

International Experiences in Health Education and the Professional Preparation of Students in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

International experiences in education have led historically to achievements in discovery, research, and cross-cultural collaborations among higher education institutions and their students. The benefits and barriers to study abroad programs, along with the desire to learn from other cultures by embracing academic and human connections, provides valuable lessons for the professional preparation of higher education students. This paper reviews lessons learned from a summer health education study abroad experience. Recommendations in training graduate students with a global perspective – highly valued in today's job market – are provided as means to further enrich their human potential.

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Introduction

Professional preparation of students in higher education traditionally has focused on textbook- and classroom-based learning experiences, aiming at the development of successful graduates who possess the skills required to join today's workforce and become productive citizens. Similar to the way in which physicians learn the science of medicine (e.g., anatomy, neuroscience, and pharmacology), classroom-based training of higher education students provides cognitive skills deemed essential for mastering educational objectives and competencies.

Equally important are the global and human connections to learning, such as compassion and empathy in understanding poverty and disease and the human connection obtained through new cultural environments. International experiences provide students in higher education a rich opportunity to achieve this indispensable human connection, thus, paralleling the medical student learning the humanistic side of medicine.

There is great value in exchange of knowledge, skills, resources, and cultural beliefs among international students in higher education. For example, the immersion of an American student researching the lack of sewage and water treatment

systems in underdeveloped countries offers opportunities for academic and ideological growth. The student invested in other cultures not only develops cognitively and strives for discovery, but also establishes humanistic potential through affective domains of sensory perceptions, for example, by witnessing first hand the "visual stories" of poverty-driven, water-borne diseases in a remote, rural community.

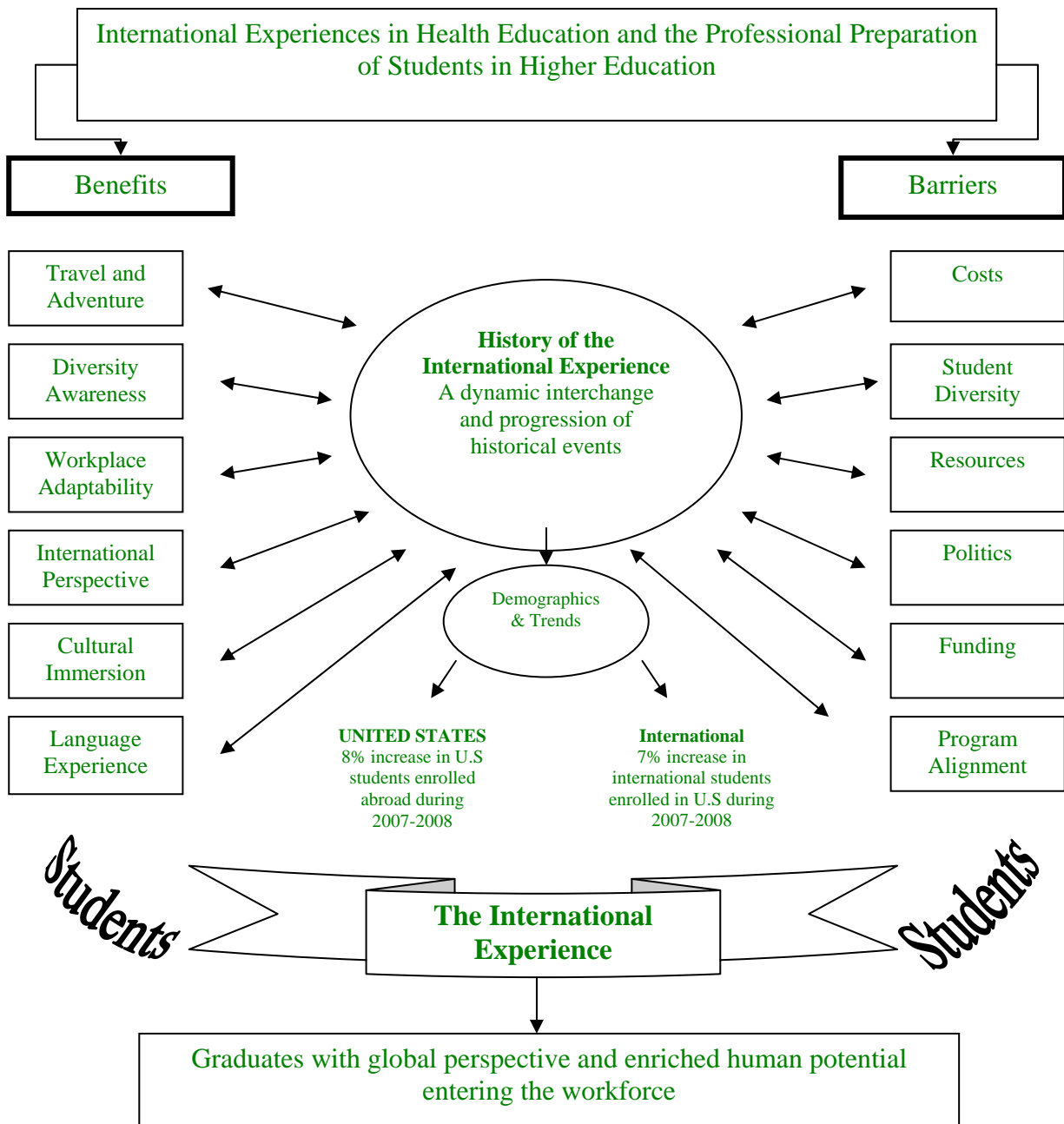
Privett (2009) captures an important element of the purpose of travel abroad and international immersion trips when he states: "It is essential that higher education prepares students and those who teach them, to confront global reality... Colleges must not narrow their education horizons to student 'success,' as that term is often defined by popular culture" (p. 2). Additionally, Altbach (2005a) emphasizes the importance of study abroad programs: "The circulation of scholars and students worldwide – even the so-called brain drain – is an element of the international knowledge system, helping to circulate ideas and also maintaining the research hegemony of the major host countries" (p. 19).

Approaching issues of global society and relationships through the human lens advances the richness of student learning. In

addition to increased altruistic traits, international experiences in the professional preparation of higher education students glean rewards highly valued in today's job market. Figure 1 outlines the dynamic interchange of historical events, with consideration of benefits and barriers, in the progression of global learning, providing opportunity for the student to enhance humaneness and cultural zeal through the international exchange of scholarly wealth. As a result, graduates entering the workforce possess important global perspective and enriched human potential.

In recognition of the numerous benefits offered by internationalization – such as the cross-cultural skills necessary to succeed in any business setting and the appreciation for cultural differences that make individuals highly adaptable to the changing work environment (Shaftel, Shaftel & Ahluwalia, 2007) – this paper focuses on the value of integrating intercultural competence in the higher education curriculum. To contextualize the importance of international experiences, a historical perspective on the development and structuring of educational programs is presented, shedding light on the current programs offered and the challenges that emerge as they evolve from policy to practice.

Figure 1. Schematic of International Experiences in Health education and the Professional Preparation of Students in Higher Education.



This paper also explores the growing need for international cooperation among academic institutions by reflecting on the lessons learned from an international health education study abroad opportunity, emphasizing a cooperative relationship between two programs (i.e., United States and Germany) that may successfully enhance the student's experience in higher education. Several study abroad programs are also described as a means to highlight current international study efforts and to identify shortcomings that must be addressed to improve country-specific educational needs. Finally, a comparative evaluation of the benefits and challenges encountered by current international program opportunities available for students in the United States and throughout Europe supports the increase in the international dimension of higher education and student mobilization.

Historiography

A discussion of the historiography of the international experience and role in the professional preparation of higher education students should begin with defined parameters. The classifications of international education are vast with changing academic landscapes. Even greater are the changing demands of student preparation for future – and current – workforce needs. Davis (1964) describes a “dynamic process, which is gaining in momentum, significance, and recognition” (p. 48). Early reports of the integration of public health concepts as discussed in Davis' article suggests the importance of exchange programs in relation to environmental and health issues such as public sanitation procedures and eradication of disease (p. 49) as well as the provision of accommodations for foreign students (p. 50).

After a review of the terms that conceptualize international experiences for higher education students, we identified several broad definitions documented by several sources (see Table 1) — all equally acceptable to the purpose of each academic institution.

This paper highlights the historiography of international study programs within three distinct categories: a brief history on the beginnings of study abroad programs in the United States, the historical backbone of study abroad programs in Europe, and the opportunities on international education in Germany and their influence on the American university system.

International Study Programs: The Global Context

In recent years, the international dimension of the higher education sector significantly gained interest and momentum within the global context. New trends in the education sector suggest that the standards of academic institutions should aim for integration into an all-inclusive interconnected world and develop cross-cultural criteria that benefit the professional development of the students they serve (Morey, 2000).

The long-standing debate of introducing an international component in the higher education curriculum continues to have unequal support among institutions worldwide. The International Association of Universities conducted the first global survey on the practices and priorities of internationalization with the member institutions of higher education, yielding interesting responses from 66 participating countries that may be suggestive of possible areas to improve (Knight, 2003). The survey concluded that three-fourths of the world regions reported that internationalization is a high priority at their institutions, demonstrating the interest and awareness of the topic. In spite of the interest only 42% of the North American region has institution-wide programs with an integrated internationalization policy, compared to 71% in Europe.

To explore reasons for such a wide gap, it may be helpful to look at another part of the survey, listing barriers to the implementation of programs. The lack of financial support ranked the highest among all reasons listed, indicating that policy reforms allocating more funds are necessary to build

regional capacity and sustainability (Knight, 2003). These findings also indicate that there are still obstacles to overcome, especially in North America, demonstrating low participation and implementation of policies in support of internationalizing higher education when compared to other world sectors. The recognition of barriers can aid in modifying policies within each region to favor internationalization. These findings may become strong motivating factors at international summits to improve higher education standards.

In the United States one of the barriers for internationalization was identified three years ago through a survey conducted by a group of business research organizations: The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management. Detailed responses were recorded from 431 human resource personnel who were asked to evaluate employers' opinions on recent hired graduates from academic institutions in the United States and their readiness to enter the workforce. After the report was released, Richard Cavanagh, the President of The Conference Board noted the following: “It is clear from the report that greater communication and collaboration between the business sector and educators is critical to ensure that young people are prepared to enter the workplace of the 21st century [because] less than intense preparation in critical skills can lead to unsuccessful futures for America's youth, as well as a less competitive U.S. workforce. This ultimately makes the U.S. economy more vulnerable in the global marketplace” (Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2006).

One of the desirable critical skills is foreign language proficiency. The globalization of U.S. markets, tense international relations with the Middle East, and the current financial crisis are factors that elucidate the escalating need for better foreign communication training in America. When David Gray, former Department of Labor Acting Assistant Secretary

Table 1. International Experience-related Terminology: Definitions and Sources

Term	Definition	Source
Internationalization	The specific policies and initiatives of countries and individual academic institutions or systems to deal with global trends.	Altbach, P.G. (2002). Perspectives on internationalizing higher education. <i>Center for International Higher Education</i> . Retrieved June 5, 2009, from http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News27/text004.htm
Globalization	Trends in higher education that have cross-national implications, such as global marketplace and internet-based technologies.	Altbach, P.G. (2002). Perspectives on internationalizing higher education. <i>Center for International Higher Education</i> . Retrieved June 5, 2009, from http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News27/text004.htm
International Education Exchange	The movement of persons from their own countries to other countries for educational purposes.	Davis, J. M. (1964). Some trends in international educational exchange [Electronic version]. <i>Comparative and International Society</i> , 8(1), 48-57. Retrieved May 6, 2009 from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1186472
Global Education	The efforts to cultivate in young people a perspective of the world that emphasizes the interconnections among cultures, species, and the planet. The purpose of global education is to develop in youth the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism, and increasing interdependence.	Propel. (n.d.). Social Sciences Education Civics: World Government. Retrieved June 23, 2009, from University of South Florida, College of Education web site: http://www.coedu.usf.edu/main/departments/seced/Propel/PROPELSSE/PropelSSECivicsGovernmentWorld.htm
Immersion Experiences	Individuals reaching their full human potential by “being humanly” in an inhumane world...the least human way of being in the world is to prosper at the expense of others, or for educational institutions to fail to acknowledge the sufferings of the people like those we encounter on our immersion experiences.	Privett, S.A. (2009, June 5) Travel abroad is as eye-opening for administrators as it is for students [Electronic version]. <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> . Retrieved June 3, 2009, from http://chronicle.com.proxy.usf.edu/weekly/v55/i38/38privett.htm

for Policy was interviewed in 2008, he agreed that Americans are at a cultural disadvantage, since most of the global markets that transaction with the United States government are raised as multilingual (Jackson, 2008). During an interview conducted in a Medill Report from Northwestern University, Grey expressed his opinion: “The communication and technology revolutions make it imperative that we be able to communicate with people who don’t speak English. To make a sale, you have a great disadvantage if your competitor speaks the language of the customer and you don’t” (Jackson, 2008). David Grey’s opinion has sound foundational roots. Since 1971, The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has traced the statistical changes in the number of foreign language programs in the U.S. public school system, and found that a decrease in the amount of programs offered occurred since 1999 (Lenkher & Rhodes, 2007), in spite of government policies intended to create opportunities in learning foreign languages starting as early as primary education, such as the President’s National Security Language Initiative, and the No Child Left Behind Act (United States Department of Education, 2008). One of the reasons behind the downward trending of foreign language programs in academic institutions is related to budget cuts (Lenkher & Rhodes, 2007).

Financial support, however, is only one of the constraints threatening the expansion of international education programs. The growing diversity of the student population in both the United States and Europe uncovers new challenges in the internationalization of education. One aspect assumes that increased globalization serves as the main catalyst for the evolution of many educational curricula, encouraging the global competition of academic institutions and escalating the pursuit for research collaboration. Although, in some respects rapid globalization may prove beneficial, the reciprocity of information exchange can only be driven forward by the ability to manage the

cultural differences that exist among collaborators. Without achieving a level of cultural competence—the acceptance of cultural differences and respect for diversity—Sizoo, Agrusa, and Iskat (2005) argue that professional success of the student is not likely. Thus, globalization presents a heightened need for increasing cultural awareness among students who are part of an expanding multi-cultural global society. Programmatic development in academic institutions must also meet the need to produce culturally competent students.

Study Abroad in America – An Historical Perspective

International programs have a dynamic history within the higher education field impacted by a host of policy, academic, scientific, and economic forces. Many policy decisions have shaped the development of international programs over the years, becoming a top priority in promoting change to the structure of international education and travel. Most significantly, the events of September 11, 2001 brought international security into focus with a dramatic change in the way student travel procedures were implemented, illustrated as follows by O’Neil, Altbach, Berdahl, and Gumpert, (2005): “For most American professors, even those who taught during the Vietnam era, relative peace and stability have been a major premise of academic life...the attacks on the World Trade Center made almost inevitable substantial changes in the relationship between government and the academy and certainly posed the threat of challenges to academic freedom and freedom of university research” (p.108).

Historical trends in international experiences date back to the early 20th century carving a path to longstanding traditions of scholarly exchanges between countries and identified by Thelin (2004). He states: “Several American colleges and universities gained international perspective in their faculty as a result of war and dislocations in Europe with many refugee scholars from German universities, purged

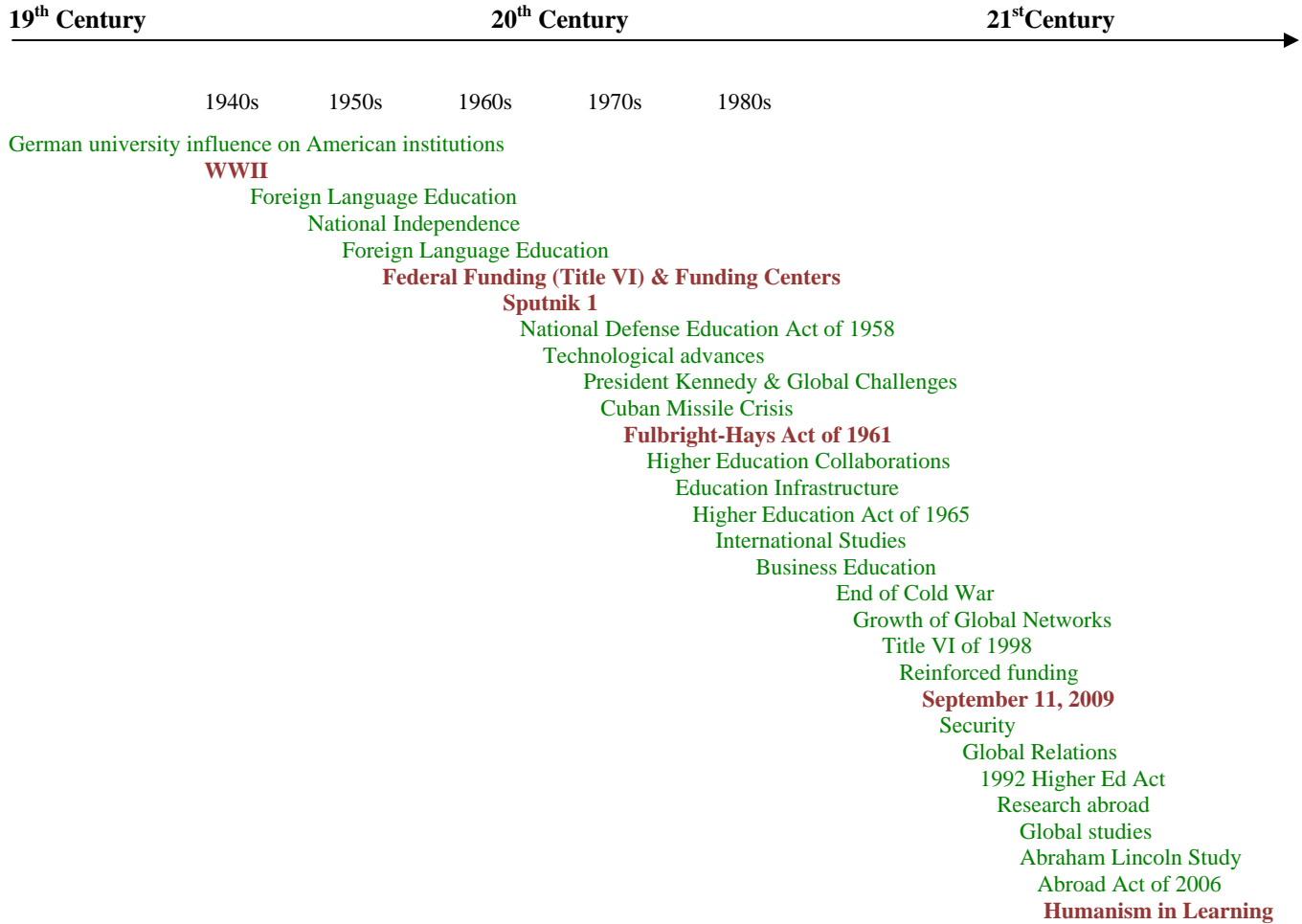
from their academic appointments by the Nazi administration, fled to the United States and often accepted teaching appointments at institutions that previously would never have been able to recruit such talent” (p. 225).

The 20th century delivered “an impressive international timeline” (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2005, p.1) of international education services bringing attention to the role of international exchange of knowledge in global relations and fundamental workforce production. Apart from the emphasis in the literature regarding the role of international experiences in teacher preparation programs of foreign languages, an emerging awareness of academic competencies encompassing other areas such as technology, military initiatives, and funding opportunities took helm. Figure 2 shows a progression of events impacting the evolution of international education in the 20th and 21st centuries and highlighting major catalysts in global interchange.

The development of international education in the 20th and 21st centuries was framed by technological advances, security awareness, funding innovations, scientific discovery, and the realization of global education partnerships. Initial prominence of foreign language teacher training evolved into opportunities of discipline expansion such as understanding the political systems of foreign countries: “The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) heralded a major United States commitment to devoting new attention to the world beyond its borders – first to teach more of the uncommonly taught foreign languages, and then to learn in depth about the histories, societies, cultures and political systems of the key foreign powers as well as the rapidly multiplying ‘Third World’ nations” (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2005, p. 2).

In addition, there were funding channels developed and supported as a result of the need to advance research, economic, and security areas. In 1957, Sputnik 1 “brought global attention to the emergence of

Figure 2. Timeline of Events in the History of the International Experience Progression
 Adapted from Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport (2005) and OPE (2005).



sophisticated technologies and international security threats” and initiated Federal funding supporting new knowledge and discoveries in higher education (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2005, p. 1). For example, Title VI of the NDEA and the Fulbright-Hays Act brought a wealth of opportunity for funding of initiatives spearheading programs designed to integrate the economic and global academic programs and partnerships.

Another outcome of programs funded for international education was the broadening of curriculum content for global perspectives. International teacher training programs included “funded projects providing opportunities for educators at all levels to obtain critical professional development and incorporate international content into their teaching” (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2005, p. 3). As military, political, economic, and academic domains transitioned as a result of new partnerships, funding, and international dimensions the preparation for students in the higher education field evolved into a stronger emphasis on the human connection to learning.

Study Abroad in Europe – Translating the Bologna Agreement into Practice

Policy reforms across higher education systems in Europe began in 1999, when 29 countries signed the Bologna Process - a trans-country effort to improve higher education systems, increase the mobility of students, and promote the European identity of higher education worldwide by the year 2010 (Bennhold, 2005). The concept presented in the Bologna Process is not new. The promotion of higher education cooperation in Europe is traced back to 1989, when the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) program was conceived “to improve the quality and increase the amount of multilateral cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe” (The Bologna Process 2020, 2009). The expansion of ERASMUS in the past decade has

been unprecedented. At the time of its conception, the European program capped the enrollment at 3,000 students. In 2006, ERASMUS granted 136,000 the opportunity for cultural exchange (Bennhold, 2005).

Since its beginnings, ERASMUS has undergone several changes to ensure curricular innovation, and served as a critical inspiration in the development of the Bologna Process. At the last Bologna convention, the number of signatory countries increased to 46, representing over 4,000 institutions (Tobash, 2009), making international education an attractive and achievable option for young people seeking the competitive edge in the job market by becoming multi-lingual and appreciative of the booming diversity in Europe.

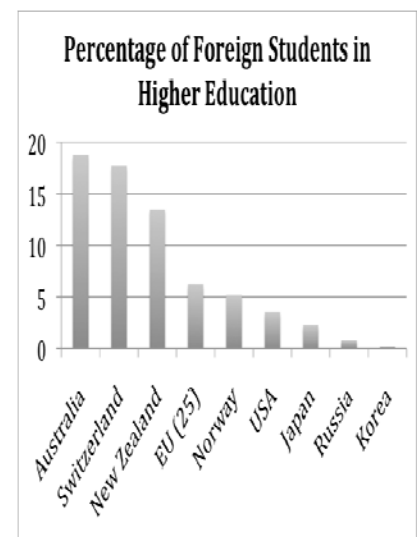
The United States will likely continue to confront challenges as the 46 nations prepare to convene again at the 2010 Bologna Declaration convention. Issues needing further consideration before reaching the target year include the process for admissions into graduate studies, the validation of transfer credits, and the development of a system to weigh credentials for admission that are fairly reviewed and equivalent to Bologna-compliant degrees (Tobash, 2009).

One positive influence on the United States during this process is Europe’s refinement of its existing credential awarding system. A report by the European Association for International Education points out that the current European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is a potential problem due to the lack of standardization of ECTS among all participants (Wauters, 2006). On the other hand, the ECTS has largely contributed to alleviating many nuisances of the credit counting process, outweighing most of its shortcomings. Careful evaluation of the ECTS could become a helpful strategy to adapt in the higher education institutions of the United States.

The impetus of European countries in becoming leaders in innovation and their relentless support towards the expansion of international relationships among higher education institutions, leads

to the question of whether the United States is equipped to become a world competitor in higher education of the same caliber as the Bologna-compliant countries and other rising supporters. The United States still falls behind the international involvement that other nations have demonstrated to the commitment of improving higher education standards. Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of foreign students in higher education programs, and places the United States at the fourth lowest level of participation (Wauters, 2006). Without the active participation in regional policy reform organizations, achieving competitive status with other multinational players seems remote. Whereas countries like Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, and Brazil have national funding initiatives in place for global mobility efforts similar to those proposed in the Bologna Declaration, the United States is yet to have a definitive stake in the international expansion of the higher education curriculum (Knight, 2003).

Figure 3. European Foreign Students in Higher Education Programs by Countries



Note. EU represents 25 out of the current 27 countries of the European Union. Adapted from Wauters (2006).

With the increasing interest and support from many countries, the internationalization of educational programs that focus on the mobility of students and teachers can still face the risk of losing ground on the global arena. Efforts to increase the sustainability of multinational educational programs need to remain at the center stage of national policies already in place. Identifying potential risks of internationalization, such as brain drain and the loss of cultural identity, are also critical to strengthening the institutional efforts that intend to widen the door for international education.

Study Abroad in Germany – Tracing Back its Influence on American Universities

German higher education has been an influential marker in the development of the university system in the United States, especially in regards to research. Altbach (2005b) considers the many contributions of the German university system in the development of American universities and states, “the reforms in German higher education in the nineteenth century augmented the authority and prestige of the professoriate; contributing to the ideal of the American academic profession and research becoming a key responsibility of universities” (p. 291).

A 2009 Germany study abroad program of students from the University of South Florida in the International Health Education summer course demonstrates application of the role of international experiences in the significance of study abroad as well as the development of the human side of learning. Germany’s scientific and scholarly contributions continue to be seen in the eco-friendly industrial plants, water and sewage systems, highway operational efficiency, and sustainable environmental protection and exchange of knowledge with other countries. It can also be seen in the focus on quality of life as well as preventive medicine, restorative health and rehabilitation, and the investment in

wellness initiatives. Thus, valuable space is at a premium and environmental concerns have an important role in the international educational experience. Moreover, the impact of Germany’s culture and educational system was a lesson learned; a personal and visual exposure to the power of self-generating energy from residual, non-recyclable waste material. In the lessons learned application, international students become sensitized to the eco-forces needed in a changing world and in preparation of enhanced job performance in the workforce market.

Given the multitude of focused research, articles, and exposure to a global, green and humanistic learning environment there is indication that today’s international education student is becoming more globally and humanely aware, evolving into workforce dynamics aligned more successfully with today’s generation and culture. As John Zogby – President of Zogby International, a worldwide research and marketing firm – recently explained to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: “College administrators should keep in mind the priorities of ‘America’s first global citizens’ – those now 18 to 30 years old. Today’s college students are ‘the most diverse, multicultural generation yet produced and more tolerant of differences’” (Zogby, 2009).

Demographics and Trends in Study Abroad Programs

Experiential Learning, Outside the Classroom

Students must be trained – and graduate ready – to serve the demands of our time. It is no longer sufficient to excel in the classroom or be at the top of the class. Employers are now seeking experienced young professionals and recent graduates to fill their vacancies and join their work teams. That is why higher education institutions recommend – and many require – their students to participate in internships, fellowships, or volunteer activities in their field, throughout their graduate student life. This section

attempts to explore the options currently available in the United States and their evolutionary process into more robust and sustainable programs. A brief introduction to some of the widely known internship and fellowship programs are included, coinciding with a discussion about the current trends in international programs that may encourage the expansion and participation of study abroad initiatives in the United States.

In addition, members of the U. S. Congress and other entities have recognized the imperative need for students to participate in international study abroad programs, as a means to increase American students’ global literacy and leadership skills. In 2004, the U. S. Congress created the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (Public Law 108-199) – to assess the status of international study experiences among U. S. higher education students, and propose recommendations on how to increase American students’ mobility and participation in such programs. On July 26, 2006, Senator Richard Durbin introduced the “Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Act of 2006,” (S.3744) – coinciding with the U. S. Senate’s designation of 2006 as the Year of Study Abroad, and in response to the findings of this Commission.

The Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Act (S. 3744) proposed that a minimum of one million undergraduate students in U. S. institutions of higher education participate in study abroad programs between 2006 and 2016 with special emphasis on expanding the number of students in technical and scientific fields to participate in international study experiences, at non-traditional locations outside of Western Europe. It also called for the establishment of the Lincoln Fellowships, to help support students when studying abroad, and other grant mechanisms for institutions.

Unfortunately, this bill was not passed by the U. S. Congress and has not been resubmitted to this date. Nonetheless, the need for American students to participate more extensively in international

educational experiences persists. It is indispensable for the global workforce, currently in-training, to understand the impact of globalization in every field and professional practice.

Internships and Fellowships

In the United States, many government entities, academic institutions, and other organizations currently offer students the opportunity to apply for short-term positions as interns, fellows, or trainees. These competitive positions are available in a volunteer or stipend-paid basis, varying according to the resources and programs offered by each sponsoring institution. Programs could last 10-12 weeks during the summer and winter breaks, a time frame equivalent to 6 or 12 months. Some programs offer fellows opportunity to apply for an extension, and others are seeking students throughout the semester on a part-time basis. The options are limitless.

These traineeship, internship, and fellowship opportunities for higher education students are not only available in the United States, but throughout the world. Far and beyond experiential learning opportunities at local or national industries within the student's home country, graduate students greatly benefit from international fellowship experiences and study abroad programs.

Current Trends in Study-Abroad Programs in the United States

Since 1919, the Institute for International Education (IIE) – a highly recognized international agency focused on higher education exchange programs – has conducted surveys among international students in the United States. This survey – known since 1954 as *Open Doors* – collects information on international students from 2,800 accredited U.S. higher education institutions. Recognizing the significance of such an initiative, the U. S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has continuously supported *Open Doors* for over 35 years (Chow, Gutierrez, Baumgartner, & Sato, 2009; IIE Network, 2004).

International Students in the United States

During academic year 2007-2008, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. institutions increased by 7% (n=623,805). This is the highest number of international students registered for the United States since this survey started in 1953-54, and includes an increase of 10% in the number of new/incoming international students enrolled during that academic period. Consistent with previous years' data, most new international students enroll in graduate programs – 60% of which are at the doctoral level – and are of Asian origin (61%). The most frequently chosen fields of study by international students in the United States are business/management (19%) and engineering (17%) (Chow, et al., 2009).

United States' Students Abroad

The number of U.S. students participating in study abroad programs increased by 8% during academic year 2007-2008 (IIE, 2008c), to over 241,000 students. This number is a 150% increase of U.S. students studying abroad, when compared to academic year 1996-1997. Western European countries – namely the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and France – remain in the top five for U. S. students' destinations abroad. China entered the fifth position, after a 25.3% increase between academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07. The Latin American countries of Argentina and Ecuador, as well as India and South Africa also showed increases between 24% and 30% (IIE, 2008a).

In contrast to international students in the U.S., students from the United States who choose to participate in study abroad programs are predominantly at the undergraduate level (83.3%) (IIE, 2008d). Unfortunately, minority U.S. students (Hispanic American, African American, Asian American) are underrepresented in study abroad programs overall (S.3744) – widening the gap of disparities and equal access to such valuable opportunities. The duration of the study abroad experiences of U.S. students varies according to the institutional type or educational

level of the participant. Graduate and specialized students favor short-term stays, whereas undergraduate baccalaureate and associate degree students favor somewhat longer stays (IIE, 2008b).

Study Abroad Programs Available in the United States

The number of U.S. higher education institutions that are providing students with more opportunities to participate in international study abroad experiences has increased during this decade (Obst, Bhandari, & Witherell, 2007). These opportunities are, in part, based on partnerships established between U.S.-based and international institutions.

Additionally, the U.S. government has expanded its programs available for students to study abroad. Table 2 presents a sample of the U.S. government, private, non-profit and other entities that offer international study abroad opportunities, as well as international fellowship positions for U.S. and/or international higher education students and recent graduates. Although much work remains ahead, these efforts do make a difference in the academic experience of U.S. students.

Benefits of and Barriers to International Study Experiences

Benefits of International Study Experiences

There are numerous benefits to international study experiences including out-of-classroom work for an extended time, satisfying an urge for adventure, and enjoyment of travel. Once abroad and forced to maneuver in a foreign environment with completely new situations, the experience may place students out of their comfort zone. This can enhance the student's level of adaptability, combining language experiences with cultural immersion and bringing ample opportunity to enhance the workforce through global perspective and enriched human potential. The student studying abroad will learn to function proficiently in different systems (Citron & Kline, 2001).

Benefits of international experiences not only influence an

individual student's development, but this student's experiences in turn may influence his own institution of higher education by bringing back a different perspective into the classroom. On a higher level, a student's study abroad may even shape international relations by fostering a greater understanding among nations- and ultimately world peace (IIE, 2009).

For the individual student, time spent studying abroad, with or without language immersion, may result in increased self-reliance, self-confidence, and increased tolerance for other opinions. Students of any discipline will gain an international perspective through their studies abroad, enabling them to become comfortable with complex situations and increasing their capability to cope. For most students, the international experience is a life-changing one, preparing them to live and work in an increasingly diverse world (Loflin & Steven, 2007).

Future employers of public health professionals, or any other professionals who have had the privilege of an international experience, will value a greater flexibility in these candidates, and they may perceive these candidates as informed, confident and flexible. Additionally, students will become more interested in the world around them, develop empathy and compassion, and be able to understand the United States from a different perspective (Cressey, 2004). Table 3 provides a description of the benefits of the international study experience.

Barriers to International Study Experiences

Barriers, just as benefits, present at different levels: at the individual student level, the institutional levels and the global level. Cost may be a premier barrier at all levels. Individual students face not only monetary costs by participating in study abroad programs, but may also have to sacrifice time in their studies in order to participate in such programs. Although instruction fees are often included in program costs, college fees may still apply to U.S. students in addition to airfare, lodging and meals expenses, and

excursion and domestic travel fees which will most likely be incurred by the student. In the light of these concerns, short-term experiences are usually preferred, especially, by U.S. students; short-term programs are an effective avenue for students interested in studying abroad (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003).

At the institutional level, administrative costs and time may be quite high. Without strong faculty and political support, institutions of higher education may not be supportive of international experiences. Different educational formats worldwide and issues of credit-transferability, along with temporal overlaps of college terms may present challenges, which can be overcome by multilateral flexibility and a strong dedication to international experiences on both host and originating ends.

Not all international locations may be perceived attractive to all students. Politics greatly influence not only the partner selection of universities, but also the support system for international experiences on both home and host ends. Sensitive political issues faced not only by American public health students, but many other students as well are issues such as family planning and HIV in Africa and abortion measures in China.

When creating international programs, the decision of whom to target may be a barrier in itself: multi-disciplinary groups of students versus students of individual disciplines; or graduate level students only versus undergraduate students who in turn may have more time flexibility.

In the interest of cost and time, it remains to be seen whether or not existing resources at the home institutions may be able to provide an international experience for students by utilizing university international student organizations, government international development approaches, and local immigrant communities. Barriers to international study experiences are summarized in Table 4.

Recommendations

To bridge the internationalization gap, prevalent at different levels

worldwide, there are several recommendations that may improve student access to culturally enriching opportunities abroad. Reflecting on the ERASMUS programs offered at European institutions of higher learning provides opportunity to learn from its weaknesses and strengths. In the United States, ERASMUS-type initiatives that receive government support may positively influence and, over time, reverse the current problem: the perceived lack of preparation of recent graduates for the workforce, as reported by the consortium of business research entities.

A recommendation that would complement the creation of such programs in the United States is the establishment of a graduate education system that recognizes and validates Bologna Process degrees. Eliminating the confusion for graduate school admission personnel by providing national guidelines that specify the equivalencies of U.S.-related credits is essential to properly accommodate international students in the American higher education system.

The IIE is currently exploring how to increase the number and diversity level of U. S. students who participate in international experiences. Efforts must continue to be closely monitored as the impact of globalization, the international workforce, and the rapidly changing financial markets demand continues to change. However, reducing barriers, increasing awareness and support of such programs, and finding funding sources for these experiences as detailed in the IIE's first White Paper on "Current Trends in United States Study Abroad & the Impact of Strategic Diversity Initiatives" (IIE, 2007) is a strong beginning.

Further, in depth studies on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of U.S. higher education students regarding study abroad programs – as well as the barriers they encounter during the decision making process to embark on such programs – are recommended. Its findings could provide better perspective on how to best address

the issue of higher education student's mobility in international programs, from the participant's perspective. An emphasis on the continuing trend to build a more humanistic society through the exposure of international students to the affective domains of global learning can yield enormous benefits in the workforce. Additionally, studies on the benefits of global learning, especially relative to health and environmental issues, would contribute valuable scientific and educational knowledge to the existing literature and attainment of global competencies.

Conclusion

Internationalizing the higher education curriculum enhances many aspects of a student's academic, social, and professional growth. Becoming part of a global society not only improves humanistic attributes, but also positively impacts the student's professional preparation for the growing demands of today's job market. As globalization expands to reach all aspects of our society, the internationalization of higher education becomes a necessity

rather than an abstract goal to achieve. Associating with people of different backgrounds and beliefs, and the language skills and cultural competence that result from educational experiences abroad can ease transition to becoming more adaptable and capable to accept change.

History makes this need for change apparent. The development of international education through the 20th and 21st centuries illustrates that human beings must adapt to the external changes in technology, science, innovation, and security measures that rapidly evolve and continue to impact education and job preparation.

The evolving political systems of foreign countries also press for the change of integrating the global perspective into higher education. As illustrated in the Bologna Process and the ERASMUS program, the political restructuring of international education programs becomes a priority that ensues in a domino effect when foreign countries recognize the value of education and international prestige. The pressure of institutions to measure up to the highest standards of innovation, scientific

achievement through research, and technology advancement has motivated a movement of educational reforms.

However, many countries still fall back from reaching these goals, which can only become palpable through the commitment to cooperate and establish partnerships with other key players. The United States, although historically apt to make the change, still lacks the structure to run expansive study abroad programs, and even lacks the structure to accept international students that travel as part of a Bologna-compliant program.

Although the numbers of foreign students in America seem promising, there are many lessons to be learned from European countries (e.g., Germany), especially related to the ecological framework of curriculum design. The professional preparation of higher education students through an interchange of international, health education experiences crosses a multitude of historical dynamics, including challenges of funding, political activity, and program needs. The result provides many rewards of enriched human potential for the graduate entering the workforce.

Table 2. A Sample of International Study Abroad Fellowship Opportunities for Higher Education

Type of Sponsor	Institution	Position
Non-profit or Foundation	Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH)	Type: Fellowship FIC/Ellison Overseas Fellowships Program (in Global Health and Clinical Research)
Non-profit or Foundation	Peace Corps	Type: Study Abroad Master's International program
Non-profit or Foundation	Research! America	Type: Internships Various health-related topic/areas (i.e. Communications, Health Policy, Global Health)
Non-profit or Foundation	American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS)	Type: Various Study Abroad Program Summer Institute for the Gifted Camp America ACIS Group Travel
United States' Government Sponsored	U.S. Department of State	Type: Study Abroad Fulbright Program (study abroad) - UNITED STATES Student Program - Foreign Student Program - Post-doctoral opportunities
United States' Government Sponsored	US Aid	Type: Internships Type: Fellowship Programs
International Entities' Sponsored	European Union (EU)	Type: Internship, Traineeship Delegation of the European Commission to the United States (Washington, DC) European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (Sweden)
International Entities' Sponsored	United Nations (UN)	Type: Internships (US, Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa) UN Headquarters (New York) World Bank (Washington, DC) UNICEF (New York) UN Development Fund for Women (New York) World Health Organization (Geneva) International Fund for Agricultural Development (Rome) UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (France) Pan American Health Organization (Washington DC or Latin American country) UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, Thailand) UN Human Settlements Program (Nairobi, Kenya) UN Environment Program (Nairobi, Kenya) UN Offices at Nairobi (Kenya)

Table 3. Benefits of International Study Experiences

Who	Description
Student	Students from any discipline will gain an international perspective through their studies abroad, enabling them to become comfortable with complex situations and increasing their capability to cope. For most students, the international experience is a life-changing one, preparing them to live and work in an increasingly diverse world (Loflin & Steven 2007). For the individual student, time spent studying abroad, with or without language immersion, may result in increased self-reliance, self-confidence, and increased tolerance for other opinions
Higher education Institution	The student's experiences may influence his/her own higher education institution by bringing back a different perspective into the classroom. On a higher level, study abroad experiences for the student could shape international relations by fostering a greater understanding between nations - and ultimately world peace (IIE, 2009).
Employer	Future employers of public health professionals, or any other professionals who have had the privilege of an international experience, will value a greater flexibility in these candidates, preferring informed, confident and adaptable candidates.

Table 4. Barriers to International Study Experiences

What	Description
Economic	Cost may be a premier barrier at all levels including students, university and nation. Individual students face monetary costs by participating in study abroad programs, and may also need to sacrifice time in their studies to benefit from participating in study abroad programs. Although instruction fees are often included in program costs, college fees may still apply to U.S. students in addition to airfare, lodging and meal expenses, as well as excursion and domestic travel fees; most likely be incurred by the student. Given these concerns, short-term experiences are usually preferred - especially by U.S. students - and act as the most effective avenue for students interested in studying abroad (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003). Many European higher education institutions are not tuition-driven in comparison to their U.S. counterparts. The severity of this barrier varies according to the student's unique personal circumstances and that of their higher education system.
Higher Education Institution	At the institutional level, administrative cost and time may be significant. Without strong faculty and political support, institutions of higher education may not be supportive of international experiences.
Academic Programs	Different educational formats worldwide and issues of credit-transferability, along with temporal overlaps of college terms may present challenges which can be overcome by multilateral flexibility and a strong dedication to international experiences on both host and originating parties. In the interest of cost and time, it remains to be seen whether or not existing resources at the home institutions are enough to provide an international experience for students by utilizing university student organizations, government development approaches, and local immigrant communities- without becoming a financial burden to the student.
Political	Not all international locations may be perceived attractive to all students. Politics influence the partner selection of universities and the support system for international experiences at home and host ends. Sensitive political issues such as family planning and HIV/AIDS in Africa and abortion measures in China are faced by American public health and other students.
Student	When creating international programs, deciding on a target may be a barrier: multi-disciplinary groups of students versus students of individual disciplines; or graduate level students only, compared to, undergraduate students who in turn may have more time flexibility.

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