



STUDY ABROAD

Which of the following comments might you hear at your college or university?

"Staying in touch with faculty and informing them of programs we offer is the single most important way to advertise study abroad."

"Most of our faculty support study abroad, but they're too busy teaching and publishing to have time for any real assistance."

"At the beginning I had a lot of verbal support, but I'm afraid this was mostly words. A student told me last week that her adviser had talked her out of going abroad so that she can graduate earlier than she had planned."

How important are faculty in the matrix of study abroad?

I recently posed this question to my Study Abroad colleagues who subscribe to SECUSS-L and received a number of thoughtful responses. Not everyone agreed that faculty support was needed, but most felt that it was, with the degree varying from "useful" to "crucial."

Faculty *do* play a crucial role in internationalizing a campus, and this should be recognized. In some colleges and universities, especially large ones, faculty may have a great deal of autonomy and actively create, recruit, manage, and lead their own programs. At other institutions, faculty are the

Campus Support for Study Abroad-- Involving Faculty

by Susan Ansara

"gate-keepers," approving courses or programs that students wish to take abroad. Still other faculty may take a laissez-faire approach and defer most decisions to the Director of International Education, saying in effect "If Bob thinks it's OK, I'm sure it is."

Unfortunately, some faculty members may function primarily as impediments, either by withholding approval from students seeking to study abroad, or by telling them that their graduation will be delayed, or by raising doubts about the quality of all programming overseas.

In order to work effectively with faculty members, we need to keep these points in mind. There is no innate reason why faculty should automatically support study abroad. Many institutions do not hire faculty with international expertise or encourage their faculty's involvement in international programs. This may be a difficult concept for Directors of International Education to accept--after all, we live and breathe study abroad, and its benefits are so obvious to us--how can others not also believe? Yet, these benefits may have to be demonstrated and documented to faculty members with statistics showing how many returned students make the Dean's List, take Honors courses, or find employment in the shortest time after graduation.

Full-time faculty at most institutions feel increasingly over-worked these days. Combined with their increased workload is the unfortunate reality that on most campuses, faculty are not rewarded by the system for supporting study abroad (much as they may not be rewarded for being

excellent classroom teachers or expert academic advisers, but only for publishing and obtaining grants). The study abroad office may be alone in providing positive feedback to supportive faculty.

We also need to recognize that our goal cannot, realistically, be that ALL faculty at our institution support us, any more than all our students will study abroad. We need to be satisfied if the majority of key faculty at our institutions are willing to work on our behalf, and constantly seek to increase that percentage.

Steps to Involve Faculty

We should maximize contacts between our offices and the faculty. Creating a faculty advisory board or committee which works with the Office of International Education provides regular on-going policies and guidelines. If possible, this committee and the selection of its membership need to be governed by the same rules as selection for other campus committees, to give the committee added stature within the framework of the university.

At Oswego, for example, the International Education Advisory Council/IEAC is listed among all the standing committees of the College; faculty are asked to choose the committees on which they wish to serve in advance of each academic year. Final appointment is made by the President. Those faculty who select the IEAC are announcing publicly that they are most interested in making this their service work for the year, and the President,

in conferring the appointments, both reinforces the importance of this committee and notices who is most interested in study abroad.

We can also ask each department to designate one faculty member who will serve as a liaison between the study abroad office and that department, who will disseminate information to other members of her/his department, and to whom students can go for advice on study abroad in that field, ensuring that there is a minimum of one knowledgeable faculty member per department. If different faculty members take on this function in different years, a pool of experts can be developed.

Faculty also can be involved in the selection process for students applying to study overseas. Creating a different selection committee for each area of the world may be a good deal of work initially, but the result will be that more faculty are involved.

Sending program information to faculty members and asking them to make announcements in their classes will keep faculty informed. We can offer to attend meetings of department chairs hosted by the deans, and at these meetings, offer to visit each department in turn to make a brief presentation about study abroad. It's hard for a chair to say no if the dean is supportive. And then we need to follow up and make those departmental visits. The visits need to be done on a yearly basis for maximum impact.

Rewarding Support

Once faculty members have been brought into closer contact with your office, they need to have a positive and rewarding experience—why else would they come back for a second encounter? Support and rewards for faculty will vary widely, according to what a particular office of international education can provide and what individual faculty want.

At my institution, overseas travel as a component of faculty develop-

ment was a key issue when I first arrived. Several years of increasingly draconian budget cuts, combined with the philosophy of my predecessor, meant that few faculty had ever visited the program sites abroad, much less had the opportunity to develop new programs. As a result, our overseas programs enrolled more students from other campuses than our own. As quickly as possible, we began to request key faculty members to visit sites for our semester programs overseas, report back to our Advisory Council on their findings, and generally become involved.

Identifying "key" faculty is a topic about which much could be written. One criterion is that the faculty member should be a relatively senior professor, influential in her/his department, and respected by the administration and other faculty. Faced with the decision of whether to send a department chair or a first-year faculty member, the choice is clear. It's also sometimes useful to send the strongest critics of study abroad, but only IF you are sure you can win these individuals over to your cause.

We also encouraged faculty members to develop their own short-term programs abroad. To be sure, my preference for programs for our students is not island or itinerant programs, but some are excellent, and they fulfill the need of our increasingly large number of older and working transfer students for short-term overseas study. We also developed opportunities for our faculty to teach in our London Center in the summer and saw enrollments soar from a low of ten students one year to a high of 43 the following summer!

Other ways of supporting faculty are as varied as the schools from which the ideas were offered: building faculty exchange into agreements for student exchange will provide faculty with the opportunity to spend a semester abroad, teach an entirely new group of students, interact with new colleagues, experience a new city or country, conduct research,

and return energized to their home campus.

It's important to have at least a nodding acquaintance with all faculty if you work at a small institution and to know the ones that you feel you have something in common with; plan to have lunch once each semester; offer to come and speak to their classes. Show YOUR support of THEIR interests by attending lectures that they have organized or which their department is sponsoring or sending them a congratulatory note when you see that they have just published a new book or have received recognition in their field. In other words, apply the Golden Rule! Invite faculty members to participate in as many study abroad activities as possible, particularly those faculty who have traveled.

We need to recognize also that faculty members have their own challenges, problems, and pressures, and try to identify win-win solutions, rather than dismissing their concerns. When a department is suffering from downward spiraling enrollments, or an entire college is fighting for its existence, it is unrealistic to think that faculty will gladly send off a major cohort of students unless you can help solve the problems related to their departure from campus.

It's also important to be sensitive to the issue of the quality of education your students receive abroad. What if a student returns from London and brags that he/she knows every pub and did no work? The reality of this statement is probably that it's not very cool to talk about the hard work done while abroad, but the faculty member who hears this may not filter the bluster appropriately. One antidote is to enlist a small team of returned students who will help you in your presentations to departments about what their education was like overseas.

With proper planning and execution, your office can create an environment in which faculty are your strongest allies in your our efforts to send as many students abroad as possible.