

Date: June 17, 2023
To: Ms. Laura Wallace
Vice President of Operations
North Plains Community College
From: Ms. Jillian Stevens, Consultant for Quantum Associates Consulting
Subject: Recommendation Report for the Feasibility of Studying Abroad

Attached is the recommendation report I have written, entitled *College Students Studying Abroad: A Recommendation Report*

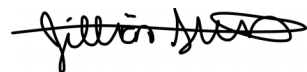
As requested by Ms. Laura Wallace, I have completed extensive research on the feasibility of requiring students to have some international study abroad. I have also familiarized myself with costs, student interest, advantages, and disadvantages associated with such programs. This knowledge came from researching journals and academic websites that focus on helping students decide if an international study program is a good fit for them. When beginning my research, I focused on community colleges that offer study-abroad programs; this led me to focus on statistics and the positive and negative impacts this type of program has on students. I ended my research by finding out how colleges establish programs that give their students the chance to study abroad.

My main findings are that students who study abroad are more likely to gain new experiences, nontraditional education, better graduation rates, and employment opportunities. The incentives I stated are attractive to students, which makes them more receptive to studying abroad. However, the costs associated with these programs can be more than one student can handle.

I recommend one of two courses of action: preparing students for every aspect of studying abroad or offering the program but not making it a requirement for graduation.

I appreciate the leeway you have given me to develop recommendations for the possibility of this program. I look forward to working with you on this project in the future. If you have any questions or comments, please email Jillian Stevens at jastevens5@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jillian Stevens". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Ms. Jillian Stevens

**College Students Studying Abroad:
A Recommendation Report**

Prepared for: Ms. Laura Wallace
Vice President of Operations
North Plains Community College

Prepared by: Ms. Jillian Stevens, Consultant

June 17, 2023

Quantum Associates Consulting
Cleveland, Ohio

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Executive Summary

To decide the feasibility of integrating study-abroad programs into the North Plains Community College, Ms. Laura Wallace, Vice President of Operations, asked me to determine if adding these programs and making them a requirement is feasible. This report will explain my findings and recommendations.

Presently, North Plains Community College does not have a study-abroad program. However, the faculty are interested in incorporating it into their curriculum. Ms. Laura Wallace asked me to consult on the feasibility of establishing a study-abroad program within the school. The students at the school are doing well academically, and having a program of this magnitude would help student progress even further. The faculty at the college have inquired if studying abroad should be a requirement for graduation.

To answer the inquiry, I began by researching student interests, the need for this program, advantages and disadvantages, costs, funding, and how to develop such a program. In my research, I came across surveys that researchers conducted where the participants were students who studied abroad. These surveys provided statistics on grade point averages, extreme personal growth, and employment after graduation.

My main finding is that students that study abroad are more likely to have higher grades, grade point averages, and better chances at employment than students who do not. These statistics prove that study-abroad programs are instrumental in the success of students. Student interest is also based on the statistics. A college is a place for students to learn, improve themselves, and get a good job after graduation. Having a program where students can learn a new culture and be a part of something new is instrumental to the development of young adults. However, a study of this magnitude requires evaluating all the impacts that it can have on students. Even though there are plenty of advantages to students studying abroad, there are drawbacks. These programs can be too expensive for students to be able to participate in.

I recommend one of three options: preparing students for all aspects of traveling to a new country and developing programs to help students cover the costs included in the program. I understand that these options may not be feasible. If the first two recommendations are not reasonable, I suggest making the program optional for students instead of a requirement. These options will ease the stress on students and faculty alike. Developing assistance programs for students is the best option for the college, as it will ensure that both students and faculty are on the same page and trips go smoothly.

Introduction

Ms. Nancy Wallace, Vice President of Operations at North Plains Community College, inquired about requiring students to have international study time before graduation and the feasibility of such a program. Determining if studying abroad should become a requirement for graduation, I analyzed advantages, disadvantages, student interest, programs that meet the criteria, and funding of existing programs. This research helped me develop and report my findings and recommendations.

North Plains does not currently have a program that offers international study. The lack of this type of program hinders students from reaching their full potential academically and in their future careers. Requiring a study abroad program to fulfill students' graduation requirements can help and hinder their futures. The advantages of this program outweigh the disadvantages, but all aspects must be analyzed to make a well-rounded decision about what is best for the students.

Ms. Nancy Wallace requested that I weigh all the options and inform her of the best way to proceed with this program within the college. To make an informed decision, I performed six different types of research:

- Researching student desire and the need for such a program helped me analyze statistics of how many students were successfully employed after graduation.
- I researched the advantages of studying in other countries to understand how it affects students in the long run.
- I then researched the disadvantages that students experienced with study-abroad programs.
- I researched the costs of programs offered at other community colleges.
- I researched the cost of short and long-term study-abroad programs.
- Finally, I began learning more about how to establish study-abroad programs.

This research concluded my initial hypothesis; that students should study abroad for any period. Students who are allowed to study internationally gain skills for their future that they would not achieve with the traditional types of study. The advantages of studying internationally are new experiences, better employment options, and different forms of education. The disadvantages, however, are culture shock and financial stress, which is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The main finding of my research regarding study-abroad programs is that it is instrumental in the success of all students. This program would offer incentives that are attractive to most students. Conversely, there are factors of study-abroad programs that need to be considered. Implementing this program leaves many decisions for students. For instance, whether they want to study abroad for two weeks through their college or a semester through a third party. Determining the effectiveness of a program of this magnitude requires that all student situations are considered.

I recommend that students receive extensive preparation to make sure they are successful. If that is not possible, I recommend that this type of program be an option but not a requirement.

In the following sections, I will provide additional details about how I arrived at my conclusion and my recommendations for moving forward with this type of program.

Research Methods

To gauge the program's feasibility, I researched several criteria that should be included in a program of such magnitude. These factors are student interest, community colleges that offer study-abroad programs, and how the study-abroad programs would be funded.

Student Interest

Study-abroad programs are beneficial to students while in college and after graduation. However, the programs would not be successful without student interest. Making it a requirement could dishearten students from pushing themselves to graduate and possibly transfer to different schools. Therefore, to refrain from losing students, the college must understand where the desire stems from. To gather data about student interest, I researched surveys that explain what motivated students' interest in international study. For example, I analyzed a survey conducted by Terra Dotta. This survey was conducted with over 200 students expressing their desire to study abroad. This survey led me to an article titled *State of Study Abroad: Addressing Mobility Motivators, Barriers*, written by Ron Carson, and he says that "In last year's survey, 24% of students indicated their top reason for studying abroad was to 'prepare for the global workforce.' This year personal growth was the top reason driving students' interest to study abroad" (2023, para. 3). The results of surveys like this one conclude that students want to study abroad.

Program Need

Student interest is only part of the criteria for assessing if this type of program is justified. Before making it a requirement, I needed to decide if this program is essential for the success of graduation and employment of students that study internationally. For this portion of my research, I looked at the graduation rates, GPA rates, and employment rates of students that studied abroad and those who did not.

Advantages of Studying Abroad

Assessing student desire, I researched the benefits that come with studying abroad. Students that study abroad tend to have a higher GPA and a broader range of skills when they graduate from college, which results in better job offers. For example, students develop independence, critical thinking, self-awareness, and intercultural communication while navigating a new country. Employers desire candidates that have studied abroad because of the skills that students that study abroad have developed. *Study Abroad Increases Professional Job Prospects* reports, "Nearly 90% of study abroad alumni secured a job within the first six months after graduation" (Bohrer, 2019, para. 9). Overall, students that are part of a study abroad program are more likely to be successful in college and the workplace than those students who do not study internationally.

Disadvantages of Studying Abroad

On the other hand, college officials must understand the drawbacks of requiring students to be in the program for graduation. I researched the cons of study-abroad programs and found there are three common downsides to these kinds of programs. These are language barriers, culture shock, and high costs. Students face not being able to understand people from their host country as well as the customs of that country. More importantly, the price of these programs is a common reason why students do not think it is feasible to study abroad. I found that the cost of studying abroad for a semester is more than short-term programs. Not only do students have to pay for the program they enroll in, but they also must pay for airfare, extra expenses, passports, etc. This method of research helped me understand why many students refrain from choosing to join study-abroad programs.

Colleges that Currently Offer Study-Abroad Programs

After determining student interest, advantages, and disadvantages of study-abroad programs, I began looking into colleges that currently offer study-abroad to accurately inform North Plains Community staff how to structure its program. Analyzing current programs made me aware of what these colleges provide. For example, what is included in the cost, and if they use long-term or short-term programs. Colleges like Austin Community College, the University of Washington, and the University of Chicago that offer study-abroad programs helped determine the criterion for this program.

Establishing the Criteria for the Program

Analyzing student interest, advantages and disadvantages, and programs already being offered guided me to develop the criterion for long and short-term programs. For the implementation of a study-abroad program to be feasible, the cost of a short-term study must not exceed \$5,000 per student and include airfare, passports, meals, transportation, tuition, and healthcare. For long-term (semester-long) study programs, the cost must not exceed \$9,000 and be all-inclusive, like the former criteria.

Program Funding

After researching how colleges and third parties fund their programs, I learned that students solely fund their trips and that it is cheaper to study abroad through the institution than through a third party. Students that study abroad through their college pay the school directly, and the school pays the international institution. However, students who decide to study abroad through a third-party provider are charged a fee for that company handling placement.

Programs That Meet the Criteria

The criteria I have set forth give several options to develop the program that would work best for your college. If you are looking for a short-term of a few days or weeks, you can work with the Office of Education Abroad. They will approve your proposed fees and curriculum of the program. I found a brochure from the Austin Community College (2023) explaining that they offer a 5-week program in England which costs \$3,100.00 per student. This includes accommodations, transportation, archeological dig site, excursions, entrance fees, welcome and farewell dinners, 24/7 logistics support, and emergency assistance, and six credit hours (para. 6). They require a \$400 deposit, which is applied toward the program fee (para. 8). Likewise, the University of Washington is offering a one-week trip to the London and France, and costs

\$4,352.58 per student. The cost of this program includes the program fee, study abroad fee, housing, food, airfare, passport, program-related personal expenses, and health-related expenses. Students are given two options to pay for the program; they can pay for it in one lump sum or a payment plan.

Funding Options for Your College

After researching how other colleges handle the payments for study-abroad programs, I found that students are solely responsible for the cost of such programs. If you were to establish a short-term program, the student would pay the college directly, and then the faculty would pay the host university. Funding a long-term (semester-long) program is more complicated than short-term programs. Long-term programs are more expensive and take more planning. One way to decrease the costs would be to partner up with another department in your college or with another school. According to an article I found during my research, partnering with other faculty can help you “share logistical responsibilities, student numbers (which can help lower costs), and in-country resources” (Center for International Affairs, 2017, para. 14). Lowering the costs of all possible programs will not only affect the college but its students as well.

Conclusions

This section presents my conclusions based on the research I performed to determine the feasibility of making study abroad programs a requirement for graduation.

Student Interest

There is an immense amount of student interest in study-abroad programs. To decide the feasibility of such a program, one must understand where student interest comes from. Students are more likely to study abroad for the incentives this program would bring. College students are in a phase of life in which personal growth is essential to their growth. Studying abroad is the perfect way to enhance students' development. Therefore, implementing a study-abroad program would spark much interest for the students at your college.

Advantages to Students Studying Abroad

Study-abroad programs, long or short, are beneficial to the students. Students that study abroad will gain independence, life skills, intercultural communication, critical thinking, and self-awareness. These programs help students achieve higher grade point averages and better employment opportunities after graduation.

Disadvantages of Studying Abroad

Even though there are many advantages to implementing these programs in colleges, the drawbacks must be analyzed. The disadvantages to these programs are cost, culture shock, and language barriers. Students that are not financially stable will have to pick and choose what programs they can afford instead of the one that would benefit them the most. Students also tend to stay away from these programs due to the language barrier that will be present when studying abroad.

Criteria for Establishing Study-Abroad Programs

My necessary criterion, the cost of the programs, establishes a flat rate that students would pay to study abroad short-term or long-term. The flat rate includes all the expenses that would occur during the trip. This criterion eliminates the unknown for students when trying to gather money to study internationally.

Recommendations

I recommend that the North Plain Community College pursue one of three options:

Option 1: Ensuring That Students Have the Proper Preparation

If study-abroad programs are to be a graduation requirement, it would be wise to establish programs to inform students about funding, language barriers, and the culture shock they will experience in a new country. These programs should be offered before students start the process. This will give students a better idea of what to expect in a new country. It will also ensure that students get the most out of their experiences.

Option 2: Developing Programs to Help Students with Expenses

My second recommendation is to develop programs to help students raise the money for the trip; this will help keep students out of further debt. Fundraising is a great way to help students that do not have the money to study abroad. If your college plans on making this a graduation requirement, then your college needs to ensure that the students can afford it without causing them to go into further debt.

Option 3: Make the Program an Option Instead of a Requirement

If the previous options are not feasible, I suggest making these programs optional instead of a requirement. This will allow students to weigh all their options without stress. If this program is optional, students will not feel obliged to take out more student loans and scramble to raise money. Studying abroad is supposed to be a fun and enlightening experience. However, if students are pushed into them without the proper help or groundwork, the outcome of such a program will not be as expected.

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