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How to Create an Effective Short Term Study Abroad Program **Patricia Brown-O'Hara, RN, PhD, Gwynedd Mercy University**

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Abstract There is empirical evidence that short term study abroad programs have a positive impact on student learning. This article describes a program that was set up in Ireland for 3 weeks. There are opportunities for quantitative and qualitative research as outlined in this article.

Introduction

Study abroad has become a key indicator of engaged learning. The increase of short term study abroad programs has enabled professional degree programs, such as nursing, to increase student participation in these programs. Both short term and long term study abroad programs can be very successful and can have a lasting impact on a students' professional and personal life (Kelleher, 2013). Expanding study abroad opportunities should be a priority especially now, after COVID 19, as students are yearning to travel abroad. Study abroad programs are not difficult to set up and can prepare students for successful careers and meaningful lives in a global society. This article highlights an innovative, study abroad program created for junior and senior nursing students in a traditional generic 4 year program and will describe course outcomes and assumptions. This program can be adapted to any college major and can have great opportunities for educators and researchers.

Literature Review

Young adults have experienced a number of pandemic-related consequences, such as closing of universities, loss of income, transitioning to remote work, decreased social interactions and the inability to travel/experience adventure. These circumstances may contribute to poor mental health. The Household Pulse Survey of December, 2020, finds that throughout the pandemic, a large share of young adults (ages 18-24) have reported symptoms of anxiety and /or depressive disorder compared to older adults (US Census Bureau, Household Survey, 2020). Young adults yearn social interaction and travel opportunities. Study abroad can meet these needs.

Despite the many alleged positive attributes associated with study abroad programs, a gap exists in the overall understanding of the benefits obtained by students who study abroad. Kelleher (2013), examined 13 studies that explored the benefits of study abroad programs for undergraduate nursing students. Findings suggest that participation in a study abroad experience is associated with many benefits. These include: various forms of personal and professional growth, cultural sensitivity and competence, and cognitive development. Study abroad contributes to the development of transferable skills and positive employment gains, with the impact varying according to program characteristics, study destinations, and the students' goals (Institute of International Education).

Malmgen & Galvin (2008) analyzed data and patterns that emerge among subsets of students by college of enrollment and for students of color. The findings suggest that study abroad participation may not harm graduation rates and that it is highly correlated with higher graduation rates among under-prepared and at-risk undergraduates as well as students of color. Kirkgoz (2020), conducted a study that investigated the relationship between students' clinical experience (traditional versus immersive international) and a number of academic outcomes. The findings showed an increase in enhancement of cultural competence and global awareness.

Hovland & Johannessen (2019), studied cultural competence in nursing students during student exchanges in Tanzania. Results showed a change in cultural competence by maintaining an open attitude and obtaining explanations that gave them an increased understanding of cultural differences. Qualitative research studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of study abroad programs. Qualitative themes such as "life changing", "lasting impact", "cultural identity" and "adventure" have been found in many of these studies. A phenomenological study by Edmonds (2020), was done to answer the question, "What is the Lived Experience of Nursing Students Who Study Abroad"? Findings showed vast benefits such as awareness of diverse cultures, adapting despite an unfamiliar environment and increased self-efficacy. These findings have strong implications for both educators and researchers. Nursing programs often find it difficult to offer study abroad programs due to their strict nursing curriculum and stringent state board of nursing requirements. It is difficult for nurse educators to fit learning experiences that help students develop cultural competence, including cultural awareness, sensitivity, knowledge and skills (Carpenter, 2012). Globalization must be considered by nurse educators as they reevaluate ways of preparing nursing students to meet the health care needs of populations they currently serve and will care for in the future (Wright, 2010).

Gwynedd Mercy University Program Development

After meeting with several Universities in Ireland, a four year University was selected for Gwynedd Mercy University's nursing study abroad program. The University of Limerick (UL) was selected for four reasons. First, The University of Limerick's mission aligned with our University. (UL) had a strong record of innovation and excellence in education. Second, UL already had an existing, successful, summer non-nursing study abroad program in place where(100 to 200) American students attend classes for 3 weeks in the summer and earn 3 transferable college credits in English, Literature Business and Fine Arts. Tuition for this program is very reasonable (2800 Euros) and includes 3 transferable credits, on-campus housing and food, 3 class excursions, busing to and from the airport and social events. Students have their own free time on weekends to explore the country of Ireland. The third reason UL was selected, was because their International Study Abroad Office staff and UL's nursing faculty were willing to set up 2 clinical observation days for our nursing students in Community Health. Other experiences could be set up for students in other majors such as finance (International banking), education etc.. Lastly, UL was chosen because the UL nursing faculty were also willing to do some lectures/discussions with our students on education in Ireland. UL also allowed for one of our nursing faculty to accompany the students to Ireland and lecture in the evenings to meet the Nursing Elective 3 credit requirements. The Nursing Elective was not a transferable course from UL but rather a course taught and graded by our faculty and the student earned 3 credits from Gwynedd Mercy University. Financial Aid covered all expenses (tuition, room and board and even airline flight) since the students were taking a minimum of 6 credits. This was such a great incentive for students to be able to afford the study abroad program.

Our 3 credit Nursing Elective entitled, "Community Health Nursing in Ireland" was created for the study abroad program. This course had 7 learning outcomes as well as 4 assumptions which are all listed below.

1. Course Learning Outcomes: Describe the characteristics of community health nursing in Ireland.
2. Examine Ireland's Community health Nursing Models and their impact on clients in the community.
3. Evaluate and compare Ireland's nursing practice in the community, to ANA and Standards of Practice.
4. Examine the impact of Ireland's health care delivery system on the continuum of care.
5. Assess factors that affect family health and the impact on individuals, families and aggregates in the Irish community.
6. Examine ethical, legal and sociocultural issues related to community health nursing practice in Ireland.
7. Demonstrate professional behavior in all settings.

These course learning outcomes are met by assessing students' literature review on Community Health Nursing in Ireland, student journaling, seminar discussions, two clinical observation experiences and completion of a Community Health Nursing Comparison paper. All grading of assessments is done by one of our Community Health Nursing faculty members who accompanies the students on the trip.

The 4 assumptions are:

1. If nursing students participate in study abroad in Ireland, there will be an increase in their cultural competence as measured by the "Inventory for assessing the process of cultural competence among health Care Professionals".
2. If nursing students participate in study abroad in Ireland, there will be an increase in their knowledge on PHN in Ireland as compared to PHN in USA as measured in their assessment scores in their Nursing Elective course.
3. As the study abroad program in Ireland continues, there will be an increase in partnerships in health care agencies in Ireland providing students with more diverse opportunities.
4. As more short term study abroad programs are developed, the University will attract more students for admission.

Gwynedd Mercy University Program Success

Our nursing study abroad pilot program was implemented in the summer of 2019 after marketing the program and conducting student information sessions. Seven out of 10 nursing students were selected to participate based on the following criteria:

1. Cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater
2. Completion of all junior nursing courses by summer 2019
3. Letter of intent
4. A 500 word personal essay

The seven students that were selected worked directly with a Financial Aid counselor to apply for additional financial aid to cover the cost of tuition, travel and incidentals. The seven students applied on-line to UL and were accepted into their study abroad program. Clinical clearances were sent to UL. The program ran very smoothly and the students described how they really grew up, due to being out of their comfort zone, and how much they loved the clinical experiences as well as learning about the Irish culture and Irish Health Care. Direct quotes from two students were: "As this was my first time traveling out of the country, I was so nervous and homesick the first day. Upon my return, I felt so grown up and thankful I went out of my comfort zone". A second student stated "This was the best experience ever. I met so many new friends, learned how to be self-sufficient and would recommend this program to all future nursing students". It is imperative that educators evaluate the impact of study abroad on the student's professional and personal life in order to clearly understand the experience from a student's perspective (Levine, 2006).

For the summer of 2020, 28 out of 40 students were selected but due to COVID 19, the program was put on hold. For the summer of 2021, 45 students applied to the program but again it was on hold due to COVID 19. We are hopeful that the program will restart in summer 2022 and already, over 60 students have expressed interest.

Gwynedd Mercy University Future Research Plans

Nurse researchers need to explore study abroad programs and identify their impact on the development of cultural competence and global perspectives in nursing students (Edmonds, 2012). Using the “Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence among Health Professionals” (<http://transculturalcare.net/contact-us/>) it is our goal to do a Pre and Post- Test, Quantitative study, using a sample size of at least 50 nursing students, before and after participating in the study abroad program, to see if their cultural competence scores change significantly. There are other research tools available to study critical reflection (Kember et al, 2000), transformative learning (Stuckey, Taylor & Cranton, 2014) which can easily be used by educators and researchers in other non-nursing programs, or any other field of study, to see if there is a change in any of these key, character changing areas, pre and post study abroad.

Conclusion

Present and future students expect study abroad opportunities in college. They often select higher education universities that have a variety of study abroad opportunities. Universities need to develop both long term and short term opportunities for study abroad. Preparing all students for a global society requires new partnership programs and creative learning experiences. Future graduates need to be broadly educated, adaptive individuals who have significant experiences in the world beyond the classroom. It is vital that tomorrow’s graduates have self-efficacious natures to take on the new challenges and recognize one’s biases, opinions and beliefs to attain cultural competence. Actively seeking encounters will encourage students to go, see and do while abroad, and will help them to overcome fear or unfamiliarity. Having the unique opportunity to be “out of their comfort zone” will create a memorable opportunity for them to adapt to the different cultural groups they encounter and work side by side with.

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