

Attracting Faculty to Education Abroad

AS THE COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONALIZE CAMPUSES continues to gain momentum, one of the most effective methods that higher education institutions have found to create meaningful, substantive, and long-term change on their campuses is to develop ways of encouraging their own faculty to become involved in education abroad.

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Engaging faculty in study, teaching, and research abroad can infuse exciting new energy, knowledge, and a more global perspective into the classroom while also bringing about more diffuse benefits both on and off campus. “Engaging our faculty in education abroad has helped us become an internationally aware and active university,” says Alice Bier, director of the International Education Office at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

At Florida State University, an award-winning Global Pathways certificate program has helped generate interest and involvement in education abroad among both students and faculty. According to Program and Exchanges Coordinator Cadence Kidwell, “As more of our faculty become involved in the certificate or exchange programs, there is more synergy for all international education efforts ... More faculty are finding out about lectures, conversation partner programs, research, and service opportunities, and are discussing these options with their students.” Kidwell notes that another result of faculty engaged in education abroad is “the development of a community ... and the sharing of ideas across disciplines.”

As international educators, we spend a lot of time talking about how to get *students* to become involved in education abroad. There’s much less talk about how to get faculty involved—yet getting faculty engaged with education abroad is vitally important. “When faculty are involved in students’ international education and experiences, the benefits are multiplied many times over,” explains Mary Coburn, vice president for student affairs at Florida State University. “By applying theory that they have learned in the classroom and in reflecting upon the meaning of the international experience

in their lives, students expand their knowledge while they develop into fully aware global citizens.”

“The most powerful recruitment tool we have on campus for convincing students to study abroad is a professor whose eyes and ears have been opened, or an academic adviser, career counselor, or financial aid officer who has benefited from an international learning experience,” says Wendy Williamson, director of study abroad at Eastern Illinois University. “Students whose professors are involved in education abroad are more likely to take advantage of it themselves. They are also more likely to understand the importance of international education.”

Faculty involvement is also a key element in students’ gaining an understanding that education abroad can and should be an integrally important part of their academic experience. According to Kidwell, “Without faculty involvement, the students will not see their participation as relevant to their academic plan.” Faculty involvement doesn’t only help promote programs—it also lends the endeavor legitimacy.

But inspiring students to study abroad is certainly not the only reason that engaging faculty is important and beneficial to students. Students who may never be able to study abroad themselves can benefit greatly from having teachers who have studied, researched, or taught programs abroad. Richard Straw, who teaches at Radford University in Virginia and has developed several short-term programs abroad, can speak to that. “As a history professor, I’ve always tried to emphasize the idea of what historians call perspective. It’s always been very important to me that students gain an awareness that people in other parts of the world don’t think like we do, that we see the world in a particular way,” Straw

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says. "As Americans, we need to work against this American-centered view of the world... Taking time abroad and then coming back into the classroom gives me just one more set of experiences that I can share with my students...especially this idea that there are lots of different points of view out there and lots of different perspectives, and we need to be as aware as possible of the differences." And according to Williamson, "Getting faculty involved is one of the most important steps in internationalizing campuses, especially for those who do not have a large international student population. ... We need well-traveled, knowledgeable professors who can grab students by the seat of their pajamas and turn them upside down, into global citizens of an ever-changing world."

Here are a just a few ways educators are finding to inspire, support, and engage their faculty in education abroad.

Offer faculty opportunities for hands-on learning about education abroad by sending them with their peers on current programs, and encourage them to create their own programs.

Sending faculty along as observers, assistants, or trainees with colleagues who are teaching abroad is one very effective way of getting them engaged in the endeavor. For Straw, the opportunity to accompany colleagues on a program in Antwerp as a mentor and academic adviser in 1995 was the first step toward creating his own education abroad programs, although he didn't necessarily think of it that way at the time, and that was not Radford's reason for sending him. "I had a wonderful time and discovered that I really liked being in that situation with the students," Straw says. Inspired by his experience working with students abroad, Straw introduced himself to Radford's new director of international education, who encouraged him to create his own program. The result was "An Appalachian/Celtic Connection," a three-week summer course designed to help students explore cultural linkages between the British Isles and Appalachia. The course was first offered in 2002, and has been offered five times since. Later Straw worked

with Jon Stauff, director of Radford's International Education Center, and with the Teaching and Learning Center on campus to incorporate elements of the three-week course into a home-campus-based, full-semester course that includes a spring break trip to Ireland.

Provide faculty with the money and the time to invest in their own professional activities abroad.

At the University of San Diego, the International Opportunity Grant Program, introduced in 1995, "has done wonders in terms of helping to internationalize our faculty, and in turn, our students and campus," according to Kira Mendez Espiritu, director of international studies abroad. "These grants have been truly remarkable in helping to cultivate faculty buy-in toward internationalization ... [They] have used the grant money for a variety of interesting international experiences, ranging from presenting a paper at an international conference to funding continuing research for a book project." Faculty are expected to incorporate what they learn abroad into their syllabi and also into their interactions with students and colleagues on campus. During the annual International Education Week in November, grantees showcase their work. "As a result of these presentations, faculty members have begun to collaborate with colleagues from other departments, and have begun to undertake joint research projects as well," Mendez-Espiritu says, adding, "USD is unique in that some of our largest programs are our faculty-led programs ... Many of the faculty members who lead these programs are past grant recipients. Some of them even came up with an idea for a program while they were overseas, funded by the grant."

Eastern Illinois University (EIU) also offers initiative grants to encourage professors to develop their own programs. "[But] we recognize that faculty-led programs are not for everyone, so we also offer ways for professors to get involved without teaching," Williamson says. For example, she explains,

“In exchange for helping us market programs and recruit students, we may send professors with the group, covering their transportation, hotel expenses, and offering them a per diem for an agreed-upon period of time. They act as group leaders, but are free to research and explore while students are in class. This works well for faculty who do not have much international experience, do not have the time or desire to put together and lead a faculty-led program, or have other reasons for visiting a country, such as research or service work.” This approach provides faculty with the incentive to become involved in the mission of study abroad, gives them the opportunity to expand their own international activities and perspective, and often leads indirectly to the development of new programs. One EIU professor from the family consumer sciences department who accompanied a colleague on an interdisciplinary summer program in South Africa later created a semester-long program that has been integrated as a regular option for students into her department’s program of study, and it is now offered every two years. “She had never been to South Africa before,” Williamson says. “While she was there she saw the value of study abroad, but she also took it to a different level. She thought that a longer experience would be better for students, and with the help of her department she created one,” says Williamson.

Support and encourage the development of faculty-led programs on your campus.

This doesn’t mean just money, though of course financial commitment is always helpful and to some degree essential. But a helpful and supportive attitude, and the willingness to be creative can also be very important: allowing flexibility in course requirements, providing administrative assistance for the planning and logistical implementation of programs, and assisting or allowing faculty time abroad to plan programs are all ways to help them create and develop programs that are not only exciting and innovative, but well planned and likely to succeed.

Belief in the value of education abroad and support at the departmental level are essential to create, develop, and sustain successful programs abroad. When Richard



Straw decided he wanted to revive a public history course that had been dormant for some time, he worked with his chair to create a new version of the course that incorporated a spring break trip to the Ulster American Folkpark Museum, where he had taken students several times before on his three-week summer courses. “The biggest issue was, would the students who enrolled in the class have to come on the trip, and I said yes,” Straw says. “I knew that there would be some pretty serious problems if we didn’t do it that way, so I got permission to limit enrollment to 12, and to make participation in the trip a requirement.”

At Eastern Illinois University, professors in the early childhood and secondary education departments have created education abroad opportunities for their students in South Africa, the Bahamas, Canada, and China. “Because of strict certification requirements, education students usually don’t have much opportunity to study abroad,” says Williamson. “So these professors have transplanted and now teach a set of required courses abroad, to give their students that opportunity.” Because the sections are offered abroad every *other* year, education abroad is an exciting option for students, but not a requirement.

Granted, developing such programs doesn’t only require a creative faculty: it calls for flexible, helpful administrators. And

it can create a lot of extra work, especially in the beginning. However, for those who believe in the value of education abroad, there’s no question that it’s worth it. “Our university is pro-study-abroad,” says Williamson. “We have removed silly obstacles and our offices work with us to help the students gain access to positive, successful experiences abroad.”

One new resource for faculty-led programs is offered by www.facultyled.com, a Web site devoted to promoting faculty-led programs created by Williamson and her partner, Francisco Jaramillo, and launched in December 2008. Through her work at EIU, Williamson saw a need for a centralized resource to help faculty promote and market their programs throughout the world and to make it easier for students and advisers to be able to find those programs. “Faculty-led programs usually need a minimum number of students in order to run,” says Williamson. “The problem is that often these courses are very specialized, and it can be difficult to find enough students [on a campus] to run them ... that can be really devastating for both students and faculty.” At www.facultyled.com, a keyword search makes it easier for students to find the highly specialized programs that match their specific interests and academic needs, which can often be hard to find on the larger education abroad Web sites.

Spread the word about education abroad programs and opportunities on your campus.

At the University of South Carolina, an innovative approach to publicizing education abroad that was developed mainly to attract students has also proved very useful in engaging faculty. “We are in our third year of a film series entitled *Beyond the Classroom*,” says Patricia Willer, assistant vice provost for international programs. “The first film was developed to capture the learning experience that occurs in study abroad. However, we have found that the film also was a great tool for sharing with other faculty members what the *teaching* experience is like: what it involves, how it engages faculty and students.”

The films have a premiere on campus to which all faculty are invited and are also used in a workshop format in the universi-

ty's Center for Teaching Excellence, as a way of encouraging faculty to become involved in teaching abroad. The first film follows history students in China who reported on what they saw, what they felt about they saw, and their reflections on the experience. The second film focuses on a journalism class offered in Munich, in which students worked collaboratively in small groups to cover the same story using three different media—print, broadcast, and podcast reporting. The third film features a spring break service learning project in Jamaica. Sarah Krivak, program coordinator for international initiatives at USC, says that the series, which began in an organic way with a member of the media arts faculty who wanted to film USC students in China in preparation for her Fulbright application, has grown well beyond its original purpose. "Other departments have seen the power of film, how effective and exciting it can be to show how students are learning," Krivak says. "There are many other applications."

USC is now considering the possibility of future films that explore the experience of international students at USC, or other, local but "beyond the classroom" experiences available to USC students. One of the films has been broadcast on public television, and was selected as a finalist for regional Emmy Awards. They are also available for sharing with interested faculty and administrators on other campuses.

Why Engaging Faculty Matters

At the University of San Diego, faculty members returning from international experiences report that they are energized from the experience "and that they translate that energy into the classroom, which in turn energizes the students," says Mendez-Espiritu. In addition to renewed and revitalized energy for teaching, experience abroad helps teachers provide the kind of richer, broader perspective that only time abroad can yield.

"We can only teach what we ourselves know," says Williamson, adding, "While it is a key priority for our institution to send more students abroad, it will be difficult to accomplish until our faculty and staff have similar experiences. That is why I proactively seek faculty and staff opportunities for travel-study, alongside of our programs for students." The results can be nothing less than transformative."

As Alice Bier says, "[Having our faculty involved in study abroad] connects us with other parts of the globe. It encourages creative thinking across national experiences... It changes an 'us-and-them' view of the world into a 'We are a place in the global environment' view. **IE**

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