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Study Abroad Opportunities:  
The Impact Upon Learning

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### **Abstract**

Sport businesses continue to grow beyond their borders. As a result, sport management programs must prepare students to be more globally aware and culturally sensitive. This chapter presents an overview of the learning possibilities associated with short-term study abroad classes for sport management students. The importance of framing study abroad as a form of experiential learning is described. The chapter also includes a rationale for how short-term study abroad classes can provide access for student-athletes, students in tightly prescribed academic programs, students for whom equity and access are important considerations, and others for whom a full semester program might not be an option. Additionally, key research highlighting how short-term study abroad can positively impact intercultural awareness, global mindedness, intercultural competence, self-confidence, and levels of independence are presented.

*Keywords:* experiential learning, short-term study abroad, sport management, global awareness

### Study Abroad opportunities: The impact upon learning

*“Having the opportunity to go abroad to experience a different society, pace, attitude, and focus surrounding sport offers a profound and greater overall understanding of its purpose.”*

– Avery Tuggle, Sport in England student winter 2019/spring 2020

### **It's A Class, Not a Vacation**

That is the most immediate and basic response an educator should give when asked the question, “What is study abroad?” This section presents a more nuanced response to that important question, but first it is important to illustrate why international education is important for all students, and in particular for sport management and other students in sport-related disciplines (e.g., kinesiology or sport studies).

We live in an ever-more globalized community and current students must be skilled in maneuvering diverse work environments (McPherson, 2009). Indeed, it is imperative that college students graduate with a sensitivity to, or at minimum an awareness of, global issues (Tarrant, 2010). Sport businesses continue to grow beyond their borders. Global television rights and social media platforms have made the national border irrelevant when it comes to marketing, selling merchandise, and analyzing games. As a result, sport management programs must prepare students to be more culturally sensitive and globally aware (LeCrom & Naylor, 2020).

Green et al. (2012, p. 439) argued that “the future of higher education will become a more global one, in which both collaboration and competition will intensify, and knowledge and people will flow more evenly across borders.” To achieve this aim, individual faculty and universities have been searching for ways to internationalize the curriculum. More specifically, Weese (2020, p. 80) issued a challenge and asked an important question about whether sport management education is keeping pace with the increasingly “interconnected and interdependent” world. He expanded on the notion, arguing that “Graduates of [sport

management] programs must understand the intercultural and geopolitical forces impacting the delivery and consumption of international sport” (p. 80). Others include the notion that study abroad is important not just because it creates more competent workers, but that it also produces better global citizens (Jacobs et al., 2020; Springer et al., 2020). For universities, globalization and internalization can be achieved in myriad ways, including Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) classes, exchanging international scholars and speakers, using case studies and textbooks with an international focus, and offering study abroad classes (LeCrom & Naylor, 2020).

Though there has been an uptick in research on student learning in sport-related study abroad (cf. Jacobs et al., 2020; Jenny et al., 2019; LeCrom & Naylor, 2020; LeCrom et al., 2015), as recently as 2015 the research was limited (Choi et al., 2013; Cunningham et al., 2010). As such, the information in this chapter extends beyond sport-related literature, especially as it relates to discussing the benefits and outcomes of short-term classes. First, it is important to provide a basic definition of study abroad. According to LeCrom et al. (2015, p. 66), “studying abroad . . . can be defined as an experience that includes spending time in another culture in order to develop or improve foreign language skills, gain academic credentials, increase knowledge of another country, and/or improve global understanding.” Furthermore, Payne et al. (2019, p. 270) described that: “study abroad allows students to explore another country or region’s culture, language, cuisine, architecture, sports and history, and hopefully increase . . . cultural awareness.”

According to Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, transition from Stage 1 (*denial*: students do not recognize any culture than their own) to stage 6 (*integration*: students interweave cultural diversity into daily life), and the ability to move

between cultures, is no easy task and unlikely to occur on one study abroad experience, be it long-term or short-term (Nguyen, 2017). Research indicates that as part of broader globalization efforts, short-term education abroad can be a key element for universities to help students move along the continuum. According to Nguyen (2017), intentional program design is a key factor for successful short-term experiences. When faculty intentionally design short-term study abroad experiences with pre and post travel exercises connected to learning outcomes (Leupold et al., 2019), even short-term programs can lead to improvements in cognitive and interpersonal outcomes (Springer et al., 2020) intercultural competency, and global mindset (Gaia, 2015).. As Nguyen (2017, p. 124) wrote, “well-defined and intentional programmatic structures are essential to student growth on intercultural competence.”

For faculty, it is important that study abroad classes are designed to meet specific student needs and the stated learning objectives for the class. Like with all effective programs and classes, faculty must design study abroad experiences by mapping activities to goals, rather than simply developing a list of activities. Nguyen (2017, p. 125) described this concept clearly: “As institutions continue to work toward campus internationalization there is more that can be learned about the impact of short-term study abroad and how to best support them as meaningful endeavors for creating intercultural competence.” One way to heed Nguyen’s call is to frame study abroad as a form of experiential education (Gonyea, 2008; Jacobs et al., 2020).

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning practices run counter to traditional teaching pedagogies which position the instructor as expert (Dane-Staples, 2019). As a concept experiential learning is not new, but it has expanded rapidly in the last decade, evidenced by increasing membership of the National Society for Experiential Education (D. Smith, personal communication), and the types

of organizations which encourage or require experiential learning (AACSB, 2020; COSMA, 2016). At its core, it is an educational philosophy based on *theory of experience* (Dewey, 1938). While others such as Lewin, Piaget, Jung, and Freire expanded Dewey's experiential learning's philosophical foundations, Kolb's (1984) model is among the most widely used and employed today (Kosnik et al., 2013). As defined by Kolb (1984, p. 41), experiential learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." Intercultural sensitivity develops through experiences, *not* osmosis. And according to Kolb's cycle, the more hands-on the experience, the greater its impact. As Hammer et al. (2003, p. 423) wrote: "As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated one's personal competence in intercultural relations increases."

Kolb emphasized a four-factor model in which a learner's schema is transformed through a cycle of experience and reflection. In Phase 1, the student has a concrete experience and derives meaning from that experience during Phase 2 (reflective observation). Through the praxis of reflection (Jacobs et al., 2020), the student retracts meaning and thoughtfully considers the experience vis-a-vis a previously held schema and in reaction to course content. As LeCrom and colleagues (2015, p. 79) wrote, "cultural awareness is more than just learning about other cultures. It calls for self-reflection, requiring one to assess [their] own prejudices in becoming more culturally sensitive." In Phase 3 (abstract conceptualization), the reflection leads to the development of a new model or theory, which is then tested in Phase 4 (active experimentation). Kosnik et al. (2013) argued that the concrete experience can be considered transformational if it becomes ingrained into the student's way of knowing and impacts the lenses through which they acquire and interpret new knowledge.

Another key element of the experiential learning process is that learners connect academic knowledge with a relevant and applicable *real-world* experience. The reflection phase is the most important element of Kolb's cycle; without rigorous reflection, the learning from the experience will be unrealized (Kosnik et al., 2013). As Bower (2013) wrote, experiential learning can promote new experiences that allow students to deal with ambiguity, which often challenges and enhances decision-making. The lucidity, yet potential impact, of experiential learning makes it a valuable framework for sport management educators (Jacobs et al., 2020).

Service learning is a form of experiential education that is an inclusive pedagogy, which can enhance critical thinking, communication, and team building skills (Bennett et al., 2003), helps develop decision-making skills (Emmanuel, 2016), increase multicultural competencies (Bruening et al., 2014), and lead to students being more willing to engage with other cultures (Jacobs et al., 2020). Ingraham and Peterson (2004, p. 96) highlighted that study abroad is another pedagogy that can help faculty achieve many of those same learning objectives: "the development of awareness of how a student's intended profession may be viewed and practiced differently in different cultures, and the acquisition of attitudes and cross-cultural skills that help a person to be an effective professional." Though many sport management programs utilize internships (Odio & Kerwin, 2016), the use of other experiential learning pedagogies, such as study abroad, is burgeoning (LeCrom et al., 2020).

Framing study abroad as an important high impact practice, one tightly coupled with experiential education, can be a useful way for faculty to create learning outcomes associated with study abroad. Or perhaps, as importantly, serve as a pedagogical tool faculty can use when developing a study abroad class. The next section provides a more detailed description of short-term study abroad and research tells us about the learning that occurs in these classes.



### **To Long Term or To Short Term, That is the Question**

*“I recommend everyone try to study abroad because the learning experience is unmatched. The academic portion is important, but the personal growth, cultural immersion, and experiences are the elements you remember most.”*

- Justin Ventura, student in Sport in England class winter 2017/spring 2018

Students who study abroad report greater cross-cultural awareness and interest (Jacobs et al., 2020), stronger intercultural proficiency (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), and greater sensitivity to cultural diversity (Nguyen, 2017). Other benefits of study abroad experiences include higher academic achievement, greater rates of degree completion, and higher average salaries (IIE, 2018). Additionally, research finds that education abroad can improve communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (Weese, 2020), all of which according to NACE (2019) are sought by U.S. employers from recent graduates for entry level positions. Payne et al. (2019, p. 272) also demonstrated that study abroad can positively impact how students “viewed themselves as future professionals.” Caution must be given when making broad assumptions about the learning as there could be a chance that students with a predisposition towards exploration, global mindedness, and cultural sensitivity/curiosity are those who choose to study abroad, especially in traditional long-term programs. Prior to highlighting more benefits, it is important to differentiate long-term from short-term experiences.

While the evidence is clear that a longer time abroad leads to greater gains in every important category, i.e., language acquisition, discipline-specific knowledge and skills, intercultural sensitivity, personal, and professional growth (LeCrom et al., 2015), myriad research indicates that short-term experiences do provide significant impacts (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Definitions of short-term classes vary. Long et al. (2010) indicate they range from two weeks to three months, while Donnelly-Smith (2009) describes short-term as less than eight weeks. Still other scholars define the term as “ranging from one to four weeks” (Gordon et

al., 2009, p. 133). It is this latter which seems to be the model many universities are now adopting as short-term (Nishikawa, conversation, Oct. 2019). No matter the specific time frame, what is clear is that a short-term experience is more focused and intense, which creates a need for intentional design efforts (Springer et al., 2020).

Though evidence supports the notion that longer-term experiences provide more lasting learning outcomes (Dwyer, 2004), there is a growing body of research which indicates short-term classes, “if well planned, can offer a more intensive and focused experience and may be the only realistic alternative in terms of your degree studies and economic resources” (cited in Long et al., 2010, p. 92). As a result, sport management programs would be wise, especially given considerations around equity and access, to pursue opportunities that allow students to participate in a two to four-week education abroad class (Jenny et al., 2019). Thus, while it is hard to dispute that long-term classes are more beneficial, i.e., that more time in-country leads to greater impacts on important learning objectives (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), the subsequent section highlights why a short-term experience is valuable, perhaps now more so than ever.

According to the Institute of International Education (2020), the number of short-term study abroad programs has increased by 10% in the last decade, which indicates that they are becoming an important option for many students and universities. One reason might be that universities want to provide study abroad classes that meet students’ specific educational extracurricular needs and/or their tolerance for risk (Mills et al., 2010). According to Mills et al. (2010, p. 12), “it is important to have program formats that will attract a variety of students and provide programs that will not place students in an environment where their comfort zone might be stretched beyond their ability to adapt.” Short-term study abroad can have a strong appeal for

non-traditional students (Gordon, 2009) and first-generation students as well (Mills et al., 2010). Some studies have found that short-term programs might appeal to both first generation and non-traditional students because of the relative affordability of both tuition and living expenses compared to a long-term experience. For example, it is much less expensive to pay for 2-4 weeks of meals or lodging than food or accommodations for an entire semester.

The prescriptive nature of some disciplines, such as athletic training, kinesiology, physical therapy, or biomechanics, make long-term study abroad an impossibility. As such, short-term classes might allow students in highly structured academic programs or student-athletes an opportunity to participate (Donnelly-Smith, 2009), given that many are offered outside the normal academic calendar. Language is another important obstacle that could prevent some students from participating in study abroad programs, regardless of the length. While Douglas-Jones and Ridders, (2001, p. 60) found that when “the level of cultural difference between point of origin and host site increases, so will the development of worldmindedness.” Selecting a location can be important for other reasons; however, and deciding to visit a country that speaks the same language does not preclude the development of global awareness and global mindedness. As Mills et al. (2010) found, short-term experiences can mitigate against language difference fear and encourage trial of a new language, or can be located in a same-language environment. This can be especially important for first generation students or those in specialized areas of study for which learning the technical language could prove intimidating (Payne et al., 2019). According to Mills et al. (2010, p. 8), not requiring a completely new language can allow students to “step outside their comfort zone without it being overly intimidating.” In their study, they found that the experience was good for those “traveling internationally for the first time” (Mills et al., 2010, p. 9). While some research indicates that a greater cultural difference between

the international location and the student's home campus leads to more growth in global awareness (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001), a massively important step is to get students to *dip a toe in the water*. So, a short-term experience in a same language country is better than no experience abroad.

As previously mentioned, the literature does point to numerous benefits students receive from a short-term experience. Among the personal benefits, studies found that students who study abroad demonstrated increased self-confidence and higher levels of independence (Hadis, 2005; Navarro et al., 2020). Ingraham and Peterson (2004) indicated that while long-term study abroad leads to higher levels of intercultural and personal growth, as well as career development, "it is evident that short-term programs provide notable value" (p. 90). Furthermore, Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) found similar results when comparing students who completed short-term study abroad experiences with those who stayed at home. Other gains for students who take a short-term study abroad class include: the ability to accept and adapt to cultural differences (Anderson et al., 2006; Gaia, 2015); greater empathy and complex understanding of other cultures (Jackson, 2008); and increased self-efficacy and cultural intelligence especially for monocultural individuals (Nguyen et al., 2018). There are other important ways in which students can benefit from a professional growth standpoint, including the development of marketable career skills identified by U.S. employers as desirable for those applying to entry level jobs to possess (NACE, 2019). For example, Zorn (1996) found that education abroad can enhance intellectual development; Lee et al. (2007) indicated studying abroad can lead to improvement in subject-specific competencies and skills; and Thompson et al. (2000) found that students' ability to work in diverse situations improved. Payne et al. (2019, p. 273) also described that "short term study abroad programs are one way for students to increase cultural awareness while staying on track

with their [specialized and tightly prescribed] curriculum.” Springer and colleagues (2020) found evidence to support the notion that short-term study abroad provides sport management students with holistic outcomes, i.e. cognitive growth, interpersonal growth, improved self-regulation, and a better understanding of what it means to be a global citizen. While those personal benefits to the individual student are important and meaningful, it is the development of either intercultural competence, or world mindedness, or global mindedness that make study abroad important and truly fulfills the aims of sport management programs described in the first section of this chapter.

Nguyen (2017, p. 110) defined intercultural competence as the “ability to adapt behavior and communication to intercultural contexts using a variety of skills and knowledge.” In her Zeigler lecture at the North American Society for Sport Management’s annual conference, Danylchuk (2015, p. 3) called on faculty to develop a stronger sense of worldmindedness, and to prepare global citizens, she urged sport management faculty to create programs with an aim to help students, “value the viewpoints, experiences, and worldview of cultures different than their own.” In their seminal study on short-term study in sport management classrooms, LeCrom et al. (2015) explored the concept of global mindedness, a variable they defined as a feeling of being deeply connected to the global community, which includes an obligation to its citizens. LeCrom and colleagues (2015) found that students who studied abroad scored significantly higher in cultural pluralism, which “is an appreciation of the diversity of cultures in the world and a belief that all have something of value to offer” (p. 75).

Additionally, Payne et al. (2019) and LeCrom et al. (2015) found that attending a short-term class increased global mindedness, as does the number of study abroad experiences a student has. This supports the argument for a short-term experience, which allows for a *soft*

*launch* into study abroad for student-athletes, those from highly structured academic disciplines, and those who might hesitate to study abroad for other reasons (e.g. they are first generation, economically disadvantaged, or non-traditional students). If students can have a positive short-term experience, it appears their global mindedness will improve, and it seems to increase the likelihood that they will travel internationally again (Mills, et al., 2010; Payne et al., 2019). In these studies, students also demonstrated significantly higher levels of cultural pluralism and greater rates of cultural sensitivity (i.e., a greater understanding that cultures other than their own are important, rather than simply tolerable).

Despite these positive findings, many students are unable to clearly describe how the study abroad experience will make them better prepared for the workplace. As such, helping students articulate the relationship between a study abroad experience and career exploration is an important role for faculty leading the programs, study abroad university coordinators, career services offices, and other university departments. Specifically, faculty should work intentional with their university's career center to help students put these experiences in context. Bottom line, if higher education institutions want students to realize the full benefits of study abroad, they need students to both: 1) understand how study abroad has shaped an understanding of their own place in the world; and 2) articulate why they are better prepared to work in an increasing globalized world - which are both among the competencies most sought by employers (NACE, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

For sport management programs aiming to internationalize their curriculum and help prepare students to learn, live, and work in an increasingly interconnected global world (Weese, 2020), short-term study abroad classes can be an important curricular and pedagogical tool,

especially for those whom a long-term program is not an option. In addition to personal and professional growth (Payne et al., 2019) and developing and maintaining relationships (Jacobs et al., 2020), other important benefits of short-term classes include increased global mindedness (LeCrom et al., 2015), greater appreciation of cultural diversity (Lee et al., 2007), and the ability to navigate and appreciate cultural differences (Anderson et al., 2006). While study abroad is not the only meaningful way to enhance global mindedness and cultural literacy, compelling evidence highlights why sport management programs should “promote and expand study abroad opportunities” (Sterkenburg & Dubikovsky, 2015, p. 123).

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