

Theoretical analysis of “Academic credibility and the hospitality curriculum”: The image problem

By Babs L. Cole

Social issues are assessed from different perspectives. The purpose here is to evaluate one short article in terms of interpretive social theory and then briefly assess it in terms of functionalism, conflict theory and critical theory.

Interpretive theory constructed nature of social meaning and reality

Evans¹ notes the differences in perception regarding liberal arts education and training in “trades.” The author believes that it is only proponents of liberal arts education who see education in applied knowledge as being less valuable than more general liberal arts education. He notes that those calling for greater concentration on liberal arts complain that other, more directly applicable forms of education are somehow less valuable in that they appear not to require students either to think or to learn to think.

Instead, they are seen as merely collecting facts that should be directly applicable to some situation in their chosen applied field.

A cornerstone of interpretive theory

is to “understand how people construct and act upon meanings²,” and Evans³ explores this aspect of the theory. He writes that those promoting the need for greater emphasis in liberal arts fail to recognize the study of the hospitality industry incorporates many of the topics and issues that those in liberal arts believe are necessary for a complete education. He notes that in academia, the “more ‘applied’ you are, the lower you are on the academic totem pole, and this is true in math, chemistry, nutrition, and even the liberal-arts area of theatre.⁴”

According to Evans, the view of more academic individuals is that in professional education “feel that if we teach skills, we do not teach values, ethics, concepts, or the appreciation of our culture⁵.” This simply is not true in professional education, of course, a fact that those with a more academic bent could see upon closer inspection. An example, economics is directly recognized as a social science; economic decisions of both businesses and households fall under the same heading of microeconomics.

The study of these two broad categories involves the study of values, ethics, concepts and cultural issues if they are to be understood in meaningful terms. Proponents of liberal arts studies likely are unaware that a subject such as economics can and does include such topics. Economists — and hotel managers — know them to be vital to understanding of the larger portion of the hospitality industry.

De Marrais and Le Compte write that these conditions and perceptions lead to the conclusion that “reality is not a prior given; it is based upon interpretations and it is constructed during interaction between and among individual actors⁶.” In short, the complaint of liberal arts proponents that professional education does not contain education in values, ethics, concept and culture reveals only that they do not have enough knowledge about professional education in the hospitality industry. Were the most vocal complainers more familiar with professional hospitality education, they would be more aware of the fact that there is increasing emphasis in all areas of business on values, ethics and concepts, and that a greater understanding of culture and cultural differences has become vital to professional success in the hospitality industry.

This point introduces the concept that reality “is not fixed but changes

according to the actors and the context⁷.” Those devoted to philosophy can find a myriad of examples to consider in light of existing philosophical knowledge. Those faced with daily decision-making responsibilities often can benefit immensely from the philosophies of individuals such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill.⁸ Kant’s categorical imperative can guide decision making in that it defines the morality of a choice based on intent, rather than outcome. Mill’s version of utilitarianism defines the morality of a choice as being based on the concept of “the greater good.” Both of these philosophers not only inform ethical decision-making, they also are relevant even today in assessing social questions. As business is a social enterprise, so are Kant and Mill directly applicable to business-based decision-making.⁹

Those promoting liberal arts education in favor of professional education are accustomed to seeing such philosophical education built into separate courses that consider only philosophy that has no specific goal. Those more attuned to professional education understand that working knowledge of the old philosophers’ theories can guide very practical decision making efforts.

Thus, reality for liberal arts proponents could be altered were they aware that nearly all business

education today contains more than a passing wave at the old philosophers. Ethical operations in business are more important today than perhaps at any other time. Business people cannot operate under specific ethical principles unless they understand those principles.

Self, roles, scripts, communication

In liberal arts education, critical thinking is one of the most highly valued skills resulting from education efforts. The same is true in professional education, in that individuals must practice critical thinking skills daily, with the added requirement that they then act on the conclusions they reach as the result. Individuals in business often do not have the luxury of assessing a single point from every possible angle before being required to either reach some conclusion about it or directly act upon it. In this sense, it appears that those in professional education gain the more complete education. They learn not only the skills required in the practice of critical thinking, they also have the benefit of having self-correcting tests before them. In business, the manager who makes an incorrect philosophical assumption quite often misses the mark on what s/he is trying to achieve.

Communication is critical to liberal arts, and the same can be said for professional education, particularly in

the hospitality industry. The liberal arts proponent will need to be able to convey ideas to others or risk being misunderstood or being dismissed as being irrelevant.

The practitioner, on the other hand, not only must convey thoughts and ideas to others, but also create an image for them that embody those ideas. If the businessperson fails, the business suffers.

Either worker misunderstands or customers do not grasp marketing communication intended to court them and to more fully know them. If the businessperson fails to communicate ideas effectively, then the livelihoods of many will be adversely affected.

In the case of interaction, the pure philosopher needs only to interact with himself. Philosophical discourse should have some point to it; otherwise, there is little reason to produce it. Again, professional education involves interaction as well, but on a more complex level.

Micro level existence

Another feature of interactive theory is that it focuses on the micro level, which is comprised of “individuals and small groups in interactions with each other.”¹⁰ Both liberal arts education and professional education in the hospitality industry are seen as being just that. Particularly those involved in liberal arts see

promotion of liberal arts education as occurring with individuals and small groups. Those same individuals are likely to see business only as some large, faceless thing that is self-supporting and self-perpetuating.

Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. Business succeeds through effective communications with individuals that have proceeded with significant critical thought activity.

It fails for many reasons, but breakdown of internal communication is a common fault. The Ritz-Carlton hotels provide an example of the critical nature of effective communications both among coworkers and between employees and customers.

Former CEO Horst Schulze set the Ritz on a path that not only would win the company the **Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award**, but also make it the first service company to do so.

The physical facilities remained the same, and services that were in place remained. The greatest change in the management of the company was that it broke down the barriers to communication¹¹ and promoted the near-mantra of “ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.” Management continually communicated to its “front line” workers — desk clerks, concierges, bell hops — that to guests, *they* were Ritz-Carlton, and that the success of the company hinged on how well these

employees met customers’ needs.¹²

Proponents of liberal arts education value constructed meaning and its ability to change, yet the success of the Ritz since instituting its quality measures in the late 1980s stands as an example of constructed meaning that also has changed over time. The difference is that at the Ritz, that change positively affected the company’s bottom line.

As required by interpretive theory, changes and constructed meaning remains at the micro level.¹³

Evans¹⁴ speaks in terms of students, maintaining the requirement of communications between individuals or among small groups.

In maintaining this focus, Evans¹⁵ also “seeks no connections to determinants in external, social structural variables.”¹⁶

Social structures may change in response to changes in communications and interactions with individuals and small groups, but the nature of those interactions do not come about in response to external variables. Evans¹⁷ highlights differences in perspectives between liberal arts and professional education, but he makes no recommendation for any change aside from that of demonstrating (i.e., communicating to) proponents of liberal arts education the fact that professional education already contains several of the qualities that they claim it lacks.

Functionalist theory

De Marrais and Le Compte¹⁸ summarize functionalist theory as being too static, focusing “on order maintenance that justifies the status quo; conflict and change come to be regarded as aberrations.”

Functionalism emphasizes order and equilibrium, and it can be argued that Evans¹⁹ also provided this view in his article. The traditional view is that practitioners of any kind practice less critical thinking and analysis than do those more highly educated in liberal arts. Those promoting greater emphasis on liberal arts seek either to maintain the current level of attention to liberal arts education or to restore the level that existed in times past. From the functionalist perspective, Evans’²⁰ article can be said to “identify social system components and to describe how systems work.”²¹

The key issue is that professional education appears to diminish liberal arts education’s influence. The problem is that, if this position is true, then those in hospitality management programs are not learning critical thinking and philosophical analysis skills. This is not the case, of course, as described in an earlier section. If liberal arts education has changed, it has not been the availability of professional education that has changed it.

Conflict theory

Assessed from the perspective of conflict theory, Evans’²² article can be said to have application in terms of this theory as well. One of the qualities of conflict theory is that it “does not define explicitly what constitutes conflict.”²³ Evans²⁴ does define some situations that are pointed to as being sources of conflict, but closer inspection reveals that they are not. Though Evans²⁵ describes the difficulties that proponents of liberal arts education has with professional education, the nature of their complaints could be solved with closer scrutiny of what constitutes professional education in today’s environment.

Some want to create conflict in claiming that certain aspects of liberal arts education are missing from professional education, but Evans²⁶ demonstrates that these individuals are only mistaken. There is no real conflict present, only a misunderstanding.

Critical theory

The goal of critical theory “is to unmask sources of oppression, to promote understanding of causes and consequences of oppression, and to encourage participation in liberation.”²⁷ As such, the goal of critical theory is far beyond the scope of the educational image problem that professional education has in the minds of liberalists. There is no oppression here, and no necessary

liberation efforts to participate in
aside from arguing that professional
education is still education and
incorporates many of the topics of
liberal arts.

The issue of professional education's
image certainly can be argued from
the vantage of critical theory, but such
is not a legitimate use of the theory.

Conclusion

Examining this single article in
terms of various social theories
highlights the necessity of applying
appropriate theory to social issues.
Evaluation in terms of interpretive
theory is justifiable and valid; the same
nearly can be said of conflict theory
though its application here stretches its
meaning. Functionalist and critical
theories are best left to other topics.

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¹⁵ Evans (1988).

¹⁶ Marrais and LeCompte (1999).

¹⁷ Evans (1988).

¹⁸ Marrais and LeCompte (1999).

¹⁹ Evans (1988).

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²¹ Marrais and LeCompte (1999).

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International education: Feedback from participants

By Hubert B. Van Hoof

Hospitality management students who participated in study abroad programs were asked why they had decided to study abroad, why they had selected a particular institution, how their home institution compared to the partner institution abroad, and what they perceived to be the benefits and relevance of their international experiences. The author found that respondents were generally very positive about the study abroad experience.

Educators and administrators involved in study abroad programs are constantly searching for the holy grail of international education, the perfect study abroad experience. Many have studied and written about the value of an international experience in higher education, and generally it was found that a mandatory or optional international component in a four-year program of studies is of benefit to our students, not only for developmental and educational reasons, but also because it helps them adjust to the challenges of life in the workplace once they leave college.¹

What does the perfect study abroad

experience look like? First, students must have the ideal academic experience. This means not only that they acquire relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the subjects of their choice, but also that there is a perfect fit between what they study abroad and what they are taught at their home institutions. Credits should transfer easily because the host institutions abroad teach what their syllabi say they are supposed to teach, and contents abroad need to be comparable to course contents at home institutions.

Second, students should have the perfect personal experience, one that enriches them, and helps them mature. If they can handle life as an exchange student at an institution abroad, and deal with the inevitable hurdles while living in another country and culture, they can deal with any challenges in their future careers as general managers, marketing directors, controllers, or food and beverage directors.²

Students should have the perfect cultural experience. They should come back as culturally sensitive individuals

who will not only to survive in an increasingly multi-cultural environment but flourish in it too. They should be familiar with people of different race, color, language and beliefs. They should be able to consider things from multiple perspectives, and, more than anything, they should be tolerant and appreciative of diversity related issues in the workplace.

Students should have the perfect social experience. Housing at the host institution should be arranged ahead of time, and should reflect the needs and wishes of our students. They should have many friends while abroad, and come back with life-long contacts around the globe so that they always have a place to stay no matter where they travel later on in life. They should travel and see something of the world first hand, while learning from the experience.

None is perfect

Unfortunately, however, this holy grail of international education has not been found yet, and students will probably never have a perfect, flawless experience. Some might argue that the experience should not be flawless, as students learn from overcoming challenges, yet, the effort is made to improve the experience every semester, not only for the students who leave home to go abroad, but also for those who come from other countries.

There is also the attempt to find new ways of enticing students to study abroad, including finding new exchange partners in new countries, or offering semester programs, year-long programs, double degree programs and international internships. Faculty are sent abroad, and international faculty come and teach in the U.S., all in an effort to make international programs as appealing as possible.

Course evaluations generally conducted at the end of the semester, are an attempt to make courses better and more relevant to students. The input received is of vital importance to faculty, in that it helps them determine what worked and what did not, at least according to the students. The results of the evaluations are also important to programs in general, as they provide administrators with information on the effectiveness of their entire faculty, on how a program prepares students for life after school, and on how courses relate, interconnect, or overlap.

Evaluations can help

Study abroad programs can benefit from student evaluations just as much. The information obtained from asking study abroad participants about their experiences will tell how these programs fit in with academic missions, provide additional information that is vital for the long-term success of international efforts,

show how relevant students felt the experience was to their personal development and their careers, and indicate how close the experience is to being a perfect one.

This study was designed to solicit student feedback on the study abroad programs at Northern Arizona University (NAU), in a format reminiscent of regular course evaluations. Its specific intent was to investigate what students saw as the biggest benefits and challenges of the experience, why they decided to go abroad, how the education they received abroad compared to that at their home institution, and what the relevance of the experience was to their personal and professional development.

The survey which provided the data for the study was conducted during the months of March, April, and May 2003. The population included all the hospitality management students who had participated in study abroad programs during the period of January 2001 to May 2003. Included were students who had left NAU to study at a partner institution abroad as well as those who came to NAU from a number of foreign countries and partner institutions. Not included were international students pursuing a four-year degree at NAU. Personal information (name and e-mail address) of these students was obtained from

the database of students at NAU's International Office.

The questionnaire was designed to gain insights into the perceptions of students about their study abroad experiences in order to provide administrators and faculty involved in these programs with information that could help them in creating better programs and more worthwhile experiences.

Web survey used

A web-based survey format was used so it could be distributed to a large target audience at a much lower cost and more quickly than a traditional mail survey. Moreover, data collection and conversion could be done automatically, and the target audience could be encouraged to participate by means of a personal e-mail message. The most important benefit, however, was convenience for both respondents and researchers.³ It was felt that the respondents in this particular age group would be more likely to respond to an electronic format than to any of the other more traditional survey tools. An important concern about web surveys is their low response rate. Yet in this case, the population under study was relatively small, and it was anticipated that these students would be interested in sharing their opinions about their international experiences.

The questionnaire was a four-page, self-administered instrument. It was

estimated that it would take respondents about 10 minutes to complete.

In the first part of the survey respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information, including gender, the country where they had studied and the institution they had studied at, academic status (freshman, sophomore, etc.), major at the home institution and at the exchange institution, and the duration of their stay abroad.

The second part of the survey was divided into six sections and examined students' perceptions about their international experiences. In the first section, two questions asked them what their reasons were for studying abroad, and why they had selected the institution in particular. They were then asked to rate their exchange programs (as compared to their home institution) on a five-point Likert scale with regard to academics, care for their general needs as students, housing arrangements, and overall levels of organization and structure at the exchange institution as perceived by the student.

The third section examined what they liked most and least about their exchange institution, and what they perceived to be the main differences between studying at home and abroad. Three questions (once again on a five-point scale) in the fourth section asked them to rate the perceived relevance of their semester

abroad to future job opportunities, their academic program at home, and their own personal development.

The fifth section contained four questions. The first two asked respondents if they would consider studying abroad again at the same institution, and if they would study abroad again at another institution if it were possible. After that, they were asked to rate the quality of the academic program abroad specifically, and the overall study abroad experience in general. The final section asked them to describe the greatest benefits and challenges of studying abroad. This was done in an open-ended format.

On March 7, 2003 a letter signed by both the director of the International Office at NAU and the researcher was sent to all 136 incoming and outgoing hospitality management students in the database of NAU's International Office who had participated in an exchange program during the January 2001 to May 2003 period. In the letter the students were asked for their cooperation, and directed to a website which contained the survey. One week later, 26 respondents had completed the survey online. On March 24, 2003, a reminder was sent out to non-respondents. The website was kept open until the end of the spring 2003 semester, May 9, 2003. At that

time, a total of 48 students had responded to the survey, a 35.29 percent response rate. Given the concern that web-based surveys generally tend to generate a low response rate, this was deemed a good result. All analyses were done using SPSS 11.0.

Limitations exist

The main limitation to this study is that it was based solely on a database of students at one school at one university. All the incoming students studied at the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management at Northern Arizona University and all the outgoing students went to the institutions that were part of the international network of the school. Opinions, therefore, say more about Northern Arizona University and its foreign partners than about other universities and their partners, and the results cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the study. They might, however, be indicative of student opinions across the U.S.

A second limitation was the small size of the sample, which was attributed primarily to the small population from which it was drawn. Finally, there was the issue of the quality of the academic e-mail addresses since as students move on in their careers, their e-mail addresses expire or messages are never read.

Varied reasons listed

Of the 48 students who responded to the survey, 33 (68.8 percent) were female, and 15 (31.2 percent) were male. These numbers are reflective of a trend observed in international education, where females in these kinds of structured programs tend to outnumber males by a considerable margin. Fourteen students (29.2 percent) were incoming from Belgium, China, Germany, and the Netherlands, and 34 (73.8 percent) had studied at universities in Australia, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom. These locations were primarily driven by what was available in the school's international exchange network, although several students indicated they had found their country and institution of choice through USAC.

Most respondents were either juniors (25. percent) or seniors (66.7 percent), reflecting a common trend not to send students abroad too early in their academic careers. Finally, 29 respondents (60.4 percent) had studied abroad for only one semester, and 19 (39.6 percent) had been abroad for two semesters or longer.

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked why they had decided to study abroad, and were requested to rank a number of distinctly different reasons in order of importance. The three most

important reasons for studying abroad in general were as follows:

- It is/was a good opportunity to travel;
- It is/was a good opportunity to live in another culture;
- I liked the country my exchange program was located in; it could be used as part of my degree program (tie).

When asked why they had selected a particular institution abroad, the three most important reasons were as follows:

- It was available as a partner at my home institution;
- I liked the country it was located in;
- People I know also go/went there.

Home, host compared

In four questions the survey then asked respondents to compare the institution they had studied at abroad to their home institution in the areas of academics, care for their personal needs as a student, housing, and organization/structure. They did this on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 being "Much Worse/Much Easier," 3 being "Same," and 5 being "Much Better/Much More Difficult."

Half the respondents, regardless of their origins, felt that the academic program they had participated in abroad was more difficult than the program at their home institution;

17.4 percent felt that it was the same, and 32.6 percent considered it easier or much easier. The mean rating of 3.15 was close to the middle of the five-point scale.

In terms of the care they received for their personal needs (such as staff availability, academic advising, and counseling for instance), respondents were considerably less impressed with their host institutions abroad; 17.4 percent of respondents rated it as much worse, 26.1 percent felt it was worse, and 23.9 percent felt it was the same. Only 10.9 percent rated it as better, while 21.7 percent thought it was much better than the care they received at home. In this case the mean rating was 2.93.

Housing abroad is always a major concern for students and their parents/caregivers. The overall sentiment was that housing arrangements abroad were slightly better than they were at home, with 50 percent of respondents feeling that the housing arrangements at the institutions abroad were better or much better than at home; 15.9 percent stated they were the same, and 34.1 percent felt they were worse or much worse than at their home institution. The mean rating of 3.18 reflected these generally positive sentiments.

Finally, when asked how they felt about the overall level of structure and organization at their exchange institutions as compared to their

home institution, the respondents were clearly least impressed; only 28.3 percent rated it as better or much better, while 21.7 percent felt it was the same, and half percent thought it was worse or much worse than at home. The mean rating of 2.70 was the lowest score obtained.

Experience is relevant

Three questions asked respondents to rate the relevance of their international experiences to future job opportunities, to the academic program they were enrolled in at their home institution, and to their own personal development. Ratings were on a five-point scale again, with 1 being "Completely Irrelevant," 3 being "Relevant," and 5 being "Extremely Relevant."

When asked about the relevance of the experience to future job opportunities, 58.5 percent of the respondents rated it as very or extremely relevant, 36.6 percent as relevant, and only 4.9 percent as irrelevant (mean rating 3.80). With regard to the relevance of the international experience to their academic program at home, 46.3 percent of respondents considered it very or extremely relevant; 41.5 percent felt it was relevant, and 12.2 percent thought it was irrelevant (mean rating 3.54).

When it came to determining what the experience had meant to their personal development, the

respondents were most enthusiastic: 58.5 percent considered it extremely relevant, 24.4 percent very relevant, and 17.1 relevant. Of interest here was the fact that none of the respondents felt that the experience was irrelevant to their personal development. This enthusiasm was reflected in the mean rating of 4.41.

Students will do it again

Under the heading "Would you do it again?," respondents' opinions and feelings about their semesters abroad were further analyzed. They were first asked whether or not they would study abroad again at the same institution if it were possible. After that, they were asked if they would study abroad again at another institution. They were also asked why they would or would not repeat the experience.

A little more than half (56.4 percent) of respondents indicated they would study again at the same institution, and a large majority (79.5 percent) said they would study abroad again at another institution. This was a ringing endorsement for the study abroad experience, yet more so for the overall experience than for the institution they had studied at. A sampling of the reasons for not wanting to go back to the same program abroad included such comments as "courses are irrelevant," "been there, done that," "I got bored there," "too unorganized," and "I

would like to get a broader perspective and experience something new.”

Some of the reasons why students overwhelmingly endorsed the overall experience rather than the individual programs were as follows: “the dynamics of an exchange teach you a lot,” “I realize there are more opportunities now,” and “my personal development was incredible, and I want to see more.”

Overall ratings are positive

When it was time to ask for some overall assessments, respondents looked at the quality of the academic program they did abroad, and the quality of the experience in general, on a scale from 1 “Very Poor,” 3 “Neutral,” and 5 “Outstanding.” As became apparent throughout all of the other questions, here again it became clear that the study abroad experience had had a much larger perceived impact on the students’ personal development than on their academic careers. Whereas 58.9 percent of them rated the overall quality of the academic program they had participated in abroad as good or outstanding (mean rating 3.54), nearly all of the respondents (94.9 percent) felt that the quality of the overall experience was good or outstanding (mean rating 4.38).

Differences do exist

In order to determine whether any of the observed differences of opinion

were significant or not, several means tests were used to compare the opinions of distinct groups in the sample. The study first looked at whether the gender of the respondent had any significant effect on his/her perceptions about the study abroad experience. As there were two separate groups based on the value of a single variable (male-female), and as the level of data provided by the questions using the five-point Likert scale was ordinal, this analysis was done by means of T-tests. In all instances, the null hypotheses assumed that the population means were equal, and the alpha level was set at .05. The study found no significant differences of opinion between male and female students about their opinions.

When the opinions of the incoming students were compared to those of the students who had studied abroad, some significant differences of opinion were found. A limitation here was that this grouping did not allow for a distinction among countries or institutions. A more detailed analysis of the data based on individual countries and programs, however, was deemed beyond the scope of this study.

The study found three significant differences of opinion between the groups (See Table 1). First, it was found that outgoing students (U.S. natives) rated the housing arrangement at their host institutions abroad significantly lower than the

incoming students. Second, incoming students rated the overall quality of the academic program they had studied at in the U.S. significantly

higher than the outgoing students. Yet, outgoing students were significantly more appreciative of the overall experience than their incoming peers.

Table 1: Effect of origins on perceptions: Incoming vs. outgoing

		N*	Mean	St. D.	F	Sig.
Academic level of difficulty: Exchange program compared to home	I	14	2.57	1.158	1.360	.250
	O	32	3.41	.946		
Level of care for your general needs: Exchange program compared to home	I	14	4.64	.633	2.344	.133
	O	32	2.19	.896		
Housing arrangements: Exchange program compared to home	I	14	4.00	.784	7.430	.009***
	O	30	2.80	.997		
Overall level of organization/structure: Exchange program compared to home	I	14	4.50	.650	.732	.397
	O	32	1.91	.818		
Relevance of semester abroad experience to future job opportunities	I	12	4.42	.793	.044	.835
	O	29	3.55	.827		
Relevance of semester abroad experience to academic program at home	I	12	3.42	.996	.001	.970
	O	29	3.59	.946		
Relevance of semester abroad experience to personal development	I	12	4.08	.793	.003	.959
	O	29	4.55	.736		
Rate the quality of the academic program abroad	I	12	4.25	.452	.7.975	.008***
	O	27	3.22	1.155		
Rate the quality of the overall experience abroad	I	12	4.17	.389	6.596	.014**
	O	27	4.48	.753		

*Total N does not make 46 because of missing values for the variable

** Significant at the .05 level

*** Significant at the .01 level

Feedback drives efforts

In the search for the holy grail of international education, feedback from students who participate in exchange programs needs to be taken very seriously and should be incorporated in development efforts. Just like course evaluations at the end of each semester, surveys like the one discussed here provide valuable information on study abroad programs, information that can help create a perfect (if perhaps illusive) study abroad experience.

This study found that hospitality management students from Northern Arizona University who had participated in study abroad programs and their peers from abroad who had studied at the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management were generally very appreciative of the experience. Even though the reasons for studying abroad were more personal than academic (it was primarily seen as a good opportunity to live and travel in other countries and cultures, rather than a good academic experience), they felt that the experience also helped them in their future careers, and that it was relevant to their academic programs at home.

Of interest were the differences of opinion between incoming and outgoing hospitality management students. Students coming to the U.S. rated the quality of the academic program they were involved in signifi-

cantly higher, while students going from the U.S. were significantly more appreciative of the quality of the overall experience. Almost all of the respondents said that they would study abroad again if it were possible, which is the best endorsement possible for these programs.

When students were asked what they considered to be the greatest benefit of studying abroad, the most common answer was that it gave them a better understanding of other cultures in that it presented them with a different perspective on other people and on life in general. Many respondents said that, while they learned about other cultures, they also learned more about themselves and that they appreciated their own culture more because of the experience. Many of them felt they had grown as persons, that they had become open-minded and well rounded, and that they had learned how to deal with adversity. In the words of one respondent: "I learned more about the way the rest of the world functions, and how I function outside of the U.S."

With regard to what was perceived as the greatest challenges of studying abroad, the predominant issue was one of adaptation, adaptation to different customs, cultures, food, teaching styles, academic standards and systems, pace of life, and a different language. Many also felt that

being away from friends and family, being pushed out of one's comfort zone, and being alone was a challenge, as was having to cope with stereotypes that existed about Americans in other parts of the world. As one student put it: "My biggest challenge was being American, and having to deal with the 'cowboy attitude' the US has painted all over the world."

Programs have merit

Administrators and faculty involved in study abroad programs are convinced that these programs have merit. A semester of studies abroad helps students become more mature, more independent, more appreciative of other cultures, and also more appreciative of their own culture. Yet, do students also know that? Only through immersion in other cultures, and through living abroad for a while, do they learn to appreciate the experience fully and reap the benefits it may bring them.

This study showed that the U.S. program was comparable to that of the foreign partners in the area of academic level of difficulty in the eyes of students, even though the way in which students in higher education are taught is very different from the way in which college-level students are educated in different parts of the world. In addition, U.S. housing arrangements are seen as better than housing situations in other countries.

Exchange students not only gain an appreciation for other cultures when they return, but also look upon their own culture in a more positive light. They are more aware of the value of their own academic programs and home universities after they come back as compared to before they left. They feel out of place when they return from their semester abroad, and at the same time they feel comfortable about being back in their familiar surroundings. They are sad that their international adventure is over, yet happy to be back; they are aware of the large world around them, and pleased to be back in their own small world. In a sense they have the best of both worlds.

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