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Developing Social and Cultural Capital through Semesters Abroad

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Abstract

Marshall McLuhan (1962) used the metaphoric term 'global village' to highlight the symbolic shrinking of the earth brought about by the increasing use of electronic technology that facilitated the simultaneous interaction among people in distant locations with relative ease and speed. With advanced technological achievements and increased travel, education has become even more internationally mobile with border crossing among students being the rule rather than the exception. Today, studying abroad in higher education is increasingly being viewed as a regular part of education in a globalised world. Though some may argue that globalisation is a step in the right direction towards uniting world communities and promoting social and environmental commitment, others may insist that it is a 'double-edged sword' which brings economic disparity to many regions. Whichever position is held, in these changing times education has become an international commodity subject to market forces. The research is designed to enable us to ascertain whether student learning is enriched in a manner that allows them to build their social and cultural capital. If social capital is "investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions (Lin 1999, p. 39)" and cultural capital can be defined as "material and symbolic goods that a society considers of worth that also includes accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status (Bourdieu,1996)", then modern universities have a role in developing such capital in their graduates. This paper discusses the conceptualization and early findings from a broader longitudinal study which examines the perceived efficacy of the semester abroad experience at the University of Sydney over a period of three years. At the core of this research, is an examination of how teaching and learning is constructed and experienced. We will also examine social learning systems through the emerging communities of practice and changes in the identities of lecturers and students who participate in study abroad and exchange programs at the Faculty of Education and Social Work and will argue that through their participation in these, students tap into that futuristic part of the society that seeks to fit into the knowledge economy with competence and confidence. In this paper, we will look at the findings gleaned from focus group sessions and the online questionnaires which were answered by newly enrolled semester abroad students who had consented to participate in the study.

Introduction

Studying abroad is not an entirely strange or new experience (Gürüz, 2008, p. 2). Rather, it can be perceived as just another phase of life. When we enter our first school, our first club, our first job, our first university, our experiences are all new and in some ways they prepare us for understanding what it is to be a stranger in a new land. This knowledge and understanding supports us when we do travel to a new country for educational purposes. These new experiences also help us to negotiate this new world when we engage with people of different nationalities as neighbours, as work colleagues, as friends in various interest groups. This new world helps us to understand that we no longer live in a mono-cultural society but a globalised world.

It has been argued that students who study abroad bring a cross-cultural uniqueness and diversity to local student populations and so semester abroad programs form one aspect of most universities internationalisation strategy (Talburtt & Stewart, 1999). Semesters abroad contribute further to a greater understanding of the 'global village' (McLuhan, 1962), a concept which highlights the symbolic shrinking of the earth brought about by the increasing use of electronic technology that facilitated the simultaneous interaction among people in distant locations with relative ease and speed. The concept of studying abroad is even more interesting knowing that “the number of foreign students today is a staggering 2.5 million worldwide ... and over seventeen thousand institutions of higher education in 184 countries and territories in the world” (Gürüz, 2008, p. 2). With advanced technological achievements and increased travel, education has become even more internationally mobile with border crossing among students being the rule rather than the exception.

Though some may argue that globalisation is a step in the right direction towards uniting the world and promoting social and environmental commitment, others may insist that it is a ‘double-edged sword’ which brings economic disparity to many regions through interpenetration of markets and integration. Whichever position is held, universities are certainly using the concept of globalisation to enhance their internationalisation repertoire and are establishing partnerships and employing agencies to encourage the best and the brightest candidates to study with them and employers are using these fluid situations to employ these graduates. Globalisation that is interpreted as ‘...the widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness’ (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999, p. 14) is also changing the face of education which has become an international commodity that is bought and sold freely. Knight and de Wit (1997, cited in Knight, 2004, p. 8) bring further clarity and sharpness to the term globalisation by defining it as the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values ideas, capital, goods, and services across national borders. These flows affect countries in different ways because of their individual histories, traditions, cultures and main areas of concern.

Nye (2004, cited in Gürüz, 2008, p. 15) introduces the ideas of *networks of interdependence, networks of connections and multiple relations all happening at multi-continental distances* to the concept of globalization. Gürüz (2008, p. 2) interprets the term, simply as ‘the coming together and interaction of human beings’ and explains that if international markets are to function smoothly, people need to be able to communicate with each other through common languages, skills base and “the capacity to work in

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intercultural environments. These he argues, are the drivers of the internationalization of higher education. In today's society, the interconnectedness of the World Wide Web has revolutionised the way we interpret the world so that even when we travel abroad we can still stay connected to family friend and colleagues wherever they may be in the world. These factors also encourage young people to travel further afield and look for the best opportunity for study, where they can make new friends, meet future business partners and compete in the global market.

For decades, students have travelled to foreign lands to engage in higher education study and with increased universal mobility and partnerships between universities, there has been a boost in the number of students participating in higher education. Many universities now boast a robust semester abroad program which not only supports students who leave that university to study at other institutions but who welcome visiting students from other countries. Indeed, within the Declaration of Bologna (1999), twenty-nine European countries have agreed to, among other things, promote by 2010 the '...mobility (for students, lecturers, researchers and technical-administrative personnel) by means of removing obstacles for the full exercise of free circulation' through the Bologna Process.

This research project examines the perceived efficacy of the semester abroad experience for students during two semesters at the University of Sydney. This study which began in early 2008 identifies and captures semester abroad students' perceptions of a broad range of academic and "non-academic" capacities, aspirations, attainments and pathways while in Sydney. The research is designed to enable us to ascertain whether student learning is enriched in a manner that allows them to build their social and cultural capital and therefore contribute to what has been termed a 'knowledge economy' (Rooney, Hearn and Ninan, 2005). In this paper, we will look at the findings gleaned from responses from an online questionnaire and focus group sessions with newly enrolled semester abroad students who consented to participate in the study.

Internationalisation and Internationalism

Peter Drucker (1992) referred to the 'knowledge worker' in his book the *Age of Discontinuity* as a person who produces ideas, knowledge and information compared to the person who is involved in manual labour. As such he is thought to have unwittingly ushered in the term 'knowledge economy'. In the developed countries of the world, knowledge is "traded", "highly prized" and sought after. Scholars continue to describe education as contributing to a 'knowledge economy', as if education is seen by society as a commodity to be traded, thus allowing competition between societies. This is one of the reasons for the success of the study abroad programs. Students seems to intuitively tap into that futuristic part of the society that seeks to fit into the knowledge economy with competence and confidence.

Two similar terms, 'internationalisation' and 'internationalism' are at the core of developments here. Internationalisation as defined by Knight, 2003 (pp. 2-3) is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post secondary education." Internationalism on the other hand refers to the promotion of global peace and well-being through the development and

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application of international structures, primarily but not solely of an intergovernmental kind (Jones, 1998, p. 143, cited in Stromquist, 2002, p. 188). The understanding here is that common interests are more important in the long term than differences.

Universities that pursue ‘internationalisation’ but not ‘internationalism’ may recruit more students from wealthier countries and the wealthier parts of other countries and may also tend to select students who they believe will make the smoothest psychological transition, that is, students whose outlook and disposition are already closest to the ethos of the host university. Thus internationalisation, pursued without heed of internationalist ideals, can reinforce pre-existing parochial tendencies (Cudmore, 2005; Stromquist, 2007).

Studies examining the nature of internationalisation in Higher Education are varied and among other things, have focussed on internationalism in students (Brunner, 2006), the internationalised curriculum (Haigh, 2008), the impact of study abroad on students future careers (Norris & Gillespie, 2008), international attitudes of graduates (Hayden & Thompson, 1995).

Internationalisation can also occur without instilling internationalism in students. In a study by Brunner (2006), examining internationalism in students it was found that while a majority of students welcomed greater diversity at a Southern USA Campus, many said the diversity was more “seen” than “felt”, because the formal encouragement of diversity did not necessarily guarantee that people of different backgrounds would freely socialise. Students expressed a view that it is up to individuals to decide to mix, instead of retreating into homogenous groups or standing behind identification banners of difference (Brunner, 2006). The host institution could also develop activities and programs which encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and more cross-cultural participation in activities. For example, classes at universities could be deliberately mixed with both local (which already be mixed) and international students. In this scenario, students will have to engage with difference and if skilfully negotiated by the lecturer, fruitful and dynamic dialogue could ensue.

Haigh (2008) portrays a ‘disjunction’ in which internationalist ideals of planetary citizenship and liberal scholarship are routinely subordinated to the competitive imperatives of an internationalised campus. In this portrayal, curriculum may be “internationalised” in name only, while still catering primarily to the needs of at-home ‘novice’ undergraduate students, and not to international students who may already be relatively advanced scholars in their own right. Moreover, the utilitarian conception of universities as providers with a ‘brand image’ to protect, students as ‘customers’ and faculty as ‘employees’ militates against any notion of active citizenship on campus.

The motivations for internationalism and internationalisation can also exist in the form of “parallel lines”. That is, oriented the same way but never meeting. A study by Freeman and Thomas (2005) ascribes the growth in international education programs to universities’ recognition of education as a human right and key driver of increased living standards. Universities aspire to provide education programs to people from developing countries so they can contribute to the development of their homeland with an international outward-looking perspective. Such priorities derive from an internationalist

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mindset and exist alongside other forces of internationalisation that view education as a commodity to be traded on an open market.

Internationalism can also operate without internationalisation. In a study by Hytten and Bettez (2008), two teacher educators described their efforts to teach globalisation issues as being motivated by their wish to help future teachers think about questions of social justice, the role of education in promoting equity, the “role of privilege” in perpetuating local and global inequalities, and how to better situate local problems in their global context. Students’ reactions ranged from enthusiastic activism to intellectualising distance, to professed despair and uncertainty and to accusations that the teachers are running a Marxist or socialist agenda. What is undisputed is that by placing issues of globalisation front and centre in course materials, students were compelled to engage with the material and form their own response. There were no ‘fence-sitters’ at the conclusion of the course (Hytten & Bettez, 2008).

The wider research on benefits of Study Abroad.

According to UNESCO, the number of students studying in higher education institutions outside their home countries is growing rapidly. In 2004 there were 2.5 million mobile students worldwide, up from 1.8 million in 2001 and from 1.68 million in 1999 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics online). IDP Education Australia estimates that by 2025 there will be 7.2 million international students...

(American Council on Education, 2006, p. 1)

The research literature for study abroad is vast. Studies such as the project conducted by Hayden and Thompson (1995) investigated the perceptions of undergraduate students in the UK who had experienced an overseas international education. The students were rated highly in terms of holding an ‘international attitude’ which included high levels of tolerance for divergent cultural viewpoints.

Another study by Stromquist (2007) examined a university that adopted internationalisation but not internationalism. Findings were that faculty identified a strong ‘instrumental’ tendency among students as a rationale for studying abroad, many of whom had tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in a graduate degree. Instrumental refers to, as staff noted, an increased priority on getting grades and job placement over learning, and a studied lack of enthusiasm for scholarship and liberal arts. Faculty members believed that students came to the university with this mindset — thus it could be that internationalised universities, marketing to students on the basis of prestige, reputation and graduate career outcomes will attract more instrumentally-minded students (Stromquist, 2007, pp.87–95)

Sutton and Rubin (2004) compared a group of 255 Study Abroad students with 249 non-Study Abroad students from 16 different universities in Georgia and found that the Study Abroad students benefited from better functional knowledge, with regard to the ways in which they navigated and solved problems in unfamiliar settings where it is necessary to devise a novel solution. They also had a better knowledge of world geography and a

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greater understanding of cultural relativism where they were able to understand that their own judgements about other cultures could be affected by the ethnocentric biases of themselves as observers. In addition, they had a greater knowledge of global interdependence and had a greater appreciation of the practical domestic and international effects of the global economic and political order.

A significant retrospective study by the U.S. Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) surveyed their alumni database of Study Abroad students dating back to the 1950s. A postal survey of 28 questions to 14,800 IES alumni resulted in 3,723 completed surveys from alumni of 500 different universities, for a confidence level of 95%. The survey found the perceived benefits of semester abroad to be durable decades after the study experience (Dwyer, 2004). Students who did a year-long study abroad were most likely to complete graduate school (46%) or earn a PhD (7%), double the rate of study abroad students doing shorter courses. Eighty-six percent (86%) increased their commitment to foreign language study following study abroad, 80% reported enhanced interest in academic study, 64% that it influenced their decision to attend graduate school and 63% to change or expand their Major area of study. Ninety-eight percent (98%) felt that SA had helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases, and 82% that SA had contributed to developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world, and 60% had awakened an interest in learning about another culture. Seventy-six percent (76%) claimed to have acquired skills that influenced career path, 65% reported an enhanced ability for a language they used at work and for 62% SA sparked an interest in a career direction.

In this study, we argue that students who attend the University of Sydney through semesters abroad, can find ample opportunities to develop their social and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1996) cultural capital can be defined as “material and symbolic goods that a society considers of worth that also includes accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status” while social capital as explained by Lin (1999, p. 39) is an “investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions”. In this globalised world, modern universities have a role in developing such capital in their graduates. Recognizing that new social and cultural knowledge is gained and developed in educational experiences, USYD has attempted to establish that every faculty provides study abroad students with teaching and learning experiences that contribute to a key set of graduate attributes which translate into the social, cultural and economic capital of these students, thus preparing them to live in the ‘knowledge economy’.

After examining a number of research projects on student gains after participating in semester abroad programs, Gürüz (2008, p. 238) concludes:

The quest for a better education for a better life has always been the major rationale on the part of the students for seeking education abroad; this is still the case. However, networking has recently emerged as an almost equally powerful rationale.

Research on study abroad in Australia and the Pacific nations such as New Zealand have provided some interesting data. Hellsten (2002) reported on a study where she asked

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participants to describe the expectations of their endeavour. She later compared this description with how they have experienced the transition after having spent some time in Australia. She concludes (Hellsten, 2002, p. 5):

The meaning which some students vest in a higher degree from an Australian university is translated into providing better career opportunities in their home country. (cf. Cannon, 2002). Another expectation is of increased intercultural exchange for the benefit of improving professional and language skills, especially for those placed within the language industry. In many cases students' decisions to take their studies abroad involve a careful consideration of what benefits this will bring to them personally and professionally. In most cases the expectations of improving 'life opportunities' are aspired to in conjunction with an overseas study plan.

Studying in Australia

Australian higher education is characterized by an increasing diversity of students which in part is a reflection of the current local student population due to both voluntary and forced migration but also an increasing influx of international students (McInnis, 2003). These international students account for 17.3% of the student population. In fact, Australia now boasts the highest proportion of international students in higher education in the OECD (OECD, 2007, p. 317).

Australia's export earnings from education exceed those of agricultural exports such as wool or wheat, thus clearly, study abroad is important to the Australian economy. Australian Education International (AEI), an agency associated with the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations operates mainly in higher education, and its goals are to "promote broader bilateral and multilateral engagement on international education and training policy; contribute to alleviating Australia's skills shortages; protect educational standards and ensure market diversification (www.aei.gov.au). This is a significant management task, as according to AEI there are some 370,000 international students in Australia.

Australia has a Memorandum of Understanding in operation between several agencies aimed at enhancing co-operation between the agencies to promote Australian education overseas. This reflects the multi-agency approach of UNESCO's *Education For All Global Action Plan* and the harmonisation recommendations of the OECD. Such memoranda (see for example the agreement with Chile, available online at: http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/policies_programs/international/agreements/Chile-UniAus-MoU-July08.pdf) set out roles and responsibilities, co-ordinated strategies, accountability and efficiency measures and question and answer guidelines for education activities between the immigration, foreign affairs, trade, education, tourism, foreign aid and related departments. Suffice it to say, that a large percentage of the Study Aboard students at USYD come from their neighbours across the Pacific Ocean, North America.

The University of Sydney Experience

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Recognizing that new social and cultural knowledge is gained and developed in educational experiences, the University of Sydney has attempted to establish that every faculty provides study abroad students with teaching and learning experiences that contribute to a key set of graduate attributes which translate into the social, cultural and economic capital of these students, thus preparing them to live in the 'knowledge economy'. Commenting on both outbound and incoming semester abroad programs, the University states that: participating in the Study Abroad and Student Exchange programs is an exciting and challenging way of broadening [students] horizons in a new environment. Students can: globalize their educational experience; enhance academic opportunities that may otherwise be limited or unavailable; establish professional and career opportunities through networking; improve language skills and cultural understanding; experience personal growth by developing self confidence and social skills. Over the past five years three hundred overseas students enrolled in units of study across the University of Sydney's 16 faculties every semester. In fact, in this year of the much touted recession there has been the highest ever enrolment of 511 students.

The current study

At the beginning of semester 1, 2008, new in-coming study abroad students at USYD were invited to participate in an online self reporting questionnaire which hoped to gauge their views on what they hoped to gain from the Study Abroad experience. At the end of that semester, a further invitation was sent out to the students inviting them to complete an exit questionnaire to ascertain to what extent their initial perceptions have been met along with any other knowledge, skills and competencies they may have gained as a result of the experience. The findings are discussed alongside findings from other international study abroad data to understand the perceived impact of study abroad programs on the lives of the young adults of the global world.

The research design includes collection of data through online questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and case studies. Anderson's (1990, p. 163) view that "good ... studies incorporate multiple sources of data" and their methodologies are "typically eclectic and combine some of the elements of ethnographic research, program evaluation and descriptive method (Anderson, 1990, p. 112) seem to aptly locate the study into a methodological framework. In this paper, we will look at the findings gleaned from the online questionnaires which were distributed to newly enrolled study abroad students who had consented to participate in the study.

This study, like that undertaken by Hellsten's (2002, p. 3), *takes the premise that systemic documentation of the student experience provides valuable insight into the pragmatics of international educational offerings... it provides educators with useful insights into otherwise unavailable viewpoints on which to review the higher education curriculum, as well as the quality assurance aspects of its delivery*

Findings

In Semester 1, 2008, 112 students responded to the study abroad exchange survey for semester one 2008, 65 (58%) of those were female and 47 (42%) were male with 104

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(93%) aged 18-24. The majority of students came from across Europe and North America with a few from Southeast Asia.

When asked why they chose the University of Sydney, there were 271 responses with the most popular reasons being: The University of Sydney's reputation of academic excellence (72), the reputation of Australia (66), the tourist icons like the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House (50). These were followed by the University's direct marketing at their home university (18) and recommendations by former study abroad students (18).

The top eight reasons that students cited as being important in terms of pursuing a Study Abroad initiative were: to have fun, to meet other people and make new friends, to open their minds to new ways of understanding the world, to learn about different cultures; to gain qualifications, to gain more professional knowledge, to improve their life skill competencies and to improve their communications skills (see table 1 below). Other reasons given in order of highest responses are: to improve my communication skills; to gain confidence; to deepen my knowledge and appreciation of my own language, culture and social context; to gain qualifications; to enhance my marketability; to gain more professional knowledge; to enhance my learning strategies (library searches, group discussions, workshops, participation in an educational community); to get as far away from home as possible; to improve my English.

Table 1: Entry Survey Semester 1 2008 – Reason for enrolling

Item No	Personal Level 112 respondents	Responses	Professional /Academic Level	Responses
1	to have fun	98	to open my mind to new ways of understanding the world	63
2	to meet other people and make new friends	92	to gain qualifications	62
3	to open my mind to new ways of understanding the world	86	to gain more professional knowledge	58
4	to learn about different cultures	80	to learn about different cultures	53
5	to improve my life skill competencies	62	to improve my communication skills	53
	Total responses	659	Total responses	579

Based on the data received, the top eight reasons that students cited in terms of their expectations of the program at either a personal or an academic/professional level were: adaptability to various situations and new contexts, social and leadership skills, wider orientation to learning in a global context, problem-solving/self-efficacy, wider orientation to learning in a global context, social and leadership skills ability, to have fun and the development of team work skills (see table 2 below).

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Table 2: Entry Survey Semester 1 2008: Expectations of the Program

Item No	Personal Level 112 respondents	Responses	Professional/Academic Level	Responses
1	adaptability to various situations and new contexts	77	adaptability to various situations and new contexts	56
2	social and leadership skills	59	wider orientation to learning in a global context	51
3	problem-solving/self-efficacy	52	problem-solving/self-efficacy	50
4	wider orientation to learning in a global context	49	social and leadership skills	48
5	ability to have fun	46	team work skills	46
6	interpersonal problem-solving skills	40	new methodologies in learning	44
7	team work skills	38	interpersonal problem-solving skills	43
8	time management skills	35	time management skills	34
	Total responses	650	Total responses	634

In hindsight, as students exited the program, it was interesting that their top expectations of the program at either a personal or academic or professional level were understanding their new subject area; adaptability to various situations and new contexts; wider orientation to learning in a global context; having fun; problem solving/self efficacy and new methodologies in learning (see table 3 below).

Table 3: Exit Survey Semester 1 2008 – Expectations Most popular responses

Item No	Personal Level 58 respondents	Responses	Professional /Academic Level 58 respondents	Responses
1	Adaptability to various situations and new contexts	38	Understanding subject area	41
2	Wider orientation to learning in a global context	36	New methodologies in learning	28
3	Understanding subject area	35	Wider orientation to learning in a global context	28
4	To have fun	32	Problem solving/self efficacy	26
5	Problem solving/self efficacy	29	Adaptability to various situations and new contexts	22

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The students were asked to rate the Study Abroad Programs based on their perceived contribution to their acquisition of skills and their understanding. The highest ratings in descending order went to adaptability to changing situations, more extensive oral and written communication, greater autonomy, life long learning and information management (see table 4 below).

Table 4: Exit Survey Semester 1 2008 – Contribution to Acquisition of Skills and Understanding

Item No	Personal Level 58 respondents	Excellent & Very good	Good	Not Very good	Poor
1	Greater autonomy	38	17	2	0
2	Teamwork	16	26	8	8
3	Shared decision making	13	28	10	7
4	Life long learning	37	16	3	2
5	Project work	24	21	7	6
6	Risk taking	27	15	15	1
7	Information management	28	19	8	2
8	Interpersonal problem solving	27	22	7	2
9	Adaptability to changing situations	44	12	1	1
10	More extensive oral and written communication	41	12	3	2

Students' voices

Rich data reporting the students' responses to their semester abroad experiences in the units of study in which they enrolled are included below. This qualitative data, gathered in focus groups and evaluations of the units in one Faculty further consolidates the kinds of notions the students indicated in the parts of the survey about the impact of semesters abroad in their lives.

The data depict what we believe is the true essence of students' perceptions about the impact of studying abroad and these qualitative comments interestingly focus in on four key areas: (1) what they know now about themselves (2) what they have gained as regards friendship, relationships and networks (3) what they now know about learning and learning processes, and (4) the impact of studying abroad on the remainder of these students' lives.

Students learned about themselves

Quotes reported below indicate that students believed they had significant personal gains for themselves. Student A said, "I am very happy that I decided to take this class. Out of all the classes I took this semester, I think this one was the most influential. I learnt a great deal about myself". Similarly Student F indicated he gained "quantity, insight and depth of knowledge" of himself as an individual. One other student indicated the semester abroad "had been an amazing tool in bettering me as an individual" (Student H). Student J

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indicated that he had “never been changed by a class as much” as he was with the unit evaluated. In her Focus Group interview, Student M was able to confirm that one of her greatest achievements was that she had learnt “that I can take care of myself”.

Students gained friendships, new relationships and networks

Also reported in the realm of positive gains from a semester abroad experience were friendships, new relationships and extending of networks.

Student C reported “the most important thing that I got out of class was the relationships that I made with the other students... and people from around the world.” Student A indicated that he learned “a great deal” about his peers. Student I reported to have “come out of it with a few really close friends that I didn’t even know before.” Student L was emphatic that one unit of study was by far the reason for “the friendships created and formed while sharing common experiences.”

Students gained understandings about learning itself

Respondents to the Focus Group questions and the evaluation survey noted that they learned about the learning process themselves.

Student C indicated that she learned “through interacting while learning.” Student D indicated that it was “an unconventional way of learning.” Student F attributed her learning to the “nature of learning outdoors over several days.. something that no amount of hours in a classroom setting could possibly have taught me.”

Student G believes that the learning at the University of Sydney “truly shaped my way of thinking.” Student I described the learning here as a “unique experience” and one that was “meaningful”, described by Student L as allowing her “to explore and discover without the tight structure that most courses enforce.” Student J is “convinced that incorporating field trips into every set of curriculum is vital as it is a form of learning that is impossible to replicate in any classroom.” Student L emphasized that it is “first hand learning” and according to Student M, “learning through doing.”

Students acknowledge the gains as life-long learning

Most interestingly, the majority of the students commented that the changes in their learning will remain with them for the rest of their lives. Student A said, “These tools will be of use to me for the rest of my life” and Student E stated “The learning I achieved from this class will last me my entire life.” Similarly Student B indicated that the friendships she had made were “lifelong friends”. Student I believes that the things she learned will “stay with me forever.”

Student H and Student M linked this to their future careers, stating “it has acted as a stepping stone to propel me along the right path to becoming a successful businessman... radically... for life.” (Student H) and “Most companies are global now and having a study

abroad experience on my resume is something that will work to my advantage.” (Student M).

Analysis

In investigating the impact of study abroad on students' career paths in the United States, Norris and Gillespie (2008) examined the 2002 survey data from 3,723 participants (25% response rate) who participated in the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) overseas study programs between 1950 and 1999. The survey aimed at looking at the long-term impact of study abroad on participants' academics, career choices, language abilities and personal development. Our study on the other hand, looks at students' expectations of the program before they begin and their feelings about their experiences at the end of the semester abroad. When we compare the initial findings of our study with the study conducted by Norris and Gillespie (2008), we recognise several similarities. Norris and Gillespie determined that "the study abroad experience enabled the majority of respondents to gain skills that influenced their career path, foreign language ability that they used at work, and interest in a career direction that they pursued." (2008, p. 5) This featured highly in our responses with some students indicating that they felt more courageous to visit a country where their first language was not spoken. Comparing the responses by decade since the 1950s, it is clear that the "study abroad alumni are pursuing globally oriented careers in higher numbers than ever before" (2008, p. 6). Norris and Gillespie reported finding a "global career" group and a "non-global career" group within the data. The "global career" group were 55% more likely "to attribute to their education abroad experience an interest in a career direction they pursued." (2008, p. 8) There was also a trend for "global career" alumni group to "seek international experiences at an earlier age than their 'non-global career' colleagues. With the increasing effects of globalization and internationalization of education, one can almost predict that the graduates from our programs will also pursue global careers.

In the final analysis, the quality of human capital investment is important. Universities need to hook into and encourage the world vision of students and support them in being able to navigate the world not just physically, but cognitively, culturally, socially and emotionally. Institutions of higher education need to develop partnerships that support knowledge collaboration with knowledge transfers between host and home countries resulting in win-win situations for all.

Conclusion

English is the lingua franca, the latin of the 21st Century (Altbach 2004). It is the language of commerce, the language of instruction in schools not only in the Anglophone countries but increasingly in non-English speaking countries of the Asia Pacific Region, South America and Europe. It is therefore not surprising that nearly half (46%) of the global enrolment in 2004 (1,132,491) came from the major English speaking destination countries (MESDCs) of the world, that is, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Gürüz, 2008, p.164). Students pursue education abroad because it provides a sense of adventure but also because it provides them with an opportunity to network while preparing them for life and work in a globalised world.

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Students are realising that semesters abroad give them an added advantage because their professional profiles become more attractive for employers worldwide. They are in fact building their social and cultural capital. We conclude with a quotation from Student M, a business student who had not previously travelled outside the United States, her country of birth. She described her semester abroad as the ‘best experience of my college career’. According to her,

every experience that I have had here has taught me a lesson, about myself, about other cultures and about the world in general. Now I am seeing everything on a global scale. In my Business classes, most of the students are international students. Most companies are global now and having a study abroad experience on my resume is something that will work to my advantage and will prove that I have a general understanding of global affairs. Interestingly, we also found that young people whose parents were immigrants encouraged their children to travel and have that semester abroad experience.

Although these have been initial findings, we can say that the study abroad program seems to be adding value to the overall experience of students and according to the students have contributed to the development of their social and cultural capital. We now have to determine whether this perception is repeated in subsequent cohorts and determine whether their expectations of the program match their experiences.

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