DEVELOPING STUDENT INTERCULTURAL PROFICIENCY THROUGH STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

In the future, marketing graduates will face an increasingly diverse and multicultural workplace both within and outside of their home countries. A crucial question: how can marketing educators better prepare students for this complex and changing work environment? One solution is a Study Abroad Program (SAP).

In the past decade, study abroad programs have more than doubled, where today, about 223,000 U.S. college students study abroad; immersing themselves in foreign language, culture and business practices. It is customary to hear students describe these experiences as “life changing,” yet, little empirical evidence exists to establish the specific areas of personal development achieved in a study abroad program. This study tests some anecdotal claims about the value of the SAP in preparing students for the global work environment. This study investigates several of the potential intercultural influences of a semester abroad for students from the United States.

The first part of the study compares students who study abroad with those who do not. Findings reveal that students who study abroad may have greater intercultural proficiency, increased openness to cultural diversity, and become more globally-minded than those students remaining in a traditional campus setting. Students perceive themselves as being more proficient, approachable and open to intercultural communication.

The second part of the study compares and contrasts student attitudes at the beginning and end of a semester-long SAP. Results show they become more globally-minded, communicate better across cultural and national boundaries, and become more sensitive to new and different cultures by the end of the SAP. Suggestions for improving SAPs for marketing students conclude the report.