



Leaders Speak Out

The U.S. Senate declaration of 2006 as the Year of Study Abroad and the recent Lincoln Commission report give reason for reflection on the state of education abroad and its future.

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ITH THE COMING TOGETHER OF TWO RECENT EVENTS, the issuing of Lincoln Commission's recommendations and the declaration by the United States Senate of 2006 as the "Year of Study Abroad," the editors of *IE*, in consultation with the our Editorial Advisory Board and the leadership of the NAFSA Education Abroad Knowledge Community, decided that a series of feature articles on various aspects of education abroad would be appropriate for 2006. To kick-off this series, we contacted a group of respected leaders in the field who represent a variety of perspectives and asked them a series of questions designed to elicit their opinions on the current state of education abroad and the possibilities for the field in the foreseeable future. The leaders interviewed here are David Larsen, vice president of Arcadia University and director of its Center for Education Abroad; Mel MacCarthy, manager of the international programs office at London Metropolitan University; William Nolting, director of international opportunities at the University of Michigan International Center; John Pearson, director of the Bechtel International Center at Stanford University; and Rosalind Raby, director of California Colleges for International Education.

The articles that will follow this one in the series will examine specific issues of importance to education abroad. We encourage the readers of *IE* to become part of a dialogue throughout this year by writing letters to the editor that can respond to issues raised in this series, or bring forward new topics for discussion.



David Larsen



Mel MacCarthy



Bill Nolting



John Pearson



Rosalind Raby

Past Is Prologue

If the Lincoln Commission's recommendations bear fruit, the field of education abroad could be significantly transformed in the next decade. The commission has called for setting a goal of sending one million students abroad annually by academic year 2016-17 [the Frontlines column in this issue (pp. 4–6) "The Lincoln Commission and the Future of Study Abroad" by Lincoln Commission member Senator Richard Durbin discusses the commissions report in detail]. But if the field is to support an increase of more than five fold that this goal represents, it will be vital that the professionals in the field examine the current state of education abroad and begin to formulate ideas for where the field may be in a decade.

Larsen and Nolting both noted the significant growth in numbers of students going abroad that has already occurred in recent years as a factor in shaping the field that exists today. "I've been focused on study abroad exclusively for the last 18 years," Larsen said, "and have seen an increase in participation in every single year. That's a huge factor. We are dealing with three times as many students as we did in the late 1980s."

Several of the panelists noted that diversity in the programs and participants has also been on the rise. "There is a greater reflection of the diversity of students

in study abroad offerings. For example, at community colleges, the majority of students are underrepresented students. The fields that they study are broader and that is reflected in the types of programs," said Raby. "We see growth in nontraditional fields for studying abroad like the physical and biological sciences."

"A larger percentage of students study in 'whole world' regions (i.e., outside Western Europe), and a much larger percentage of students participating in short-term education abroad," said Nolting. This is also contributing to a broadening of the field that has been well underway for some time now. Pearson agreed, "students are increasingly interested in global destinations, not just traditional European destinations. Also, they have expanded their view of what study abroad means. We have a lot of students who go overseas to do honors research, not with a particular program. They go on their own but it feeds back into the home curriculum."

McCarthy added that education abroad has become much more of a mainstream activity over the last two decades. "Study abroad is an anticipated component of the higher education experience... Academic departments—faculties—readily engage in the internalization of curriculum. It is widely recognized that a study abroad experience has professional and personal benefits for any student."

Raising the Profile of Education Abroad

The widening of the recognition of the importance of education abroad and the benefits it can bring in a variety of academic disciplines is a key development that received general agreement from the panel. To build on this on campuses around the country, there was strong agreement that education abroad professionals must work hard to ensure that the entire academic community at each institution supports the enterprise of sending students abroad to enhance their education and opportunities.

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tance of campus-wide coalition building, Raby emphasized that to achieve this unity on a specific campus education abroad professional would do well to take advantage of the strong examples and resources that exist in field today. “Within NAFSA, there are knowledge communities that offer collaboration outside of one’s own institution by connecting with colleagues—this builds greater strength in numbers of professionals on a mission to advance international education.”

Still the Exception, Not the Rule

Nolting and Raby both noted the fact that although this generalized support for education abroad is the ideal, it is not yet the reality on many campuses in the United States. “Having support at the highest levels of an institution is a crucial factor, and it is still the

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Pearson took up this idea and expanded on it. “Of course, it’s not just a role for NAFSA. I think if there isn’t a receptive institutional culture little can be achieved. What David has done in Acadia in the last 20 years has been to use his role and his office to get the university to look more broadly at what study abroad means. That it doesn’t just mean the Arcadia study abroad program [which is available to students from many institutions], it means getting Arcadia students themselves overseas.” Pearson also noted that his own experience at Stanford backs this up. “It really takes a coalition. I don’t think one person or one office can really change this. It can make the opportunities known. But if you don’t have buy-in from certain other areas, faculty, administration, financial aid, admissions—all of those offices have to play a part if you are looking down the road, say a five-year plan, to increase the interest in education abroad. So coalition building is actually what one person can achieve.”

While she concurred with Pearson on the impor-

exception rather than the rule,” Nolting said. “Where there is such support, study abroad tends to have better access to resources, better visibility, and is seen to be central to the institution. Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, and more recently Harvard exemplify cases of how study abroad can flourish when there is support at the top.”

“There is philosophical component with this at many community colleges,” said Raby. “While there exists a small portion of community college presidents, deans, and faculty who do perceive study abroad as valuable for community college students, this support is often not backed up by a budget. As a result of a chronic lack of funding, office, and staffing, institutions end up reinforcing the peripheral status of study abroad at their campuses,” she said.

Nolting said that even at the larger, better-funded, four-year institutions, decentralization can be a significant problem in achieving institution-wide support for education abroad. But there are ways to overcome this, “Networking on campus can go a long way toward encouraging the higher levels of campus administration to understand the value of study abroad and meet the

challenge of gaining high-level institutional buy-in. I would say this to colleagues: Find ways to heighten the visibility of the programs. Celebrate students' successes in these programs once they are back on campus. Make it known how influential study abroad is to a student's college experience and after graduation."

McCarthy emphasized that to make education abroad a central part of the institution's focus, academic goals and standards must be front and center in any education abroad offices work. "Learning and teaching must remain central to the study abroad experience. Study abroad is not about leisure; it's primarily about education. It's about the student being immersed in a different educational environment. By studying overseas, a student benefits from the opportunity to study their subject from different point of view. Also, a student's studies can be complemented by specialization as well as integration in a cultural environment not available at their home campus or hometown."

Preparing Students for a Globalized World

In a world where national economies are becoming more and more interdependent and job hunting is no longer restricted to a student's home country, the role of education abroad in preparing students to be productive citizens is evolving. McCarthy, who is based at London Metropolitan University, sees this aspect as critical in developing programs that will be relevant to the challenges facing students after graduation. It also has great importance to the smooth operation of the world economy as borders come to be seen less as barriers. "Study abroad potentially mobilizes people and knowledge," he said. "Knowledge acquired through study abroad is going to play out in any economy. I suppose examples of this would be an employer's recognition of an international qualification and appreciation of the international experience. The expansion of the knowledge base across the continent is another example. Approaches to teaching and specific disciplines varies from country to country, the student that studies overseas is bound to return home with a new perspective. As educators, we assume that new academic and cultural perspectives acquired through study abroad are delivered into the economy by way of employment in the home country—if so, study abroad influences the global economy with knowledge, experience, and capacity."

Larsen agreed, saying that today "students are aware that it is not a local or even a national economy that

they are dealing with; it is very international. They want to get out into the world and learn as much as they can about it in preparation for living their own lives."

Raby also commented on the important preparation that education abroad can provide in terms of the changing world economy. "In terms of preparing students for careers, study abroad is a great asset. Thirty percent of the global economy is in international trade. Every career that exists has some sort of global component to it. International literacy skills are in demand and study abroad is one of the best ways to gain those skills."

Nolting, too, said that it is in the interest of all campuses to provide education abroad experience to future generations of leaders. "Americans will be working in a globalized workforce, and therefore need to be as well qualified for desirable jobs as are highly educated nationals of other countries. Study and work abroad can be important in making American graduates more competitive by increasing their understanding of other cultures, and their ability to interact positively and productively with them," he said.

Although not disagreeing with his colleagues about the importance of the education abroad experience, Pearson did sound an important note of caution about not overplaying this point when comprehensive statistical studies have not yet been done that can back up the claim that students will be better off in the international economy as specific result of their education abroad experience. "I think we would hope that it would allow students to understand other cultures and other ways of behavior that will stay with them in whatever careers they go into. But I don't know if we have real data that says that people who have gone on study abroad are affected by it in a very real way in the careers and the jobs that they go into, especially if you're talking about the global economy." [Editor's note: An explosive growth in research on various aspects of education abroad, including longitudinal studies on long-term impacts on employments and career paths, is explored in the column titled "Beyond Anecdote: Research in Study Abroad Comes of Age" in this issue on pp. 51–55.]

Safety and Health Considerations in a Potentially Dangerous World

In a post-September 11, 2001 world where threats can include terrorism, pandemic diseases and the ever present possibility of localized natural disasters, education abroad professionals have been working

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diligently to meet each new challenge with carefully considered emergency planning on both a macro and a micro level.

“We are more acutely aware of the threat of terrorism than we were before. The possibility of an avian flu pandemic hangs over us like a cloud,” said Larsen. “For example, if you have a group of students overseas and the United States closes its borders, you have to know what you will do for those students.”

“I’m not sure we’ll resolve [all aspects] of these challenges in the immediate future, but we must do our best to meet them,” he said. He suggests that there are a number of important methods that have already been established in the education abroad community for dealing with emergencies. “Two decades ago, the study abroad community took the innovative step of sharing information about what was going on overseas in a time and in an area of crisis in response to the Libyan bombings. We have been doing so, quite routinely, ever since. Despite the fact that everybody has their own programs and their own agenda, there is now a real spirit of working together for the good of the enterprise in a time of crisis.”

McCarthy noted that in uncertain times, promoting education abroad to students can present problems. “Fear (especially of travel and all that is perceived as ‘alien’ to our Western culture), if left unchallenged by enquiring minds will clearly deter some from studying overseas and embracing ‘difference.’ Intercultural interaction through study abroad and academic collaboration is essential for international understanding.”

Fortunately, the most recent *Open Doors* statistics indicate that despite the potential for a lack of enthusiasm among students due to the possible dangers in the world, the demand for education abroad continues to grow. According to the *Open Doors* report released in November 2005, participation by U.S. students in education abroad grew by 9.6 percent in the 2003/2004 academic year, continuing a strong growth trend that has not yet been deterred by the uncertainties that world travel of any kind can engender.

Access Issues Are Critical

The panelists were consistent in wanting to see higher rates of participation among certain underrepresented groups. They perceive this as being of central importance to the growth of education abroad going forward. Minorities and financially disadvantaged

students and those with disabilities are a key component of this as yet underserved population.

“I think that the challenges today are being faced. I think there is a genuine awareness among institutions and study abroad providers that study abroad should not be preserved for certain types of students,” said Pearson. He noted that there has been an ongoing effort to expand awareness of these issues.

Raby pointed out that the community college population is especially vulnerable to these challenges because their student bodies have a higher percentage of students who fall into these categories. These students are often struggling just to make ends meet for their campus-based classes and they may not even consider studying abroad unless the financial side of the equation can be made easier. “It is important to remember that funding is a key issue for community college students and therefore low cost, but high quality programs that have alternate funding sources are critical to ensure success,” said Raby.

In addition to those who are underserved due to the constraints already mentioned, there is a large population of students in academic disciplines such as engineering and the hard sciences that have also been traditionally underrepresented among those going abroad to study. Often the academic demands of these disciplines have not been made flexible enough to allow students time to go abroad, or the credits earned abroad have been unacceptable on home campuses. This is another type of underrepresentation challenge that will need to be met if education abroad is to attain the kinds of student numbers that the Lincoln Commission has envisioned.

“The key element of study abroad is education and our focus should be on the quality of education and the experience. It is important that we explore innovative models of collaboration and establish programs that will enable a wide range of student profiles to have an opportunity to study abroad,” McCarthy commented.

Looking Down the Road

With the current trends continuing to be strong and with the Lincoln Commission calling for the federal government to put in place scholarships that would significantly increased the number of students going abroad over the next ten years and beyond, we asked our panelist to speculate a little on the possibilities for the future.

Larsen stressed that enthusiasm for growth needs to be tempered by assuring that quality and integration into the curriculum are being achieved. "I hope that things are going in directions that faculty members are happy to have them go in. Curricular integration and the more direct involvement of home school faculty in advising students about studying overseas is an exciting development. It requires that faculty understand the variety of opportunities available abroad," he said. "If this trend continues, you can envision study abroad programs that are specifically intended to meet home campus educational objectives. This would include programs that advance learning begun at the home campus and even programs that provide learning experiences unavailable there."

His vision for the development of education abroad is optimistic. "I hope that numbers continue to grow. We are still working with only about 5 percent of the undergraduate population. We should be serving at least a third of that group—preferably half. The demand on study abroad professionals is to have imaginative, creative, high-quality programs available throughout the world to absorb these numerical increases and to meet student and institutional needs."

Nolting sounded a similar tone, "I see the positive growth trend continuing long into the future. Also, I think the trend toward more short-term study abroad will continue, along with greater integration of study abroad into the on-campus curriculum. There will also be a greater variety of types of education abroad offered, such as service learning, and more co-curricular education abroad opportunities such as internships and volunteering abroad," he said.

McCarthy expanded on the theme of integration of education abroad into the overall educational strategy: "I think that study abroad will become an even more integral part of higher education experience as will the development of international curricular elements in undergraduate and graduate programs. One assumes that even greater academic specialization will be possible through study abroad in the next decade and that the number of students studying abroad will continue to grow."

Pearson agreed that the growth trend was well established. He sees the potential for rapid growth resulting from the Lincoln Commission's recommendations as holding both exciting potential and significant challenges for the field in keeping the level of excellence high. "I would hope that we would address some of these challenges, that we would see participation in study abroad from the broader student body." He also noted that, in his view, the current growth trend and the possible explosion of participation may shift the education abroad experience more toward short-term programs rather than the more traditional semester- or year-long education abroad experiences. "While we know that studying abroad is valuable, the current trend seems to be that an increasing number of students are studying abroad for a shorter period of time. However, what we don't know is that if short-term study abroad programs have the same positive benefits, in terms of a long-term commitment to global understanding, as a more traditional year-long study abroad experience; whether or not we can say short-term experiences are as valuable as

year-long experiences is not yet determined," said Pearson.

McCarthy, too, saw the potential for more short-term programs and was cautious about if this should be considered progress. "While the short program has its place in promoting cultural awareness (in both developed and developing world nations), short programs shouldn't be confused with study abroad generically. The short program experience is not a substitute for a semester- or year-long immersion experience. The short program is a taster program, perhaps a precursor to a greater interest."

Raby reflected on the question of diversity and how it will be handled especially at the community college level. "I think that at the community college level at least, work and internship abroad programs will grow because the emphasis at many community colleges is preparing for a career. Because of the financial hardship factor that many community colleges face, I don't think volunteer abroad programs will be popular at this level. Depending on the future outcome of the Lincoln Commission report, things could change though. If funding is readily available, it could be an interesting and deciding factor in postsecondary reform."

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