

IR Support for Strategic Planning of Study Abroad Programs: Building the Framework

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Abstract

The development of Study Abroad Programs must be linked to institutional strategic planning for proper funding and support for services. Such links can best be identified through partnerships within the institutional organization, such as institutional research and academic units. The breadth of knowledge of institutional researchers can offer unique insights to program development needs that may not be realized from the academic unit perspective alone. Georgia institutions are bridging the gap between planning and development of Study Abroad Program areas by such partnerships.

Introduction

Study Abroad Programs in the state of Georgia are under review and development to meet an objective of the University System of Georgia (USG), the governing board for thirty-four public two and four year institutions. USG has alerted campus personnel dealing with international studies programs that four percent of the undergraduate population of the previous fall semester must be studying abroad by Fiscal Year 2007. To accomplish this goal, campus personnel in international studies are collaborating within the system to identify and fund paths that will support this stated target.

At selected institutions, partnerships that support international studies are being expanded to incorporate a broader planning mechanism. In such cases, institutional planning supports the initial phase of strategic planning to determine funding and staffing for broader enrollment patterns. To accomplish this strategic planning, institutional researchers are being asked to provide trend information, such as population trends in non-U.S. citizens. In addition partnering countries are providing insight into funding options and enrollment that may support study abroad growth. Included are paths that show how selected Georgia four-year institutions are developing Study Abroad enhancements based on strategic planning through a qualitative study of population trends, classroom delivery strategies, funding mechanisms, and administrative support strategies.

Options for trend data are identified through various national and statewide databases available in the state of Georgia, the United States and the state of Mexico. Likewise, supporting staff in institutional research have partnered to identify other possible sources for data. Specifically, migration patterns from the state of Veracruz to the state of Georgia, as well as K-6 student and teacher enrollments by Hispanic populations are explored for a factual understanding of classroom impact. Cultural perspectives of Hispanic populations are identified as a need for classroom teachers, whether U.S. or Mexican to include in the daily classroom deliveries. Institutions in the state of Georgia are seeking to develop insight into institutional partnerships that strengthen development needs to meet a statewide planning objective.

Study Abroad in the University System of Georgia

The University System of Georgia recognizes the benefits of study abroad for all of Georgia's students. In 1995, the Board of Regents developed an International Policy Directive outlining the System's commitment to international education. The directive challenged the USG institutions to increase study abroad participation to 2% of all students by the year 2000. Rising to the challenge, USG study abroad participation more than doubled from 1996-2000. (http://www.usg.edu/oie/study_abroad/) Presidents of the University system institutions have been asked to consider specific program development initiatives shared at the system level; these include:

- Expand and focus program capacity
- Identify opportunities for collaboration
- Reward longer-term and immersion programs (e.g., new Georgia Global Scholars Exchange) and
- Expand faculty development (Sutton, R., February 2003)

Clearly none of these initiatives will be inexpensive to research or to implement. The greatest challenge to the desired growth and development will continue to be the need for additional funding amidst the economic concerns that are limiting state-wide budgeting. The latest USG initiative includes a representation of four percent of the previous fall's enrollment by 2007 in the International Study Abroad programs with the University System.

Study Abroad at The University of Georgia

The University of Georgia (UGA) is a public research university located in Athens, Georgia. The University enrolls over 33,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. The University employs over 2,000 instruction, research, and public service faculty and close to 7,000 staff. The Athens main campus consists of over 360 buildings on 614 acres. Total UGA land holdings exceed 42,000 acres in 31 Georgia counties. Approximately 35% of the institution's \$1.1 billion annual budget is provided by the State of Georgia. UGA is ranked 19th among public national universities by U. S. News and World Report.

Study Abroad Programs at UGA

The University of Georgia offers more than 130 study abroad and student exchange programs in 36 countries. Opportunities to study abroad are available to both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at UGA as well as eligible students attending other University System of Georgia institutions. A student may participate in study abroad any time after completion of their first semester at UGA, including the summer after the senior year.

Study abroad activities are offered in a wide variety of academic fields including agriculture, business, education, environmental design, fine arts, foreign languages,

forestry, humanities, journalism, law, mathematics and computer science, and physical and social sciences. UGA study abroad programs vary in duration from short-term and summer programs to longer-term semester and academic year programs. The University owns non-State funded residential sites in Oxford, England, Cortona, Italy, and San Luis, Costa Rica, making it one of a very few U.S. research universities to operate year-round overseas residential centers.

With the exception of a decrease in 2001-02, participation in study abroad programs at UGA has grown steadily since 1993. During the 2003-04 academic year, 1,641 UGA students studied abroad, an increase in participation of 13.9% from the previous year. The University currently ranks tenth nationally among research universities in the total number of students who study abroad and ranks third in the number of students who participate in short-term study abroad. Eighteen percent of 2003-04 UGA graduating seniors had studied abroad during their undergraduate career.

Consistent with national trends, UGA students who study abroad are primarily white (90.8%) and female (63.8%). Approximately 90% of participants are undergraduates, almost half of which (41.9%) are in their junior year. Seventy-nine percent of UGA participants study abroad for eight weeks or less; 18% study abroad for a semester, and 2% study abroad for a full academic year. Western Europe is the most popular study abroad destination (64%) for UGA participants, followed by Latin America, the Caribbean or Canada (15%). Programs in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East enroll the smallest percentage of students at 4.7%. Students majoring in Business and the Social Sciences comprise 42.5% of UGA students studying abroad.

Institutional Commitment

The University of Georgia's commitment to international education is clearly stated in the institution's mission statement:

“With its statewide mission and core characteristics, the University endeavors to prepare the University community and the State for full participation in the global society of the twenty-first century. Through its programs and practices, it seeks to foster the understanding of and respect for cultural differences necessary for an enlightened and educated citizenry.” (<http://www.uga.edu/profile/mission.html>)

The University reiterates this commitment to international education in its 2001-2010 Strategic Plan. The plan lists “Competing in a Global Economy” as one of three strategic directions to guide the University as it moves toward its vision for the future. Expanding international programs and broadening and increasing language programs are included in this vision as well as specific goals for study abroad participation.

The Office of International Education (OIE) oversees study abroad activities and provides immigration and other services to over 2,000 international students, scholars and visitors each year. OIE is responsible for the financial administration of study abroad

programs and provides assistance to faculty in developing new international programs. According to Dr. Mark Lusk, Associate Provost for International Affairs, while some grant money is available, the primary source of funding for development of international programs at UGA is the International Academic Program Development Fund (IAPDF). The fund, established by the University in 2000, has as its primary objective the enhancement of international education through financial support of academic and scholarly initiatives. Faculty members may apply for up to \$3,000 to be used as start-up funds, short-term support, and preliminary planning and development of international programs. The IAPDF was originally established at an amount of \$100,000 per year, but due to State budget cuts has been reduced to \$70,000 for 2004-05.

Institutional Goals

In addition to system-wide targets for participation in international programs, the University has set institutional goals consistent with its strategic direction of competing in a global society. Institutional goals for 2010 are as follows:

- Increase percentage of the student body studying abroad to 6.25%
- Increase percentage of students graduating with international experience to 25%
- Increase the number of year-round academic programs to 5
- Increase the percentage of students graduating with foreign language proficiency to 30% (defined as two or more semesters of the same foreign language)

While UGA is making good progress toward these goals, the Office of International Education continues to seek out opportunities for growth in international programs.

Opportunities and Challenges

There are many opportunities for growth in international programs at UGA. While the University offers a diverse array of study abroad and exchange programs, there remain geographic and academic areas where demand is not currently met. This unmet demand can be fulfilled by developing new offerings in these areas and by encouraging students to participate in approved non-UGA programs. Other avenues for increasing study abroad participation are through increased foreign language proficiency and improved diversity of UGA's study abroad population. The addition of a fourth residential site (possibly in Africa) will provide new options for students who wish to study abroad.

In order to achieve these objectives, certain barriers to growth must be overcome. A major barrier to growth is the time and money it takes to develop new programs. Without incentives such as release time for involvement and faculty awards and incentive grants for involvement in international programs, few faculty members will undertake the tremendous amount of work required to develop and implement new programs.

Simply developing new programs is not enough. Measures must be taken to ensure the viability of new programs. This is achieved by preventing competition

between new and existing programs, discouraging new program development in saturated areas (academic and geographic), and providing insight into areas of student interest. Many times new program development is driven by the passions and interests of faculty and not by demand.

In a recent study funded by the Ford Foundation, the American Council on Education found that “the level of undergraduate participation in international education ... fell far short of students’ expressed interest in these same programs and activities.” (Slaya, L. and Hayward, F, p. 73) The primary barrier preventing students from studying abroad is the cost. However, some students cite rigid curricula and delayed graduation as reasons for not going abroad. Study abroad scholarships aid in increasing participation among currently underrepresented student groups. In addition to increased student funding, securing major capital gifts to support overseas residential facilities are necessary.

Support for Strategic Planning

Many units outside the Office of International Education provide support for strategic planning efforts related to study abroad and other international programs. At UGA, the senior administration supports planning efforts by making funds available through IADPF grants for new program development and enhancement of existing programs. Before investing in new overseas study abroad sites, many financial questions must be answered. Budget and finance officers assist study abroad administrators in devising fiscally sound business plans that address not only budget issues, but marketing and risk management issues as well.

The role of institutional research in strategic planning for international programs is equally important. Access to institutional and national data allows IR to provide study abroad administrators with information useful to their planning efforts. Survey data such as that provided by the National Survey of Student Engagement gives valuable insight into student attitudes and expectations related to study abroad and other international activities.

Institutional student data is critical to recruitment efforts. A stated goal at UGA is for the study abroad population to better reflect the diversity of the overall student body. Included in that goal is to increase study abroad participation by minorities and students from rural areas of the state. Institutional research can provide student demographic data that supports such recruiting efforts. Other types of institutional data such as enrollments in certain majors and foreign language courses also aid in planning of new programs and student recruitment.

Study Abroad at Georgia Southern University

Georgia Southern University is a public Master’s I university located in Statesboro, Georgia. The University enrolls over 16,000 undergraduate and graduate, students and offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral levels.

The University employs over 670 faculty and 815 staff. The Statesboro campus consists of over 145 buildings on 675 acres. Approximately 41% of the institution's \$179 million annual budget is provided by the State of Georgia. Georgia Southern is ranked 21st among public Master's I universities in the South by U. S. News and World Report.

Study Abroad Programs at Georgia Southern University

Georgia Southern offers or participates in more than 21 study abroad and student exchange programs in 19 countries. These study abroad programs are available to both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Georgia Southern as well as eligible students attending other University System of Georgia institutions.

The development of Study Abroad programs at Georgia Southern continues to have a commitment for development based on interest of students and other partnering constituents. Currently Study Abroad opportunities are available in Costa Rica (International Studies or Spanish Immersion), Czech Republic, Literary Tour of England, Ireland, South Africa, Spain (Spanish Immersion or European Hospitality Management), or West Africa. Additionally opportunities are available through the European Council of the University System of Georgia (Spain, Germany, Greece, Russia, France, England, Italy), as well as the Asian Council.

Participation in study abroad programs continues to grow as staffing and budget issues are addressed. Additionally faculty partnerships and exchanges between institutions have experienced growth. Student participation has more than doubled from 1998 to 2003. The growth in this area can best be attributed to the commitment of administrative leadership to seek and mature partnerships, as well as educate students, parents and faculty to the opportunities available.

Through its partnership with the Universidad Veracruzana, the Veracruz State Department of Education, and the Bulloch County, Ga Board of Education, Georgia Southern University has established:

- Student exchanges
- Faculty exchanges
- Collaborative research and scholarship efforts
- Academic partnerships
- Community outreach programs

In addition, an outgrowth of the programs and efforts has been the recognition of the need for support in the Bulloch County K-12 educational system. The county population of Hispanics has grown from 0.8% to 1.9% between 1990 and 2000. Similar growth has occurred in surrounding southeastern counties, as well as Georgia has continued to experience one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the U. S. The continued growth of Hispanic population in Bulloch County Schools has created the need for teachers with Spanish language skills and

knowledge of Hispanic peoples and their cultures. By exploring a partnership between the countries, as well as the universities, the funding has gained support from U.S. county government and the Veracruz State Board of Education, as well as University sources from Mexico and Georgia.

Institutional Commitment

Georgia Southern's mission statement reflects the University's Strategic Vision supporting growth of Study Abroad through the following statement:

“The University offers a student-centered environment enhanced by technology, transcultural experiences, private and public partnerships, and stewardship of a safe residential campus recognized for its natural beauty.” (<http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/about/mission.html>)

In addition, one must seek to understand the definition of transcultural experiences as defined in the University's Strategic Plan, Level I plan.

Transcultural can be used synonymously with intercultural, multicultural, cross-cultural and global. It refers to other cultures whether they are found across the globe or in the same neighborhood. As used in this document, transcultural refers not only to international experiences but to the variety of diverse cultures that are part of the University and the region. The definition of transcultural is being broadened to include issues of gender diversity as well. Georgia Southern University wants our students, faculty and staff to experience and become comfortable with a wide range of cultural environments. The University also wants to play a leading role in exposing the larger regional community to these diverse cultures. Transcultural experiences should be explored and celebrated as an integral component of the University's learning experience.

Transcultural opportunities enable Georgia Southern University students, faculty, alumni, and staff to experience and become involved with a wide range of cultural environments. The University will continue its leadership in the academic community as a place where diversity is celebrated and explored. Georgia Southern University's role as a leader in the state and region also encompasses a responsibility to broaden the larger community's understanding of the enriching aspects of diverse cultures. (<http://services.georgiasouthern.edu/osra/councils/spc/stratplan.htm#to>)

Selected strategic objectives that were defined to support transcultural experiences include an increased exposure to global cultures, as well as an increased understanding of our multicultural campus. To support appropriate development of these objectives, academic leaders defined an action step:

Expand transcultural opportunities and experiences for the campus and the community, integrating them into program curriculum and developing external partnerships to create opportunities wherever possible. Promote the study of foreign languages. Offer increased study abroad opportunities for students and faculty; establish centers abroad in strategic locations; and continue to emphasize internationalizing the curriculum. Encourage the exploration and study of local cultures.

The Center for International Studies is directed by Dr. Nancy Shumaker. Funding for the Center is achieved through statewide funding, with the support of scholarship opportunities for selected students. Mr. Jeff Palis, Coordinator for Study Abroad and Exchange Programs, offers vital support in educating the campus community and recruiting students for the programs. Through discussions in various language classes, as well as student groups with an interest in international opportunities, the Center staff has found students who are interested in how they could participate in Study Abroad programs.

Institutional Goals

Georgia Southern University is seeking to meet the University System of Georgia 2007 target for institutional Study Abroad participation rates. Specifically, the goal is stated as:

By 2007 the number of Georgia students going overseas will equal slightly fewer than **4%** of all undergraduates, **5%** of those who are enrolled full-time, and **25%** of those who earn degrees.

If this is accomplished, it will make Georgia the most dynamic study abroad system in the country. Collectively, if you put all of this together in round numbers, you get the 9th largest campus enrollment in the System, with over 250 programs in 55 countries, a diverse curriculum, a growing total of credits and dollars—all managed by 34 very different institutions. (Sutton, R. February 2003)

To accomplish this, it is necessary for the University to continue to mature the need for identifying students who are willing and financially able to participate in Study Abroad programs, as well as secure funding to assist with their participation.

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities for Study Abroad continue to be of interest to incoming students, whether freshmen, transfer, or graduate level. Key ingredients that support the opportunities and growth of new programs continue to involve the educational process of

students and their families. For all students, they are made aware of the programs through the orientation process. But the reality of their participating in these programs must be linked to the funding options, whether through personal funds or scholarship funds. As Georgia Southern moves into a capital campaign in the fall of 2004, the need for scholarships to support international programs has been identified as one of the focuses in the academic distinction development. As these dollars are secured, the Center for International Studies can mature its efforts to expand offerings in the Study Abroad programs. The critical recognition of the need for funding underscores the Universities commitment, yet again, to the development of international study opportunities.

Support for Strategic Planning

As noted previously, the basic premise for Study Abroad development at Georgia Southern University is underscored through the Universities Strategic Plan. This level of understanding provides the basis for the Center for International Studies staff to garner support throughout the University community, as well as the county, state, nation and international venues. By developing the initial areas for growth and development, the Center staff has been successful in securing campus-wide support which includes the following offices: Admissions, Graduate Studies, various academic departments, Provost, Financial Aid, Advancement, Housing, Student Affairs, and the President. Additionally, the Study Abroad opportunities under further development with the Universidad Veracruzana, the Veracruz State Department of Education and the Bulloch County Board of Education underscore the success of researching issues from a strategic planning perspective.

Additional paths to support strategic planning initiatives can be explored by seeking resources available to institutional researchers. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics released a June 2004 report on *Language Minorities and Labor Market Indicators – Recent Trends*. This report supports the need for non-English speaking teachers if you investigate the growth of students from 5 to 24 years of age who spoke a language other than English at home.

Conclusion

The linkage of Study Abroad Programs and institutional strategic planning are critical for proper funding and support for services. Partnerships of the institutional organization, such as institutional research and international studies units, the system board office, international university counterparts, can provide insight that broadens the factual base and the planning mechanisms. The University System of Georgia has tasked its thirty-four member colleges and universities to seek ways to broaden the Study Abroad programming and participant base by 2007 by mandating a system goal. The vision of planners and administrative leaders who can support this goal can be seen through the partnerships and plans that are evolving on various campuses.

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