

Global Classroom: Teaching Political Science through Study Abroad and International
Internships

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The utilization of study abroad and other international experiences in the teaching of politics is neither a new or novel concept. The value of international experience to the study of politics in both international relations and comparative politics is not debated. The best way to integrate international experience into the Political Science curriculum is the more interesting question. This discussion focuses on methods for maximizing the impact of international experiences for students studying international and comparative politics while abroad. The idea for writing this paper began as an attempt to apply case study research concerning Maryville College students experiential learning and study abroad specifically to the Political Science curriculum at the College. Kirsten Sheppard, International Programming Director at Maryville College, conducted the case study. Scott Henson, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Maryville College, prepared the Political Science application based upon the findings and suggestions in Sheppard's study. The result is a collaborative effort by a faculty member and a staff member at the College to enhance the academic curriculum through the use of best practices in international programming. This project is a work in progress, and the suggestions in this discussion are preliminary in nature. This collaboration will continue as additional faculty and staff members contribute to the discussion, and recommendations are implemented and evaluated over time in the Maryville College curriculum.

Internationalizing the Political Science curriculum is evident in several ways. Registering for and taking courses at an institution in another country is a popular option. Field research is another howbeit quite different approach. Depending on the level of integration with the local political culture and processes, coursework completed abroad offers varying degrees of experiential learning. Often, courses at top international

universities are surprisingly demanding to the American student and confine much of the experience to classroom lectures and dormitory studying with occasional diversionary trips into the local culture. There is certainly value in diverse perspectives offered by international faculty and fellow students, but the full value is truncated when experiential learning does not extend beyond campus. Field research extends the study of politics into the real world at the local level of the host country or community, but the specificity required of rigorous research may also limit the experiential learning component of the project. In both of these cases, it is also often difficult to relate the learning experience of the student back to the home institution curriculum. As Sheppard's research shows, the value of intercultural experience to learning goals is heavily influenced by the integration of the experience into the full college curriculum. Involvement by home institution faculty and opportunities to reflect on the experience as well as host interaction contributed most to the successful appropriation of the learning experience. This study highlights the need to integrate international experiences into the broader curriculum through courses taken abroad and field research abroad while also recommending consideration of alternative methods of internationalizing the curriculum such as faculty-led experiential learning abroad, internships, and guided study abroad. The key element is full and intentional integration of international programming into the curriculum of the Political Science discipline.

The format of this discussion begins with a synopsis of Sheppard's research as presented in *Finding Meaning: Outcomes Of Short-term Experiential Education Abroad Programs Revealed*. The excerpts of key findings and suggestions will be followed by the specific steps adopted in the Political Science (International Relations and Comparative

Politics) curriculum at the College in order to facilitate the application of best practices for study abroad to academic requirements in the discipline.

Internationalization efforts at universities and colleges have led to the creation of more and more study abroad programs to try and meet the need or desire to produce global citizens. In fact, many institutions list “creating global citizens” among the goals of study abroad programs and as part of institutional mission statements. Maryville College’s mission statement reads, “Maryville College prepares students for lives of citizenship and leadership as we challenge each one to search for truth, grow in wisdom, work for justice and dedicate a life of creativity and service to the peoples of the world.” (The Maryville College Mission Statement, n.d.) This goal has led to the creation of programs of different types and durations in order to increase the numbers of students who participate in these programs, and who will hopefully become globally competent citizens of the world.

Does this need translate into global citizenship being an actual outcome of study abroad programs? Research done shows that, indeed, study abroad programs can provide students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are related to functioning effectively in today’s world. (Dwyer, 2004; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003) There has been some controversy, however, over whether or not short-term programs can achieve these goals of creating global citizens. There is a general tendency to assume that longer programs are better and offer more rewards that lead to global citizenship. However, many of these studies that suggest short-term programs are not as valuable as long-term programs are focusing on particular skills-based criteria, or pre-determined categories. (McGury and Shallenberger, 2005) Much can be learned by students as they come into contact with a

new context and test their abilities to cope in another culture. One student, recently returned from a short-term program, commented, “I would have never imagined going into this program that I could navigate a large city where I spoke only a little of the language by myself. But I did.” This may seem like a small accomplishment, but coming from a student who had never left his home state it was a big step. Short-term programs have the ability to be transformative.

Trends in the field of study abroad are changing. The number of students studying abroad is increasing, yet students are choosing to study abroad for shorter durations. Ten years ago, only 1.7 percent of students studied abroad for less than eight weeks, while 14.3 percent of study abroad students went abroad for one academic year. In 2002/03, students who studied abroad for less than eight weeks represented 9.4 percent of students who are studying abroad, where only 6.7 percent of students are now studying abroad for a full academic year. Of these shorter-term programs, 5.6 percent are programs taking place during a three- to four-week January term. (IIE Open Doors, 2004a)

Given the trend toward student participation in shorter-term study abroad experiences, as well as the need for students to be able to function in an increasingly complex world, it is important to look at the value of short-term programs in terms of what significance these experiences have on students’ learning, in general and of global citizenship.

Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand. ~ Confucius. A number of different factors can influence students learning, including the type of program or the approach used. “Experience” is at the core of study

abroad programs. While the type of short-term study abroad programs can vary, from topic-focused programs, to language training, or interdisciplinary programs, it is the experience that becomes the focal point for learning while students are abroad. (Hovde, 2002) Maryville College programs take an experiential education approach.

John Dewey, an early promoter of experiential education, argued “that the goal of education is not to come up with the right answer – since that could change – but rather to understand and use one’s experiences.” (Citron and Kline, 2001, p. 20) As a result, experiential education abroad programs need to not only look at what knowledge, skills and attitudes students can achieve, but whether or not they are able to apply the learning to their daily lives. The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as, “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values.” This definition reinforces the ideas of Dewey, Kolb, Lewin and Piaget, four theorists who have contributed to the idea of experiential education. It is presumed in this study that the experiential approach plays a role in students’ learning outcomes.

Research on experiential education and study abroad suggest that there is value to experiential education, and that there are techniques that will enrich experiential study abroad programs. (Citron & Kline, 2001; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; and Mello & Davis, 2003) Most of the studies completed rely heavily on the experiential education works of John Dewey and David Kolb to support the value of experiential programs.

To be able to better understand the role experiential education plays in relation to this study, it is important to have a working definition of it. Experiential education is differentiated from experiential learning by suggesting that it is the role of the educator that defines education. Learning is individual, but education is a “transactive process between an educator and student” that encompasses outside elements such as the educational system within which the education is taking place (Itin, 1999, p. 1) In other words, experiential education can encompass experiential learning, but also takes into consideration teacher and learner interactions. This study will be looking at experiential learning as it occurs within the context of experiential education because in the case of a group environment, student learning is not done in isolation.

Many philosophies of experiential education can inform this study, from Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle (see chart 1 below) that focuses on the transformation of experience, to Freire’s (1974) emphasis on collective reflection, or dialogue. Kolb based his work on experiential learning primarily on the theories of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey and Jean Piaget who had common necessary elements that include reflection and application to a new experience or some form of action. (Itin, 1999) Kolb (1984, 38) describes learning as a “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience,” reinforcing the role that experience plays in education. Kolb’s experiential learning cycle illustrates a process that takes a learner through four stages: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). Experiential education abroad programs ideally take students through these stages, ensuring that they are involved in new experiences; are able to reflect on their observations and experience from multiple perspectives; find

general truths from their reflections; and are able to test new behaviors in everyday situations. (Kolb, 1984)

Worthy of note is that while a number of sources apply experiential learning to study abroad programming, many focus on the importance of including the reflection piece, and I have not encountered any research that analyzes the “now what?” stage of experiential learning, or rather, how students move from abstract conceptualization of their learning to applying it to a new situation or experience. The figure below outlines the different stages of the experiential learning cycle.

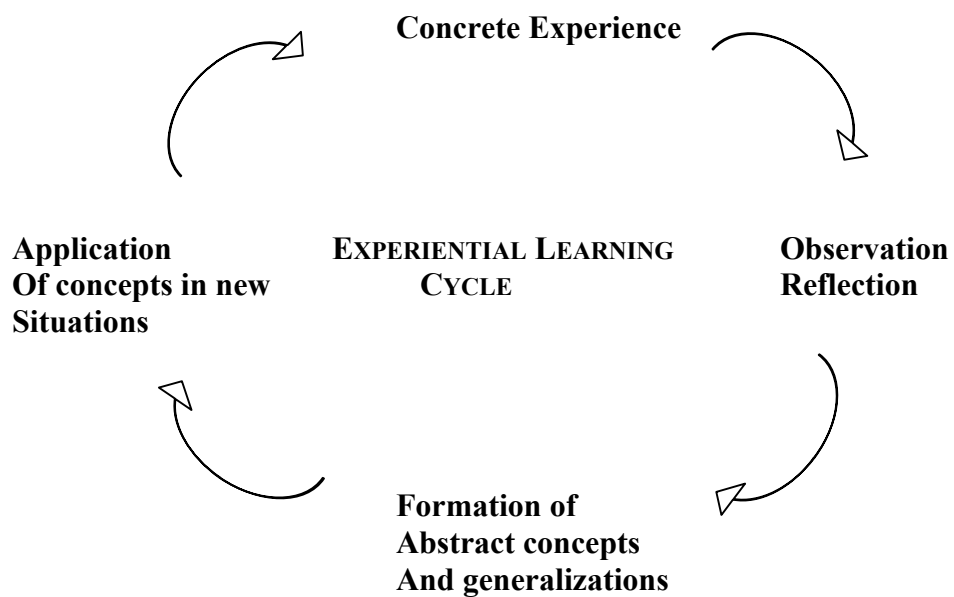


Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle

The application stage of learning is crucial in achieving goals around global citizenship, and even to develop intercultural sensitivity. Thus the exploration of how students create meaning out of their experiences and apply it to their daily lives makes

this assessment of outcomes of short-term experiential education programs relatively unique.

In order to emphasize program goals, and take students through a complete experiential learning cycle, I believe that there needs to be greater emphasis put on three specific areas of short-term study abroad programs at Maryville College. However, I believe these elements to be applicable to any study abroad program. Research suggests that pre-departure orientations prepare students for success on their study abroad programs. Pre-departure orientations are already a key element to all of the short-term programs offered at Maryville College, however areas covered and format are inconsistent. McGury and Shallenberger suggest that the pre-departure phase of short-term programs should consist of: "...academic and cultural context setting; examination of motivations for study abroad; and community building." (2005, p. 86) Since Maryville College programs are designed to be experiential programs, I would also suggest that students begin the reflection process by writing some form of a learning contract that reflects their learning goals and a plan for how this program is relevant to their lives upon their return. In our study of Maryville short-term January-term programs, journals revealed that some students had done some reflection on their expectations, hopes and fears, however rarely discussed specific learning objectives. In interviews and surveys, students listed learning about their host country and culture as a thing they expected to learn. This is a valuable expectation, however it needs to be clear to students that they are expected to learn more than basic facts about another culture and gain more than a desire to travel in the future. They ensure that students are personally invested in their own learning. Learning contracts can also help faculty gain valuable insight into their

students prior to departure. Community building is a key component to pre-departure orientations for faculty-led trips due to the group nature of the travel experience. Team-building activities that allow students to get to know each other and the faculty leaders prior to the trip can do much to help them understand the challenges and opportunities of learning as a group.

While abroad, key program design elements include structured activities, a combination of academic and experiential learning, as well as continued reflection in the form of discussion and journaling. Reflection is not only a key to experiential education theory, but is a requirement of Maryville College experiential programs. Students who were provided structure to their journaling seemed better able to describe their observations and provide interpretations to those observations. The focus of the structure to journaling should correspond with the goals of the course and the nature of the specific program, however it should encourage students to further explore their learning, and have them make observations about the host culture, reflect upon the meaning of the observations, and draw conclusions from their reflections. Group discussions allow the opportunity for faculty to draw attention to specific areas of learning, and follow up on student observations.

Maryville College experiential programs have as a goal that the programs should provide a new experience, and allow students to assess its significance and provide an opportunity to test their conclusions. Re-entry meetings introduce students to the concept that these programs play a longer role in students' lives than the three-weeks they were abroad. However, there is currently no other element that has students explore the relationship of the trips to their lives, or test the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they

may have gained from the travel-study trips. I would encourage faculty leaders to incorporate, as a requirement of the program, some form of follow-up project that has students take some action as a result of the January-term programs. In this case study of students, many revealed that they do not know how the program relates to their lives beyond furthering their desire to travel, or being an “experience” that they can hold on to. A project that has them make use of their experience and expand the impact of the programs to a wider community can help student further explore what they have learned. It also contributes to taking students from the “so what?” phase of the experiential learning cycle to the “now what?” phase of the experiential learning cycle as they move from exploring new truths and concepts to being able to test new behaviors in everyday situations.

The Political Science curriculum at Maryville College seeks to implement the core suggestions of Sheppard’s research focused on faculty involvement in the educational component of experiential learning and student reflection and application of the learning experience to the overall goals of the curriculum. In a general sense, Political Science as a discipline requires students to develop and test hypotheses concerning political processes and relations in the world. Explaining political behaviors, making predictions, and verifying outcomes are key skills to acquire in the study of politics. Course planning, advising students, developing study abroad programs, and transforming the classroom are areas that the international politics faculty can begin to enhance the use of international experiential education in the formal curriculum.

At Maryville College, each discipline has a paradigm or course plan intended to inform students and faculty advisors of the required courses and best arrangement of

courses to complete the program of study. Recently, various divisions have revised their paradigms to include an optional study abroad component. International Studies majors now have a required study abroad element. These paradigm options provide both a reminder to students and advisors of the study abroad option, and a format to envision the study abroad experience in the context of the overall curriculum. Practical matters such as transfer credit options, prerequisite courses, elective course options, and graduation or certification requirement equivalents are also covered in the paradigm guidelines.

Prerequisite course and other relevant preparations are crucial elements of a successful study abroad experience, but function as only part of the integration process. The more neglected yet vital element is post-travel evaluation and application. One consideration is the development of post-requisite courses that build upon the experiential learning through application in a formal course structure. In the Maryville College curriculum, an ideal format is the Senior Study course required before graduation. In the Summer 2007 semester, there is a planned research study in China involving five Maryville College juniors. All the participants plan to use their summer research as the basis for their Senior Study and Senior Thesis. Senior Seminar courses, Capstone courses, and other upper-level courses can easily adapt study abroad experiences to formal coursework.

The primary component of formal integration of study abroad experiential learning into the curriculum is faculty guidance. Many faculty members are unaware of student experiences abroad. While vehicles for informing faculty members of student experiences is helpful at a basic level, the goal is faculty leadership throughout the experiential learning process. One of the best methods is faculty-led study abroad

experiences. Maryville College utilizes the January-term for short-term faculty-led travel programs. These programs were the basis for much of Sheppard's study. Semester length and academic year programs are also under consideration where faculty members teach and facilitate learning abroad. The level of commitment for follow-up from faculty is greatly increased and enhanced by the shared experience. This method also gives the faculty much more control of the learning process and input into the goals developed by students.

In addition to course post-requisites and faculty involvement, experiential learning abroad is enhanced by student presentations of their experience. The process of communicating experiences to an audience heightens students' reflection and evaluation of the experience. It also addresses the "what now" question and students convey values and judgments about their experience. Maryville College instituted a program called "Reports from the Field" that provides a forum for faculty and student presentations. These reports can be included in the academic requirements of study abroad as well as ongoing collaboration between faculty and students.

Sheppard's research highlighted several techniques that enhanced experiential learning such as journaling and travel blogging. These assignments increased the level of reflection by students by requiring them to communicate their experiences and ideas to an audience or formalizing the self-reflection process. Additional techniques from the journalism field can also enhance the observation and reflection process of experiential learning. With a background in journalism, Henson encourages students to employ a reporter's viewpoint while engaging culture and society abroad. This is especially useful in politics, as many models exist for reporting on political news. In his Senior Seminar on

Political Communication, Henson integrates journalism and reporting techniques into the study of politics. Utilization of visual images through film and photography, communication through the Internet, story development, interviews, and narrative descriptions become tools for political inquiry. Application of course materials and acquired skills to study abroad experiences requires planning, structured programming, and faculty involvement from the beginning to the end of the process. Maryville College is the ideal setting for this approach with close faculty advising, low student to faculty ratios, and limited course offerings allowing faculty members to monitor a student development and progress through the curricular program.

Guidance throughout the student learning process must extend beyond faculty involvement to include the College staff and administration. Outlets for student presentations, collaborative opportunities with clubs and organizations, reinforcement of learning goals, cooperation with the registrar's office and international programming, expertise in the learning center and other campus resources, financial aid, residence life, and interdisciplinary programs of study require a College-wide commitment to study abroad programming within the overall curriculum. Maryville College utilizes an International Programming Committee consisting of faculty, staff, and student members to coordinate the full integration of study abroad programs and encourage internationalization of the College curriculum.

The most effective way that faculty can accomplish the goal of internationalizing the curriculum beyond involvement in student travel, participation in College programming, and integration in course work is to transform the classroom environment into a global classroom. Technology makes this task more practical and engaging than

ever before. Creating a global classroom means more than integrating world events into the lesson plan. A global classroom has continuous access to global resources and information. It allows students to experience events. Broadband delivery coupled with Internet accessibility means that students can see and hear world events in real time. It also means that students can engage the world through communications tools, interactive news services, messaging, and online chats. Maryville College is testing the effectiveness of fast access connectivity in the classroom by supplying a bank of laptops to classrooms as needed, and by expanding wireless access on campus. Technology is only one tool available to the globally oriented classroom. The most valuable asset is a teacher tuned into the global academic and political worlds. The model of a global citizen is the responsibility of the classroom educator. A vision of the learning environment that ignores the walls of the classroom and embraces opportunities to appropriate a global perspective begins with the teacher who builds it into lesson plans, worldview, assignments, discussions, visuals and conceptual models, activities, and study abroad. It requires; however, the extension of courses beyond the confines of a classroom, semester or quarter, and registration cycle.

There are many additional components of Sheppard's research that apply to the Political Science curriculum at Maryville College. There is also an ongoing discussion and study of best practices in international programming involving the International Programming Office and committee, faculty and staff leadership, and student organizations. This review of recommendations for curriculum enhancements is a primarily report intended to formalize the process of continuous improvement toward

internationalizing the curriculum in Political Science. It is also an important element of a collaborative College-wide effort.

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