

PLANNING AND EXECUTING A SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM FOR MBA STUDENTS WHILE IN RECESSION

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ABSTRACT

Study abroad programs are defined as educational experiences that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin (Kitsantas, 2004). Most study-abroad programs extend over an entire semester (Clarke, Wright, Flaherty, & McMillen, 2009; Open Doors, 2005), and encourage students to immerse extensively in a host country's environment. However, recently, an increasing number of higher education institutions began offering short-term study abroad (STSA) programs, to decrease programs' costs, and thus, making the programs relatively more attractive than most common (i.e., semester-long) programs (Sindt & Pachmayer, 2008; Takei, Lupton, & Rawlinson, 2009).

While the empirical research on long-term study abroad programs is relatively abundant (Clarke et al., 2009), the literature on the design and execution of STSA programs is relatively scarce (Ferservand & Tillery, 2001; Koernig, 2007; Takei et al., 2009). In this context, complementing the work of Gordon and Smith (1992) and Koernig (2007), this study reexamines the most important aspects of design and execution of a STSA program for MBA students while in global economic recession, based on the insight from a private institution in the Southwestern U.S.

While the previous literature on STSA programs focuses predominantly on undergraduate education (Gordon & Smith, 1992; Koernig, 2007), this study's main contribution is that it provides a novel perspective, that is, it takes into account the challenges associated with a more mature and demanding student base – the MBA students – while coping with the challenges associated with economic recession. This study is based on the recent experiences of the author, who planned and executed a STSA program in Prague, Czech Republic.

For this particular program, the planning process started approximately eight months before the actual trip to Prague. The choice of destination was not predetermined by the administrators of the university or by the academic program. That allowed for a

higher discretion of the faculty member to find a destination that adds value to the program and its students. To create the schedule for the program, first, multiple lists of organizations operating in Prague were created by using multiple databases available through the university library system or the Internet. A crucial element in planning was a scouting visit to the destination five months prior to the beginning of the actual program. Finally, strong support from the administration of the U.S. business school and a partnership with a major local university facilitated this visit.

The challenges of designing a STSA program while in recession can be overcome by a systematic approach, in which thorough planning and excellent communication with all partners involved are key. The most important requirement is to accurately understand what really adds value to the program, and then to communicate the value proposition effectively to potential students. Further, it is imperative for faculty members to begin planning early and use all resources available on their campus. Another factor of success was the faculty member's deep familiarity with the area and the business climate.

Overall, this study illustrated that a program entirely built on the program goals and the needs of the MBA students can be successful. Such needs may be different than the needs of undergraduate students, as MBA students tend to be more mature, have a better understanding of the business environment, and higher income. Furthermore, this study adds another dimension to the general understanding of the challenges associated with developing STSA programs. The new dimension – global economic recession – makes planning for these programs more difficult, as all actors involved in the program suffer (i.e., fewer resources available to the U.S. university, students being laid-off or experiencing decreased support from employers). In this context, extra caution in planning is necessary to counteract the effects of recession.

References Available on Request