

# Study Abroad or Study Away: It's Not Merely Semantics

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Increasingly, colleges and universities have made study abroad—or, as some are calling it, education abroad—an important component of their students' educational experience. They argue (and we agree) that study abroad provides students with a global perspective, and thus better prepares them for living and leading in our globally interdependent society. As Chickering and Braskamp have argued, developing and internalizing a global perspective is an essential part of a holistic development paradigm—well grounded in sound student development theory (2009).

Since this generation and future generations of students are and will be increasingly interacting with a larger, more globalized community, they need to become ever more competent in understanding, talking with, relating to, and working with persons who differ from them politically, socioeconomically, and religiously. Might a domestic program, designed to meet these same educational learning and developmental objectives, influence students to think, reflect upon themselves, and interact with others, and thereby generate outcomes similar to those of a study abroad program? We would argue, yes. While study abroad is an important educational experience that can foster the development of these desired learning outcomes and developmental skills, mindsets, and behaviors, so too are domestically based off-campus study programs. Thus, we introduce “study away” as a concept and educational strategy that integrates study abroad programs with domestic programs. Diverse cultures within a local, regional, or national community should be recognized for providing learning opportunities and experiences that can also be transformative.

According to the IES Abroad Web site Alumni Career Resources section, an international experience is important

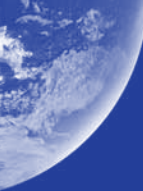
because “It shows your versatility, your ability to adapt to change, global work experience (if applicable), cultural sensitivity, and also highlights the increased confidence and global awareness you likely gained as a result of living and learning abroad.” In other words, study abroad fosters the same general learning skills, self-identity formation, and interactions with others we hope all students have acquired by the time of graduation. We do not assume college graduates who work in the international arena work in the country of their study abroad experience, and many graduates who studied overseas often take positions in the United States. However, they still interact daily with a diverse workforce. Today, even in many rural locations, the United States has become

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so richly diverse that one does not need to travel more than a few blocks from a campus to have a cross-cultural experience, hear other languages spoken, meet people from different cultural traditions, and discover religious practices different from one's own. The U.S. population is no longer majority and historic minorities, but inclusive of large immigrant populations. Even what constitutes a majority is shifting by state and region. We are a global nation.

## STUDY AWAY

If a common goal of diversity and multicultural programs and internationalization programs is to assist students to live effectively



with difference, why do we assume only an international program experience can do this? If there are critical skills we want students to acquire and engage in, does it matter whether these are acquired internationally or locally? Thus, we argue for retiring the terms “study abroad” and “education abroad,” and instead adopting “study away.”

As both a concept and strategy, study away recognizes that students can have experiences that open their minds, hearts, and behaviors to difference and allows them to experience such difference firsthand, either internationally or domestically. Additionally, by expanding the concept of study abroad to study away, the range of experiences that can

grams can allow students who have been abroad to further their knowledge within their own communities.

At a time when colleges and universities are struggling to be more responsive to diversity and to increase the diversity of their student bodies, becoming more serious about domestic program options within a broader-based study away effort may be a productive next step. Whether real or imagined, tensions often exist between internationalization and multiculturalism. Internationalization efforts are often located in the academic program, while multicultural programs are generally found in student life (Olson, Evans, and Shoenberg, 2007). All too often, points of intersection are noted, but there

initiative with the admissions office. Students are increasingly looking for programs with community-based education opportunities, such as service learning or internships. These programs are not easily developed overseas, but many local opportunities may already exist, although these opportunities are not traditionally linked to the study abroad office. Students today are often seeking courses and cocurricular activities that focus on issues ranging from social justice and conflict resolution to national identity and assimilation. Why must we look only overseas for programs that can meet such needs? At the same time, many campuses are interested in expanding their ability to offer nontraditional languages, but deciding which ones to offer and finding teachers or native speakers to staff language programs can be a challenge. Perhaps we need look no further than members of the local campus or community. Granted, these are not trained language instructors, but programs exist for using such speakers effectively in academically structured language programs (see, for example, the Council of Independent Colleges program, Network for Effective Language Learning: [www.cic.org/projects\\_services/grants/nell.asp](http://www.cic.org/projects_services/grants/nell.asp), or the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs: [www.nasilp.net](http://www.nasilp.net)).

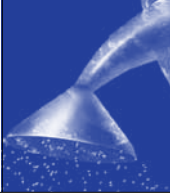
Our suggestion is that college leaders and faculty need to identify what it is that students are expected to learn and how they are expected to develop while in college, and then identify specifically what can be best achieved by student participation in a study away program, regardless of location. The development of such learning outcomes should make it possible to align the work of different campus constituencies that increasingly have diversity, multicultural, international and/or global initiatives among their goals. For example, one of us has proposed a framework that connects three major domains of student development—cognitive, intrapersonal,

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move students toward living effectively with difference is greatly expanded. These various options provide students with multiple entry points to such learning. For some students the entry point will be an on-campus course and an internship or volunteer activity; for others it will be a short- or long-term study away program. For some that program will be overseas; for others it will here in the United States. Thus one can offer a study away program locally to students who are reluctant to go far from home and campus, or unable to afford an experience overseas. At the same time, domestic program options provide opportunities for students returning from overseas study away programs to use or try out what they learned abroad in a local cultural setting. Programs both domestic and international can address such issues as immigration, migration, and resettlement of immigrants, and domestic pro-

is little overlap. Similarly, tensions exist between issues of domestic minorities and immigrant populations. Study away presents an opportunity to build on the experiences many campuses have with internationalizing and to embrace (but not smother) the goals of multiculturalism by positioning those who work in the diversity arena as valued partners.

There may also be the potential to both expand programs to groups of students traditionally underrepresented in study abroad and to reduce costs. The development of new programs is expensive. The cost of developing host-family stays for international programs can be high and requires community links or relationships that often do not exist and take time to build. However, as an alternative, a domestic program might build on already existing community relationships, or be developed in conjunction with a broader



and interpersonal—with four sociocultural environmental interventions—culture, community, curriculum, and cocurriculum (Braskamp, Braskamp, and Merrill forthcoming).

Using the term study away, educational leaders can work together to discuss and determine desired and meaningful outcomes, and then build appropriate environmental interventions that will include communities beyond the campus including those in the neighborhood and across national boundaries.

### AN EXAMPLE

Today, Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) purposefully uses the term “study away” to emphasize its commitment to a global–local nexus. Not only does this recognize the diversity found in its Pacific Northwest location, but most importantly, it is derived directly from its mission statement, “Educating students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership, and care—for other people, for their communities and for the earth.” Especially over the past two decades, PLU has been very intentional in planning and implementing a campus-wide set of integrated programs to internationalize the institution, using local as well as global environments. As stated in the long-range plan, *PLU 2010: The Next Level of Distinction* (2003)

PLU’s aspirations to academic excellence and an engaged community are framed by a global perspective. Such a perspective is, in one sense, without boundaries and, in another, profoundly local. International education is not a flight from the university campus or American society, but ultimately a more vital and insightful way to engage them both. (PLU 2003)

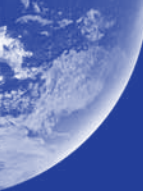
Each PLU study away course or program has individualized learning objectives, but when looked at broadly, there is considerable similarity and overlap. For example, “to identify similarities and

difference in cultural values,” “to recognize ethnocentric reactions that inhibit the cultivation of crosscultural understanding,” and “to challenge one’s own stereotypes and myths about people” are not all that dissimilar. Yet these learning objectives come from intensive, month-long study away programs that range from Makah Culture: Past and Present at Neah Bay, in which students study a Northwest Coast Native American community some 120 miles from the PLU campus, to The Hilltop in Tacoma, which explores issues of poverty and homelessness only fifteen minutes from campus. New programs being developed focus on the History of the Civil Rights Movement, which in the Northwest also includes the expulsion of the Chinese community and an active present-day reconciliation project; The Origins of Blues and Jazz, and Northwest/Southwest: Native American Perspectives on the Environment. All of these programs include similar learning objectives.

The following learning objectives—(1) to understand the complexities of changing patterns of urban and rural life, environmental challenges, and the minority experience; (2) to be able to distinguish cultural myths from cultural content; and (3) to broaden student’s knowledge of approaches to and strategies for social change and the values placed on the processes by diverse groups—could just as easily be drawn from PLU domestic study away offerings. However, they were, in fact, taken from PLU’s semester-long study abroad programs. The first is from *Continuity and Change in a New World Power in Sichuan, China*; the second from *Contemporary Global Issues: The Norwegian Approach to Development, Conflict Mediation and Peace Building in Norway*, and the last from *Development, Change and Social Development in Oaxaca, Mexico*. While each of these programs has additional learning objectives specific to their location, including impor-

tant language-learning objectives, when global learning objectives are viewed in their broadest sense and without country or regional specificity, they contain many overlapping goals that do not require great leaps of faith or academic gyrations to identify points of commonality that can be met either internationally or locally.

Recognition of the similarities in learning objectives is reflected in the assessment programs PLU uses for its study away programs. These address a broad set of programmatic learning goals, including a student’s experience and familiarity with cultural diversity; intercultural skill level; knowledge of global issues and processes; and commitment to citizenship. In the end, it is PLU’s intention to measure the global learning and development of study away students as they move along a global education continuum of four phases—introductory, exploratory, participatory, and integrative—in order to give real substance to what it means for PLU to be preparing students to be globally competent citizens (see [www.diversityweb.org/digest/vol8no3/kelleher.cfm](http://www.diversityweb.org/digest/vol8no3/kelleher.cfm)) With learning objectives that move with each phase from descriptive to comparative to analytic and ultimately to reflective and demonstrable achievement and accomplishment, a student could conceivably progress through the continuum taking exclusively on-campus courses. As an ideal, however, a student would meet the introductory-phase learning objectives through on-campus coursework, meet the exploratory phase knowledge and skill level objectives, and begin to be able to explain and articulate the values perspective and personal engagement objectives though a January or summer short-term course. In this way, the student would be better prepared to engage more fully with all of the learning objectives tied to participating in a semester of study away, and then return to the campus to undertake meeting the integrative phase objectives.



While PLU's domestic programs were not originally designed with the intention of creating lower-cost options than programs requiring travel overseas (they were designed by faculty members with specific academic expertise), the current economic crisis surrounding higher education makes existing domestic programs and the development of new ones an attractive way of increasing cost-effective study away options. At PLU, the average cost of a short-term overseas January-term study away course is more than \$5,000 per student (even with tuition included as part of a student's comprehensive fee for the academic year). A domestic program that costs a participant only a few hundred dollars for travel, room, and board becomes a more realistic option. Even given students' limited resources, such programs may also hold the potential for increasing the number of students who participate. They can also serve as an attractive option for

students who are reluctant to participate in an overseas program because it takes them far from home or otherwise out of their comfort zone.

There are other advantages to consider. Not all faculty members have international expertise and even some who do find it too daunting to consider leading a group of students overseas. Thus, the development of domestically based short-term off-campus courses and semester-long programs has the potential to expand faculty participation to those whose expertise is more locally, regionally, or nationally focused. For example, teaching an Introduction to Asian Art in the Northwest course may lead to one taught on the ground in China and Korea somewhere down the road.

Also, as noted above, the development of domestically based programs must go hand in hand with the development of closer relationships with local domestic minority or immigrant communities. The addition of a semester-long study away option in Puget Sound, a diverse neighboring community, is being considered for the strengths it will add to the academic program. As such, it will have the same elements as an overseas program. The study of a language will be included (although choosing a language for the program will prove challenging—Cambodian, Korean, Russian, Filipino/Tagalog, Vietnamese and Northwest Coast languages are all spoken in Puget Sound). A host-family option is also essential, as will be

a local participatory community-based education opportunity. Internships with volunteer agencies will provide a lived experience through which students will have opportunities to integrate their academic and intercultural knowledge and skills, examine their values perspectives, and put into practice what it means to live, learn, and work in a global context. Within all of this, PLU also has the potential to further develop closer ties with diverse neighboring communities, and to increase interest—and perhaps ultimately college enrollment, whether at PLU or elsewhere—among the youth of these communities, reinforcing the work of the admissions office to increase diversity in the student body.

As such, the development of a study away program that includes both international and domestic off-campus study options can make it possible to align better the work of different campus constituencies that increasingly all have diversity, multicultural, international, and global initiatives in their units' goals. Working together with the common understanding that study away is multidimensional can allow different academic and administrative units to construct meaningful outcomes and build community across institutional boundaries. ■

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