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Study Abroad in Action

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Introduction to *csuglobalaction*

From its beginning, the mission of the CSU has not only been the training of teachers but the teaching of its students as the youth of the state of California destined for leadership in the state and beyond. For the CSU, teaching has meant a drive for “access and quality” where “the primary focus of the faculty is on students” and while scholarship and research are important, applied research and research that includes students as partners have been foundational characteristics. In this regard, the CSU has been leading the way building a “sound and productive system of comprehensive universities” and as such, the CSU has been “visited and studied by educational leaders from every continent and a multitude of nations” (*Gerth, xiii*). However, while this section will showcase the teaching across the campuses and therefore draw attention to our domestic classrooms, it will also highlight the programming that the CSU has developed as part of its international reach through opportunities to study in other countries and cultures.

In 2023 we mark the 60th anniversary of CSU International Programs and remember those efforts of Lew Oliver at Chico who began taking groups on guided tours of Italy as early as the 1950s. The Master Plan did not mention the subject of study abroad or the CSU’s international aspirations, but it was not long after that international programming began to take shape particularly under the stewardship of Glenn Dumke, who was appointed chancellor in April of 1962. First, there was a program to France during the academic year 1962- 63. The newly established Chancellor’s Office commissioned a study of international education in that same year, which led to a plan for the “development of a unified state college program” in this area (*Gerth, 270*).

In 1963 a number of trustees visited 11 countries (at their own expense) with an introduction to all the relevant ambassadors from Governor Pat Brown. By the start of the 1963-64 academic year, programs began in 5 countries: France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Taiwan. Another report was commissioned in 1966, reported out by 1967 and its generally positive tone set International Programs on its way to becoming a permanent feature of CSU life.

It was not all smooth sailing however as the next Governor Brown (Jerry - elected in 1974) immediately decided to delete all funding for international programs in 1975. Only by sheer dint of determination and skilled lobbying was the still young program saved. Happily, it not only survived, but continued to thrive in the coming years such that, by the 1980s, the CSU was firmly ensconced in the international arena.

In 1997 a task force on globalization was created as the system once again began to consider its role in the international space. This time the effort resulted in the creation of an “Office of Global Education” in the Chancellor’s Office. However, it is interesting to note that Donald Gerth believed that, while the CSU had masterfully evolved as an “important social invention” that it still needed more work on how to address change not only in California, but in the world. He goes so far as to suggest that while the CSU is, and remains the largest system of higher education in the US (and one of the largest in the world) it has “not been international as a whole beyond International Programs...The CSU is a citizen of the global higher education community, a major citizen”, however, he goes on “Exercising the responsibilities of that citizenship is an agenda yet to be developed” (*Gerth, 284*).

The goal therefore of this section of *csuglobal* is threefold. First, this section is intended to address a perceived gap in the scholarly world for a publication focused on pedagogy and specifically geared to the internationalization of the classrooms and the campuses of the CSU. Second, this will be a useful place to discuss the collective knowledge/best practice/evolving issues around our students going abroad (and those coming from abroad to our campuses) in terms of how they fare and what we can do better. Finally, and to go that extra mile, the journal seeks to be a place where we can discuss the role of California in that global space and how the CSU’s leadership can and should be stronger at the intersection of the local and the global. We aim to act in the world not only as separate campuses, but to better unify that strength for the good of our students and an increasingly global California.

In keeping with this mission, this section of the journal will be led by an administrator and a faculty member. Cari Vanderkar (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo) and Amy Below (East Bay) bring their own powerful voices, but the combination of their experience, expertise and roles in the system could not be better suited to reaching across the staff/faculty boundaries to address the teaching/curricular issues that lie at the very core of the CSU. To that combination, we have also added an Ad Hoc editor Maria Ortuoste (East Bay) who will help support students seeking to publish and engage with the journal – not only in this specific section but across every area of the journal.

More specifically for this issue, Vanderkar and Below offer a strategic overview of the questions that can and should be addressed as part of California's international role going forward as well as laying out the changing challenges of the classroom. If there was ever any doubt that such a section can and should be part of a global CSU, that is instantly put to rest as the themes and questions raised by their colleagues across the other sections are echoed in the practical questions they raise. As an institution that prides itself on the teaching and the practical – we know that the magic happens in the classroom. So it is that we hope this section will provide an opportunity for new collaborations, exciting innovations, and a place for dialogue on the role of the CSU in the development and guidance of California's future global citizens.

Dr. Alison R. Holmes, Managing Editor

Study Abroad in *Action*

When I first started in the field of international education thirty years ago, we set out as a team of peer advisors to debunk the myths of study abroad. Students thought that study abroad would be too expensive and not accessible, would delay graduation, that grade point averages would be affected negatively, that lack of additional language skills could create barriers to access, and that they wouldn't be able to take courses in their field of study. We stripped each of these myths back, demonstrating the ways in which study abroad is possible. We further showcased how study abroad will “change your life,” allow you to make new friends, gain cultural competency and learn skills important for careers and in personal lives.

Thirty years later, many more students are studying abroad. Students became increasingly confident of their ability to engage in learning abroad. Our campaigns were working and support on our campuses and at home for global experiences ever growing. Yet some of the myths persist. But for whom? Many more realizations have come to bear—or at least we hope they have. Study abroad isn't accessible to all, and many students do not see a clear pathway to pursue the opportunities. Institutions need strong and timely collaboration for study abroad students to make progress toward degree completion. Students struggle with academic systems worldwide and need support to help them navigate the academic and other cultural environments. All students (with some more than others) need adequate funding to undertake international experiences. And the transformative nature of study abroad is profoundly dependent on the student, their skillset, their resiliency, their ability to find a program that is a good match for their goals, and the intentionality of the program leaders to guide them through challenges and reflections on those experiences.

I am an anthropologist by training, and just as the field of anthropology is challenging its colonial past, so is international education. We are reflecting deeply on the historical colonial aspects of our field—from the Grand Tour of Europe of the early 1900s, to the present bucket list items that students check off, to the consumeristic approaches of going abroad in the pursuit of idealized notions of living in different cultures.

The *Open Doors Report* produced by the Institute for International Education (with sponsorship from the U.S. Department of State) indicates that nearly 350,000 US students studied abroad in pre-pandemic 2018-19 as compared to around 71,000 U.S. students in 1989-90. In data released in November 2021, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo ranked first in the nation among Master's institutions for the number of students sent abroad in 2019-20. Cal State Long Beach and San Francisco State ranked sixth among Master's institutions, while San Diego State ranked third in the country overall (among Doctoral institutions). These are statistics of which we collectively are proud—and deservedly so! Additional rankings have placed several CSU campuses in top statuses based on the length of program. For long-term duration of study abroad also in 2019-20 rankings, seven out of the top ten Master's institutions were CSU campuses, with San Francisco State in first place, Sonoma State third, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo fourth, Chico State fifth, CSU Northridge sixth, San Jose State ninth and Cal Poly Pomona tenth. The success of long-term programs is an indication, in part, to the strong success of CSU International Programs systemwide exchanges and the long-standing tradition of immersive, year-long opportunities for students throughout the entire system.

Our training on power, privilege, and embedded context compels us, though, to understand more about who is studying abroad and who isn't. AND, what are our students gaining from their experiences abroad?

Roger Adkins and Brian Messerly in their chapter "Toward Decolonizing Education Abroad: Moving Beyond the Self/Other Dichotomy" (2019) discuss a need for a reckoning of study abroad, specifically the need to be attentive to reciprocity and how study abroad can be mutually beneficial to local communities and not a one-way pattern of siphoning local resources toward the self-enlightenment of the student abroad.

Dr. Cheikh Thiam, former Academic Dean for the School for International Training and currently Visiting Professor in English and Black Studies at Amherst College, asserted in his paper

presented at the Global Inclusion conference in fall 2021 that globalization has been a one-way process with access to the world limited to a very few and with travel overwhelmingly dominated by citizens of the global north, by privileged students.

His sentiments frame the necessity of access, which forms one of our top goals in our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan at the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo International Center. We look to funding, curriculum mapping, and internal and external partnerships to help us in supporting students underrepresented in study abroad as well as in reviewing our systems, marketing and processes while we work to dispatch barriers—perceived and real—to study abroad and international education generally.

Recent research highlights the importance of study abroad for our students with regard to student success metrics such as time to degree and GPA just as we stated 30 years ago. It also illuminates deeper insights. Karin Fischer summarizes findings from research by the University System of Georgia in her May 2022 segment in *Latitudes: Study Abroad's Impact on College Completion*: “Students who studied abroad were six percentage points more likely to graduate in four years and four percentage points more likely to graduate in six years than their classmates.... They also graduated with higher cumulative grade-point averages than their peers.” The Georgia study through CASSIE—The Consortium for Analysis of Student Success through International Education is in line with research on the topic coming out of the CSU (Gruber 2020). Gruber’s findings utilizing Chico State data indicate that graduation rates were higher for First-Time Freshman (FTF) who studied abroad, including first-generation college students (FGCS) and underrepresented minority (URM) students; that there was “no statistically significant difference between SA [study abroad] and non-SA group in time to graduation, including URM and FGCS;” and that final cumulative grade point averages for students who studied abroad were higher than those who had not. This data is compelling and corroborates our efforts to break down perceived barriers for study abroad. It also serves as a point of reference for other CSUs to engage in similar data analyses partnering with our institutional research offices.

Within the CSU, study abroad professionals are provided with policies (formerly Executive Orders) that guide the essentials for preparing students for experiences abroad. These policies have shaped the good work that we do and create a benchmark for the system. Orientations must be thorough and include health and safety, logistics, financial obligations, cultural and political information, and onsite resources. Similarly, faculty and staff leaders must have trainings prior to departure that cover crisis response, obligations as CSU and state employees including mandated reporting, adherence to codes of conduct, and expectations including those related to communication. And more recently the requirement that leaders have appropriate country/program cultural expertise and experience was added at the system level, though it was in place on some campuses previously. Campus committees review how the program objectives align with leaders' expertise. And the ongoing challenge of program learning objectives linking with in-country experiences, excursions and the overarching notion of promoting cultural humility and competency remains.

What makes our programs transformative? How are we partnering with host organizations and institutions *in situ* to facilitate reflective and reflexive thinking, experiential learning that is ethical in practice and daily life, and a “decolonialization” of study abroad? To what extent are we, in the largest state system of higher education in the country with nearly 500,000 students, fostering global citizens?

The **csuglobalaction** theme is one that centers on telling our story and highlighting best practices in international education *in action*. What are our successes and challenges and the ways in which we are building the cultural toolkit for our diverse student populations to approach their lives and careers with empathy, respect, resiliency, critical thinking skills and deep humility? How are we building out effective programming that layers high impact experiences—service learning, internships, research—with our study abroad and non-credit programming worldwide? How are we approaching and integrating in practice timely topics such as antiracism, White supremacy, identity and privilege? How are we preparing our students for anti-American sentiment they may encounter? How are they able to navigate

political landscapes abroad and how Americans are perceived? Are our students understanding that their “bucket list” items might be another way of commodifying their study abroad experiences and being takers in spaces where there should be reciprocity, reflection and growing understanding?

As we navigate out of the pandemic, international offices are faced with profound challenges within higher education and society at large. The ‘great resignation’ has left offices understaffed. Budget cutbacks and freezes have left initiatives under-resourced. And morale can be low in the real need for higher levels of oversight for health and safety, the balancing of back-to-office and hybrid working, rising costs of living, and ongoing existence in times of ambiguity. Staff require support and creative ways to reignite and sustain our passion for the work we do. And our students need additional assistance in moving out of the isolationism of the pandemic. Mental health care needs are high throughout our campuses. As an article on differential personality change in adults during the pandemic indicated, “It is notable, but perhaps not surprising, that most significant personality change during the pandemic occurred in younger adulthood, with most traits showing no change among older adults.” And specifically, that “younger adults showed disrupted maturity in that they increased in neuroticism and declined in agreeableness and conscientiousness” (Sutin, et al. 2022). How does this impact cultural adjustment and ability to demonstrate cultural humility? How are our faculty and students navigating this together? What stories of resiliency and courage can we highlight?

We also look to broaden international virtual exchange opportunities to further the reach of our efforts for all students to have significant international education experiences. Although fully virtual “study abroad” programs received lukewarm enthusiasm from students at best, ongoing integrated and intentional opportunities to collaborate with international partners and bring cohorts of students together for project-based learning, to explore critical global issues and the like have become more deeply present in the curriculum on our campuses often with

grant support from colleges, international offices and higher administration. What are your successes in this realm?

Likewise, in working with international students, in the 90s and early 2000s we were faced with ever growing cohorts of students and the expansion of multifaceted partnerships to support the needs of those populations. Now international student enrollments have dipped considerably impacting budgeting, staffing and programming and potentially affecting the experiences that international students have at our institutions. Changes in regulations, such as Hoff (2021) explains, stalled student mobility during the pandemic as well as strengthened the need for support for students who were pulled in myriad ways—financial, academic (online and hybrid learning across borders), logistical (entry and exit limitations), caring for family back home, etc. International faculty and visiting scholars can face similar challenges.

Political change and upheaval in many areas of the world throughout the pandemic and continuing bring stressors to our field and opportunities to enhance our cross-campus collaborations in support of our study abroad and international students. In times of crisis, international students in minority group status (i.e., BIPOC) may feel insecure and unsettled in ways far different from U.S. students. Some students may have gone to high school in the U.S. and may have more comfort in navigating civil, political, academic and cultural realms in the U.S. Others are trying to make sense of current political and social movements, how campuses are trying to support them and what they should do to advocate for themselves or even if they should do so at all. Feelings of vulnerability, uncertainty about the level of risk they may be taking, and perhaps a disconnect from the sentiments of U.S. students may make them feel further isolated from their peers, from resources on campus and from integrated cultural experiences they may have initially sought in coming to the U.S. for their degrees (Zhang and Vanderkar 2021). How are we continuing to support our international students during times of political uncertainty and change here and in their home countries?

We look forward to learning from you and the compelling work you are doing.

csuglobalaction is a space for telling our stories, highlighting best practices and celebrating CSU global efforts in action. This journal intends to build out an awareness of the CSU and of California in the global context. This section specifically highlights faculty, staff and student experience in engaging with international communities and education at home and abroad. As we work to affect positively California's future through the effectiveness of our programs and curriculum, let's share how we are shaping our future resilient and highly capable workforce and our inclusive and humble global citizens.

Cari Vanderkar

Notes

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