

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA: AN ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL AND STUDY ABROAD EDUCATION WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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This report is the result of a request from key administrators at the University of South Alabama to assess and provide guidance for its study abroad enterprise. In addition to background and secondary source research, the authors visited the campus for three days in late September, 2006, and conducted numerous interviews with stakeholders, students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

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“What nations don't know can hurt them. The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward, and that important. For their own future and that of the nation, college graduates today must be internationally competent.”

- The Lincoln Commission

BACKGROUND

In late November, 2005, the 109th Congress of the United States declared, by unanimous vote, 2006 as the *Year of Study Abroad*.

In doing so, Congress recognized the importance of study abroad in increasing global literacy, cultural understanding, and foreign language skills of U.S. students. These competences are I/P
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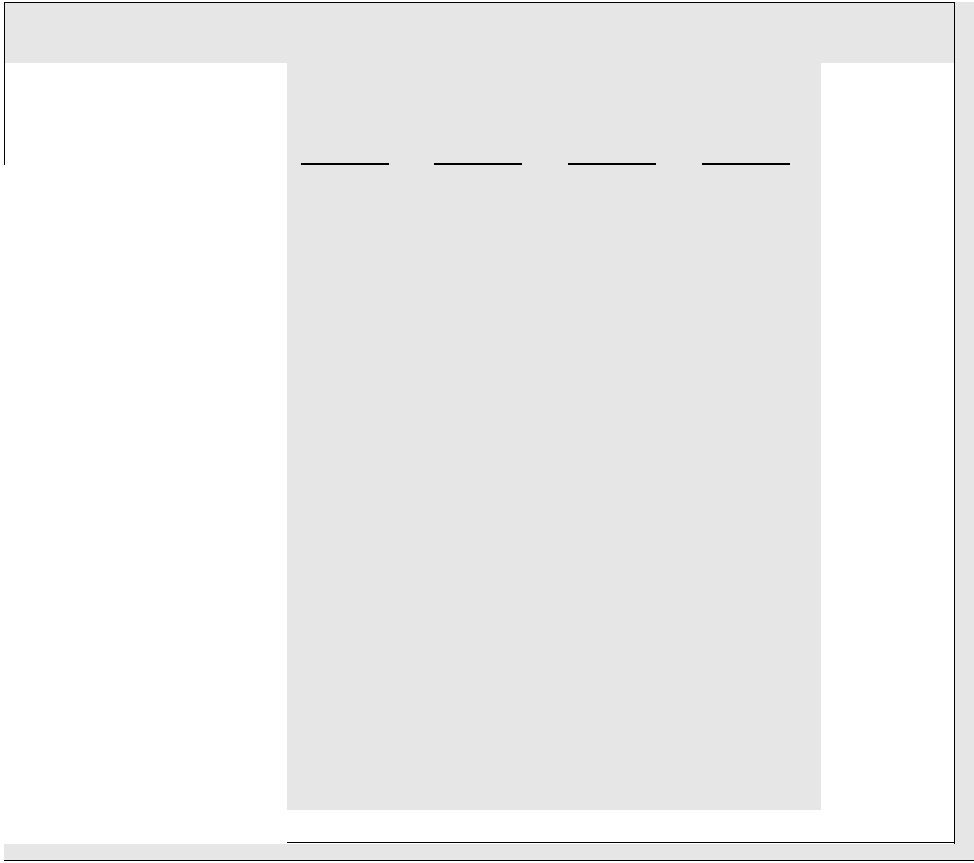
cannot find Israel on a map of the Middle East, 65 percent cannot locate Great Britain, and 58 percent cannot find Japan. Of even greater concern is that 50 percent cannot locate New York on a map of the United States, and 11 percent of students cannot even find the United States.

Why Study Abroad?

“An understanding of the diverse cultures of the world, especially those of developing countries, should be an essential component of the 21st century education of our nation's students.”

- The Lincoln Commission

To lack knowledge about the international environment in today's competitive global arena is to be under-educated and “at risk” in the future



How Long are They Staying and Where are They Going?

“Today, the defense of U.S. interests, the effective management of global issues, and even an understanding of our Nation’s diversity require ever-greater contact with, and understanding of, people and cultures beyond our borders.”

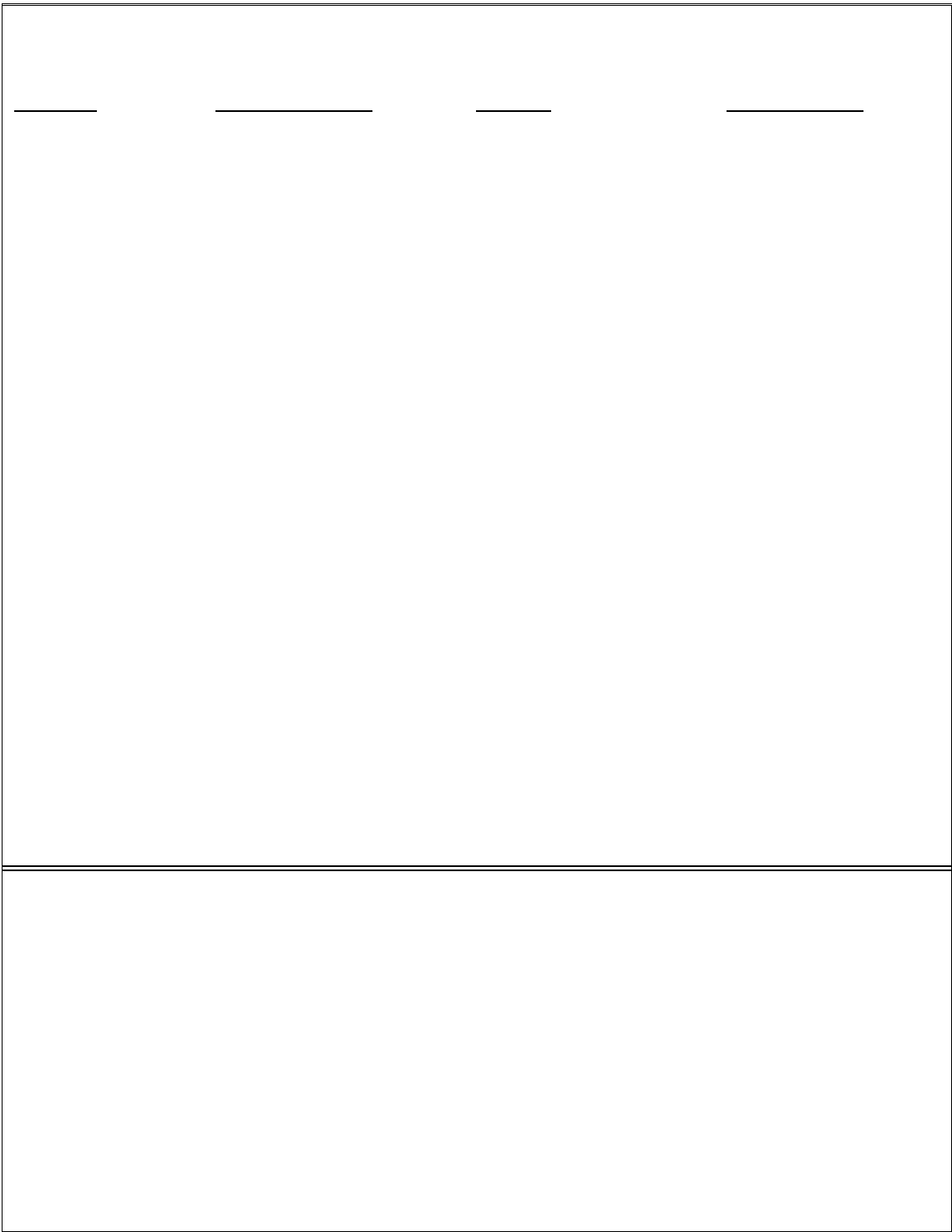
- President Bill Clinton

In the 2003/04 academic year, approximately 54 percent of study abroad participants took part in programs of less than one semester. This continues the steady trend of the past several years as

students shift away from the semester- or year-abroad programs and opt for shorter, more intense programs. Many immersion programs offer the student a concentrated, in-depth experience by combining on-site experiences, with class lectures, and directed student research (Henthorne, Miller, and Hudson 2001). These programs of shorter duration are becoming increasingly popular during a time when more and more undergraduate students are burdened with family and/or increasing financial commitments. Shorter programs provide a mechanism by which students may still gain international experience while, at the same time, maintaining local obligations.

Most Popular Destinations

As can be seen in Table 2, the traditional destinations of England, Italy, and Spain continue to dominate as the most popular destinations for study abroad. However, of increasing interest is the tremendous growth taking plac(s)-26 (s)9 (o)-5



of countless students, in multiple disciplines, to numerous countries, for a number of years. Their professionalism and dedication to furthering the goals of international education can never be doubted. Conversations with previous program participants (students) show that they not only enjoyed the programs, but they believe the experience gave them a better understanding of the global community. _____

This branding, this promise of international activity can be a potent part of the package used in recruitment of highly desirable and coveted students to USA and its Honors program. These may be students that otherwise may not choose to select USA as their university of first choice.

Likewise, a strong brand identity that includes this “promise” of study abroad may be used as a powerful tool in the recruitment of the best possible faculty, in the development of that faculty, and in the long-term retention of that faculty. Strong faculty members are a product in demand. Many of these individuals want exposure to the international arena or, having had some form of prior exposure, they are looking to expand their world view. Offering them the availability of study abroad experiences is one significant way to assist them in pursuing their individual research agendas and individual growth.

We urge the University of South Alabama to include international and study abroad education as an institutional priority. Anything valued by the university and overtly expressed as important by the university should be manifested in all university documents, starting with its mission statement, and protocols, including tenure and promotion. Whether international and study abroad participation is nested in teaching (a non-traditional teaching approach), research (enhancing one’s individual research agenda), or service (extending the university into a-31 (a) 16 31.1i (-t)-29
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term programs. However, exchange-type programs of semester length may be the most appropriate for the sciences and professional disciplines. Such programs may be arranged at the college level using the model of “swapping” students with vetted foreign partners. This activity

Additionally, these students could be utilized as “guest” speakers in classes and/or pre-departure seminars. The knowledge and insights they have to offer of their home countries to USA students is irreplaceable and under tapped.

Measurable deliverables must be required of all study abroad programs. To operate such programs without requiring concrete deliverables would be to encourage no one to take “ownership” of the programs. It is necessary that program accountability be in place. Deans must be held accountable for success/failure of programs that are housed in their respective colleges. Deans, department chairs, and others must be encouraged to engage in this activity. Following this, measures of success or failure on these dimensions must be provided. The Director of Study Abroad

more students to the table. Another significant outcome of expanding the international experience to key players is an improved study abroad product. It is inevitable that the insights and observations of these constituents would lead to useful program modifications with the beneficiary being the student.

Attention should be directed to further strengthening the ties between USA and the local Chamber of Commerce and other economic development entities. The University of South Alabama is an integral part of the Gulf Coast region. Substantial interest exists in the economic development community concerning study abroad. It is necessary to explore what synergies may exist to extend the ties between USA and the local economic development community. The community wants and does support the university, but some may believe that there is nothing truly special for them to support. Given the university's already strong ties with the Chamber, this may provide an excellent opportunity to foster the growth of international education. Educating students to the global environment may be that "something special." Significant monies may be available for study abroad scholarships from local industry. As previously stated, the Mobile area is home to a number of international organizations (for example, EADS, Ciba). Industries such as these have repeatedly expressed interest in hiring students with ANY international exposure. Yet they cannot find them to hire. **International and study abroad education may be the hook that brings them to the scholarship table.** These may be industries that would not normally consider providing funds to the university. USA should consider asking the local Chamber director or similar to serve on its study abroad committee.

It is important is for the President and the Provost to speak with passion about the importance of international education and study abroad to the university due to its context. It is not required for the President and the Provost to speak with specificity about particular Study Abroad programs. No prestigious university exists without considerable "intuitive" connections to its context. For USA, this makes international and study abroad education a good candidate for funding.

Cited Works

American Council on Education (AEC) (2005), "Public Experience, Attitudes, and Knowledge: A Report on Two National Surveys about International Education," Available online at: <http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=9433>. Retrieved: September 24, 2006.

Black, Tyrone and David L. Duhon (2006), "Assessing the Impact of Business Study Abroad Programs on Cultural Awareness and Personal Development," *Journal of Education for Business*, 81, 3.3 ren&sc81 (cn)9 (e,-)445 (ack, T)-11 (y)40 (r6)-27 (n)24hd Daurlf*QBa-10 (rb005 Tara13 (

Appendix

Partial Listing of Contacted Individuals and Groups*

Mohammad Alam - Electrical & Computer Engineering
David Bowers - Political Science & Criminal Justice
Isabel Brown - Foreign Languages

Ana Burgamy - International Programs
Bob Coleman - Honors Program
Patsy Covey - Provost
Frank Daugherty - English Language Center
Richard Hayes - College of Education
Samual Fisher - Political Science & Criminal Justice
Robert Fornaro - International Programs
Jason Guynes - Visual Arts
Melissa Haab - Admissions
Ellwood Hannum - School of Continuing Education & Special Programs
Keith Harrison - Assoc Vice President for Academic Affairs
Richard Hayes - College of Education
Brenda Henson - International Student Services
Robert Ingram - Baldwin County Economic Develop Alliance

Emily Johnston - Financial Aid
David Johnson - College of Arts & Sciences
Calvin Jones - Foreign Languages
Mathew Joseph - Marketing & International Business

Zoya Khan - Foreign Languages
Mohan Menon - Marketing
Harrison Miller - History
Vaughn Millner - Behavioral Studies & Educational Technology
Dorothy Mollise - Student Success & Retention
Carl Moore - College of Business
Gordon Moulton - President
Stephen Morris - Political Science & Criminal Justice
David Nelson - Mechanical Engineering
Phillip Norris - Continuing Education
Maggie Pyle - Sponsored Programs
Janice Sauer - University Libraries

Rick Schaffer - Bursar

Bill Sisson - Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce
Deborah Spake - College of Business
John Steadman - College of Engineering

6 students