

## A Matter of Controversy?

IN ALMOST EVERY field of endeavor there are practices about which well intentioned and equally qualified practitioners can disagree. Our cover story in this issue, "When One Is Not Enough," by Charlotte West, examines one of those controversial areas of practice in education abroad—multicountry programs. Education abroad programs that take their students to several different nations and/or cultures during a single experience are certainly neither completely novel nor scarce. But as to whether this form of education aboard is an improvement over the more traditional single country/culture programs that emphasize immersion and thorough cultural exposure, there is certainly disagreement. As the philosopher, logician, anti-war activist Bertrand Russell once commented, "change is indubitable, whereas progress is a matter of controversy." And there is certainly a level of

disagreement in the education abroad field over efficacy of multicountry programs.

As James Gehlhar, associate vice chancellor for international affairs at East Carolina University, notes in our feature story, although there are significant advantages to exposing students to multiple cultures during the course of their undergraduate studies, "it also works against students gaining deeper understandings of any one culture, definitely a minus unless the overall time period abroad is longer than a semester."

Still, programs like Semester at Sea, which offers academic credit through the University of Virginia for studying all across the globe on a 'floating university', and regional programs that give students an opportunity to visit several locations in a geographic area, such as Pacific Discovery which offers regional programs in New Zealand/Australia, Southeast Asia, and Nepal/Tibet, tout their

program as offering unique advantages that single country study cannot.

Some of the students quoted in the article note that they considered the lack of complete immersion in the multicountry programs that they eventually chose, but decided the advantages were, for them, significant enough to overcome this downside.

What most of the experts in the article do agree on is that the structure of any programs is paramount. If students are properly guided through the multicountry experience, it can have value as an educational tool.

If you would like to weigh in on this topic after reading our feature article, please drop by the *International Educator* section of the NAFSA Web site ([www.nafsa.org/ie](http://www.nafsa.org/ie)) and write a letter to the editor using the provided Web form. We'd love to hear from you.

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