useful spin-offs.

One useful way to launch such an effort is to invite a major figure in the area of internationalization to your campus to galvanize campus interest, and invite those whom you wish to impress to a presentation and working sessions. Such a visit, well orchestrated, can generate enough momentum to sustain the interest of even dubious faculty members and ensure their participation on other committees for the period ahead.

Future committees can include:

- A campus-wide advisory committee to set goals, priorities and new directions, appointed by the highest academic officer on your campus.
- An academic advisory committee for specific programs which clearly

relates the program courses to the curricular needs and on-campus requirements.

- An advisory committee for approving programs of other institutions for credit on your campus.
- Selection committees for acceptance into your programs.

And so on. It goes without saying that there should be a nucleus of individuals and committee chairs whom you can trust to move things forward in a positive manner. It is all too easy to become entangled in a committee's web and lose your creative energy. It definitely helps to have an experienced mentor on campus who can advise you along the way on the ins and outs of academic diplomacy to whom you can turn to for help.

Faculty Development Through Overseas Travel Can Lead to Support for Your Efforts

Any opportunity you can find to involve your faculty overseas for short inspection visits to your program sites while they are abroad on their own business or longer stints as resident directors or even instructors pays off with support for your efforts. (Make sure things are going as you expect them to be on the program to prevent the visit from confirming faculty suspicions that the students haven't cracked a book in two months!) How to fund this travel? Build it

into the overall program budget as an essential.

There are other opportunities for your faculty in this respect. Those advisory boards you are on may contribute toward the cost of the board meeting: can you include a faculty member, or send one in your place periodically? Share your invitations and nominate your faculty for national policy committees. In other words, divide the pie with your faculty.

The Institute for European Studies has long been promoting faculty development seminars overseas in sites where the Institute-sponsored study abroad programs are based. Now CIEE has announced some very interesting seminars for this coming academic year in its own very interesting program locations, including Vietnam. By bringing these opportunities to the attention of your faculty, you can gain their attention as a person who has their interests at heart.

Additional Opportunities to Become Involved with Issues Related to Academic Quality

Become involved in the major international scholarship and fellowship advising process, such as Rhodes, Marshall, Churchill, Fulbright, Rotary, etc.

Relate your program to academic honors. Keep

pushing for upper level and honors credit back on your campus, such as having your program count toward departmental honors requirements and Phi Beta Kappa. Work with your advisory committee to weave study abroad solidly into the academic fabric of your university or college. The international honor society, Phi Beta Delta, is a great new concept that will reward students and faculty for their overseas commitments. If appropriate, you could look into getting a chapter going on your campus.

Make yourself the guardian of ethics and good practices in study abroad on your campus so that inquiries about programs come to you for initial screening. This way your faculty and deans know that they can count on you to limit students to programs consonant with overall campus standards.

This is by no means an all-inclusive list or perfect blueprint for success. You may have many other suggestions not mentioned here that have worked to give study abroad, and your own role as a study abroad professional, credibility on your campus.

Any of you out there who wish to contribute tips to the profession based on what has worked for you would be very welcome to do so. Let us hear from you!