Chapter 7

The Outreach Triad for Successful Study Abroad Programs: Students, Faculty, and the Local Community

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ABSTRACT

The old adage “build it and they will come” does not apply in the context of study abroad at the community college. Community colleges have historically struggled with study abroad enrollment due to a number of factors including inadequate funding, insufficient institutional support, and a lack of interest and awareness on behalf of their students. While there are many factors that go into successful programming for study abroad, one key element is outreach. This chapter will define outreach in terms of the marketing and communication methods to three key stakeholders in study abroad: students, faculty, and the local community. It will be argued that program administrators need to better understand the various ways in which outreach is used to increase both student enrollment, minority students in particular, and the number of faculty engaged in leading study abroad at the community college. The chapter will conclude by proposing some strategies for identifying funding opportunities from local community partners.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of study abroad in higher education are well documented in the academic literature, particularly when it comes to sufficiently preparing our future leaders how to effectively navigate the global marketplace. However, community colleges have historically faced a myriad of challenges when it comes to study abroad program enrollment. A common theme among many program administrators has been the lack funding and staffing to sufficiently develop and promote study abroad programs on campus. With tight state budgets for higher education, international education has become a peripheral activity.
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to the core mission of workforce education in many the community colleges. Moreover, community college faculty may not have the experience or knowledge to effectively develop and promote study abroad programs on campus. Compounding these challenges is a student body, especially minority students, who do not pursue international experiences as part of their academic goals.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the influences on a community college student’s interest in global learning opportunities, outline the obstacles they face when it comes to study abroad participation, and offer suggestions to campus administrators and faculty on how to increase outreach efforts to market and promote study abroad experiences particularly to racial and ethnic minority students. Recommendations are also provided on how to engage the local community in study abroad.

It is important to note that several of the studies presented in this chapter come from research done at community colleges in the state of Florida, which is one of a growing number of states that allow community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees to increase students’ access to higher education at a lower cost (Povich, 2018). While these institutions may be changing their names and degree offerings, the mission continues to be to serve the local community; and therefore these community colleges can serve as models for other institutions of higher education when it comes to internationalizing the campus and curriculum.

BACKGROUND

Student Interest in Global Learning

Many post-secondary educational institutions rank “improving student preparedness for a global era” among one of their most pressing goals (American Council on Education, 2017). In 2006, the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, commissioned a year-long study of the United States higher education system and found that much work was still needed to develop “a world-class higher-education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, and empowers citizens… a higher-education system that gives Americans the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy” (Spellings, 2006, pg. viii).

Over a decade later, the question is still asked as to why so few college students in the United States study abroad. According to the Institute of International Education’s Open Doors Report (2016), only 1.6% of all U.S. undergraduates studied abroad in 2014-2015. The question begs to answer if college students are just not interested in the world at large, and if they are not then is college too late to spark that interest? In a study of one large community college in Florida, the author found that only 24% of students (n=68) had a strong interest in global topics or events. One student in the study responded: “I have too much to worry about within my own country and mind, I will begin to worry about international events when they begin to adversely affect me” (Robertson, 2014, p. 10).

In a follow up study at nine community colleges in Florida by Robertson and Blasi (2017) using similar research protocols, the authors found similar results with 36% of students (n=175) very interested in global learning. Only one-third (33%) of the students strongly preferred courses with global content and 40% strongly preferred courses with cultural content. However, the authors did find that the majority of students had traveled internationally or planned to travel in the near future (86%), but only 4% reported participating in a study abroad program. According to a separate qualitative study with seven students enrolled in four community colleges in Florida, there were five primary factors found to influence a
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