

Iowa State University

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Best Practices for Planning, Developing, and Sustaining Interdisciplinary Language-Based Study Abroad Programs

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Part Three: Offices of Study Abroad and University Relations

Best Practices for Planning, Developing, and Sustaining Interdisciplinary Language-Based Study Abroad Programs

Chad M. Gasta

In seventeen years of experience as a study abroad program director, I have seen how university students, faculty members, and administrators have come to share a strategic mission for study or work abroad; namely that programs must provide a meaningful international credential that not only yields a more fruitful undergraduate experience but also creates the potential for a better and higher-paying job upon graduation. I have spoken with many job recruiters over the years who tout the importance of developing an international skill set that requires a profound understanding of other cultures and languages. General news outlets and trade magazines report an intensifying obligation in a competitive global economy to attain proficiency in languages other than English and to gain competence in intercultural issues related to foreign commerce, politics, and society.¹ Study abroad programs, especially those with substantive language and cross-cultural training components, can provide excellent tools for addressing these concerns. However, the proliferation of enrollments for reasons other than second-language study has presented existing programs with new challenges. Whereas traditional models, created and maintained by language departments, have emphasized second-language proficiency, new interdisciplinary programs seek meaningful ways to combine language and culture with course work in professional majors such as business, engineering, science, technology, and agriculture (Huebner 2).

I direct an interdisciplinary study abroad program at Iowa State University called ISU on the Mediterranean—Summer in Valencia, Spain, which provides beginning through advanced Spanish-language instruction as well as courses in English in engineering, business, agriculture, and the biological sciences.² For six weeks, students live with host families, study Spanish in addition to course work in their academic field, take weekend excursions to major historical and cultural sites, and enjoy experiential learning opportunities such as biological lab work or fieldwork, or internships in Spanish with local businesses or agencies. Using this distinctive approach, my colleagues and I have built arguably the largest language-based (and language-department-sponsored) study abroad program in the United States, serving an average of 85 students each summer and a total of 103 students in 2017. This essay will provide a road map for planning and developing similar programs and will offer advice on how to sustain them over time. Statistical research from ten years of program evaluations will provide evidence regarding students' language learning, cultural awareness, and interpersonal and critical thinking skills.³ I hope to show that a program like ours can vastly improve students' understanding of world affairs while helping them acquire greater self-confidence and a willingness to work abroad, fostering the global cultural literacy that the professions increasingly require.

BACKGROUND

Goals and objectives for study abroad programs vary greatly based on geographic location, primary language, and academic discipline. Richard Brecht and A. Ronald Walton divide study abroad programs into two basic categories: those directed at foreign language proficiency and those that are “broadly educational” and usually neither require nor offer a language component (5). “Broadly educational” program goals include exposure to a foreign country, an increase in cultural literacy, and an improved knowledge of a particular academic discipline (5–6). On the other hand, the main objective of language-proficiency-based programs is immersion in a foreign culture in order to enhance language skills and cultural understanding. Language proficiency is improved through course work, planned activities and excursions, and, perhaps most significantly, interactions with native speakers (through host family experiences, exchanges with students at the foreign university, and daily living). I believe that neither of these program types sufficiently meets the needs of students competing in the global economy. Instead, I propose combining the two program types.

Until 2004, ISU on the Mediterranean was a traditional language-based program offering advanced courses in grammar, composition, and conversation, and introductory courses in literature and culture. Versions of these courses still exist in our current program. Nonetheless, we decided to take advantage of sharp growth in programs in engineering, agriculture, and business and to redesign our program to focus on training global professionals to work, communicate, and compete abroad. We decided to connect the study of Spanish language and European culture to the needs of students outside the foreign language program, providing a meaningful international experience that includes Spanish language training while offering unique courses in English in other disciplines. At the same time, my department began a second major option for students in the colleges of engineering, business, and agriculture and life sciences, called Languages and Cultures for Professions (LCP), and our summer program became an anchor of the LCP program and a principal recruiting ground for the Spanish major. The LCP program includes specialized and technical courses on professional cultures (Spanish for Global Professionals, Spanish Conversation for Professionals, Translation, and Interpretation) and contemporary cultures (Spain Today and Latin America Today) while also requiring traditional literature courses (introductory surveys and advanced seminars). Most of these courses were integrated immediately into the ISU on the Mediterranean program.

To improve and expand options for students not primarily studying language, ISU on the Mediterranean offers English-language courses in engineering, agriculture, and business. Our program coordinator at the University of Valencia helps us locate qualified faculty members; we then provide a general syllabus and work with the instructors to make each course more appealing through distinctive experiential components. The instructors work for the University of Valencia, yet the Iowa State directors maintain a degree of control over the course content so that it corresponds to offerings on our own campus. In the past, students with little foreign language training almost always opted to study in an English-speaking country if they studied abroad at all. By combining Spanish and English course work, we have managed to capture a cohort of students who otherwise would not likely study a language or go abroad—and to equip them with international experience, cross-cultural training, and language skills. The courses in English vary from year to year but generally include management, marketing, finance,

international entrepreneurship, industrial engineering, biology fieldwork, biology lab work, and Spanish film studies. These courses are offered solely to students from Iowa State or other universities in the United States who are participating in our study abroad program.

The program cost includes tuition and fees paid to the University of Valencia for two courses. First, all students must select the Spanish course for which they are eligible (introductory, intermediate, or advanced Spanish). There are no exceptions to this rule—everyone takes Spanish. Then, for their second course, students may choose another Spanish course or any of the aforementioned courses in English. We strive to apply a decidedly experiential approach to these courses. For example, Spanish language and culture courses use the city of Valencia as a venue for observing Gothic, Romanesque, and twenty-first-century architecture; Spanish cuisine; soccer and bullfighting; tourism; social issues; urban planning; and political institutions. Industrial engineering and business courses feature visits to important industrial areas, factories, the port authority, and corporate offices. Biology includes fieldwork across the Valencian region. It is also worth mentioning that each summer we place eight to ten advanced Spanish students in internships at select companies in the area, mostly in business, engineering, education, health sciences, hotel and restaurant management, and accounting. These interns are usually Language and Culture for Professions secondary majors, who are required to work abroad at some point.

Other program details are equally important: all students, regardless of Spanish-language proficiency, live with a Spanish host family that does not speak English. Host families provide meals, conversation, and sometimes outings in the city or region. We believe this arrangement to be an important cornerstone of the program and one reason why students' language confidence is so high in posttravel surveys. All students also participate in two weekend excursions to the Madrid area: the first weekend, we visit the cities of Segovia, El Escorial, and Toledo before busing to Valencia; and at the end of the program we return to Madrid for a city tour, followed by visits to the Royal Palace, the Reina Sofía Museum, and the Prado Museum. These excursions include hotels and transportation, meals, entry fees, and excellent guides.

Perhaps the most unusual experiential component is the biology courses, developed in 2007 by Steven Rodermel, distinguished professor of Genetics, Development, and Cell Biology at Iowa State. Students may select one of two modules, both of which are taught in English by professors from the biological sciences departments and associated research institute at the University of Valencia. Module 1 is a full-immersion lab experience with one to two faculty members and their graduate student researchers in marine biology, animal sciences, cell biology and genetics, plant pathology, neurology, and geology, among other areas. This module helps address a well-known deficiency in lab experience among undergraduate science majors. Moreover, the option of conducting the labs in Spanish helps advanced Spanish students and heritage learners improve cross-cultural skills while becoming familiar with the principles of biology and their practice abroad. In Module 2, six to eight University of Valencia faculty members deliver lectures on topics significant to the Valencian region followed by fieldwork at important biological sites in the area. Locations include the Albufera natural coastal lagoon and tidal system, Europe's oldest botanic gardens (and accompanying research installations), the City of Arts and Sciences' Oceanogràfic aquarium and sea turtle rescue area, the Jávea coastal

natural park, and the innovative Bioparc natural habitat (an interesting departure from a commercial zoo).

Such experiential learning opportunities allow a variety of disciplines to intersect with the study of Spanish. In other words, we have successfully made this study abroad program both “broadly educational” and “language-proficiency based” by merging language and culture study with course work in other disciplines. Such programs answer the call put forth to department chairs by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages to provide consequential and beneficial programs that meet diverse needs:

It is the task of the department chair to define the study-abroad experience so that it is meaningful and productive for a wide array of students, while still stressing the acquisition of other languages, the understanding and enjoyment of other cultures, and the difficult process of turning the foreign into the familiar and the familiar into the foreign. Some of the successful models of the past have become less attractive for many students. (72)

We believe that our summer program is addressing these concerns, and today the program counts on participation and support from faculty members from five departments and four colleges at Iowa State: a true cross-disciplinary collaboration. In explaining how we managed to do this and describing how it has come to be sustainable, I will assume that readers are seeking out suggestions applicable to their own programs. With this in mind, I will address readers directly as “you” in the remaining pages.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As universities place ever-greater emphasis on learning objectives and outcomes, it is incumbent upon you to do the same for a program abroad. There is one major difference, however. Whereas a course on campus is assessed on content and delivery, abroad you are also evaluating the quality and validity of homestays or residence hall living; learning that takes place on planned excursions and in experiential venues, including service learning, internships, lab work, independent studies, and special projects; and, possibly, gains in language proficiency. All of this requires quite a bit of forethought. Start by defining the overall goal of your program abroad. Is it language proficiency and cultural literacy? Do you simply want students to get meaningful international exposure? Are you trying to advance their knowledge of a particular discipline? Whatever the case, design the program around simple learning and experiential goals. Then work backward to individual experiences and courses. Data collected through student surveys, such as the statistical reporting presented at the end of this essay, can help you determine whether goals are being met.

A growing body of evidence supports the intuitive view that students make more significant gains in intercultural competence when studying in a country where the target language is spoken than they do studying only in classrooms at home (Deardorff 38). To advance that notion even further, I recommend homestays—and not just because a family experience improves language learning and proficiency. In contrast to residence halls (which are not the

norm in many countries), homestays guarantee meals and shelter, provide another set of watchful eyes on students, and offer additional security. Remember: as a program director, you are responsible and liable for student well-being in many instances. Homestays with qualified families can help head off issues that might require disciplinary action, such as class tardiness or inappropriate behavior.

Make your goals regarding linguistic and cultural proficiency transparent to program collaborators in other disciplines. Otherwise, you may encounter requests such as “Can the agriculture students be excused from their language class today so they can do fieldwork?” or “We need to scale back the number of days students are in language classes so the business students can visit more factories.” Certainly, there is some flexibility here, but it can be a slippery slope. It is well known that students demonstrate a more dramatic increase in linguistic proficiency if they study the target language before they begin their overseas courses and continue studying the language at the outset of their program abroad (see Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg), because they are able to take immediate advantage of the foreign language environment.

With respect to short-term summer programs, if well run and truly intensive (small classes meeting for at least four hours each day, carefully integrated community activities, and several hours of daily homework), students can learn as much as in a semester program stateside. However, a summer may be even shorter than it appears, since, just as in semester programs, the schedule must allow some time at the beginning for students to settle in and at the end to prepare for departure. Moreover, when the pace of learning is accelerated, students may end up spending most of their time in the classroom and have little opportunity to explore and interact with the local environment. Make sure you give students what they really want, such as time for independent travel, hands-on opportunities such as internships or service learning, strong interactions with host country citizens, and meaningful ways to improve their language skills. At the same time, you must also give students what they need: strong organization and structure, a well-defined plan for academic study, clear expectations about attendance and active participation, and reasons for undertaking specific study or group travel. If experiential learning is a cornerstone of the program, make sure you schedule adequate time to travel to sites, to undertake laboratory analyses, to work on modeling, etc. In our program, all courses end at 2:10 p.m. each day so that students can use public transportation to get to their labs on the biology campus; travel by bus for fieldwork visits; or head off by bike, bus, or metro to their internships.

Some obvious points are nevertheless worth mentioning: courses taken abroad should count toward major, minor, and degree requirements. Students often shop for study abroad programs seeking the one that will best help them complete these requirements. If your courses count toward an array of academic degrees, more students can benefit, and large enrollments can lead to significant cost savings as expenses are shared across a greater number of participants. Leverage the study abroad environment to design unique courses that cannot be offered on campus, such as the biology modules described earlier. When setting up such courses, it is imperative that you involve faculty members from the departments or academic units whose students you hope to attract. These instructors can advise you as to what sorts of courses

abroad best fit their students' educational needs and curricular trajectories.

GETTING STARTED: CHOOSING VENUES

Unless you are integrating the study of a particular discipline into an existing language-based program abroad, you have the opportunity to carefully choose your host country and institution. While Madrid, Florence, or Beijing may sound attractive, other cities can be even more appealing and more helpful toward your objectives. If language acquisition is a primary goal, consider that smaller cities have fewer distractions and often cost substantially less than larger ones (overall program cost is a deciding factor in students' choice of study abroad programs. My advice is to keep it as inexpensive as you can). While it is much easier to recruit for a program in Buenos Aires than for one in Mendoza, Argentina, word of mouth will go a long way toward ensuring future enrollment once a program has been offered successfully. Our choice of Valencia, Spain, was no accident: Iowa students rarely get to spend time near the sea, the city has great historical and cultural attractions, and the university is first-rate. The Mediterranean environment is ideal for both leisure and academic work. Choose a location where you, as program director, will want to return year after year. Whether friends, family, research possibilities, or other connections draw you to the area, selecting a place you love to visit year after year is vital. There is little hope of sustaining a program abroad if you, the person who worked so hard to create the program, no longer wish to spend time there.

Selecting a host institution is as important as choosing a host city and country, and there are many factors to consider beyond the institution's academic or research reputation. For example, private language schools flourish in many countries, and many boast wonderful teachers of language, culture, and literature. Some even offer courses in professions and translation. Private schools often respond much more quickly to program needs than do public universities; but a complex multidisciplinary program usually benefits most from alignment with a large university, which offers more extensive academic resources, facilities, expertise, and personal connections to the local community (e.g., businesses, factories, laboratories, and fieldwork areas). Moreover, with undergraduate research options becoming more and more important, an institution without research expertise may not suit your program. We selected a reputable research university whose highly trained instructors could offer focused course work in many disciplines. We also discovered that, while instructors abroad may not be trained in some of the course work you wish to offer, or may not be accustomed to personally leading fieldwork, they may nevertheless be qualified to teach the courses you are creating and may welcome the opportunity to branch out into new areas and lead foreign students in unique situations.

Whichever institution you choose, make sure there is an office of international education staffed with knowledgeable people who can help with logistics—reserving buses, planning excursions, booking guides, finding professors, reserving space, processing transcripts, etc. Moreover, if experiential learning or undergraduate research (featuring fieldwork, internships, art space, service learning, or the city as a classroom) is a cornerstone of your program, confirm that the institution can accommodate your needs. To attract you, the institution may tell you they can provide everything you need. Do not take such declarations at face value; ensure that there is logistical support, including a very capable main contact person.

Your host institution may offer some of the conveniences that students have come to expect in the United States, such as health and fitness facilities, computer and technology centers, libraries, laboratories, and dining halls. Of course, some universities across the world are unable to provide all of these amenities. Inform students that the lack of such facilities is not indicative of the quality of the institution or the experience. Remind them that they are going abroad to understand how different cultures place emphasis on different things.

Draw on the host professors' strengths or innovations in research and teaching. For example, our students love film, and the University of Valencia has a specialist on post-Franco-dictatorship film. Another faculty member is a specialist on the cultural ramifications of water scarcity. Yet another is a geologist and a leading authority on Mediterranean climate change. These instructors yearn to teach outside their regular courses—and rarely get to do so at their home institution. Note that some universities (or departments) abroad measure prestige by their association with partners from the United States. As a result, turf wars may arise between departments or professors who are vying for those partnerships. Avoid these conflicts at all costs. No matter what side you choose, you will ultimately lose.

ACKNOWLEDGING REALITIES AND MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER DISCIPLINES

While language and literature departments need to promote their own interests in study abroad, it is increasingly important to recognize the other institutional stakeholders in the field, to understand their concerns, and to work with them to ensure a successful experience for students. Language teachers tend to feel that professors outside the humanities do not see the value of what they do. This is a long-standing problem and one that will not find easy resolution in the foreseeable future, particularly amid economic stresses that have prompted the public to question the value of a college degree, the costs of education (language majors tend to be second majors, which can mean a longer term to finish a degree), and the practicality of language study. Language teachers often feel like second-class citizens who must bow to the pressures of colleagues in professional programs. Instead, they should work to advance core goals while integrating the objectives of other disciplines. In other words, professors in different disciplines must work together to formulate and advance the goals of multidisciplinary programs, but I strongly advocate for including language study among them. Language is the entry to culture, and professionals who do not understand another culture will always be at a disadvantage when their competitors do. So, as you embark on developing your program, invite the appropriate stakeholders to the table.

Collaborate with disciplines that belong to essential campus programs or high-priority programs, that attract a lot of students, or that need your expertise in order to create unique international experiences. Look at where your university administration is putting its time and effort (Iowa State emphasizes agriculture, engineering, and STEM areas), because those departments likely receive funding that could also benefit your program. Academic programs with large student populations will automatically give you an audience, thus providing enough participants to satisfy overall budgeting needs and increasing the likelihood that your unique course will be offered. Consider underrepresented majors. Most psychology departments have huge student populations but few study abroad options. The same is true for computer science.

How about Developments in Psychology in Vienna, or Japanese Anime in Tokyo?

Once you have targeted a few disciplines that are in need of a study abroad program or are interested in collaborating with you, involve faculty members from those departments in designing unique courses or experiential learning opportunities. If your colleague already has connections at a particular location or university, leverage those relationships. Moreover, enlist as many faculty members from the collaborating departments as you can; those who do not want to direct a program themselves may still offer guidance and help promote your efforts. Seek out complementary experiences, such as opportunities for integrated study, internships, service learning, or undergraduate research that connect to a variety of majors. This will help draw applicants from a diverse group and increase your chances of having enough participants each year to continue the program. I have seen many study abroad initiatives wither due to lack of enrollment. Sustainability has to be a consideration.

Finding the right collaborator can be difficult. As you narrow your list to a few potential colleagues, make sure that you are honest with them from the beginning about the objectives of the program, the expectations for the position, the time commitment and tasks involved, and the positive and negative aspects of the job. It is imperative that all directors be on the same page at all times. Keep in mind that leading a group abroad is a lot more work than teaching at home. Even at universities with a study abroad office, faculty leaders may be charged with many administrative duties such as annual budget management, staff supervision at the host university, negotiation of memoranda of agreement and contracts, emergency and crisis management, excursion and activity planning, and the recruitment and preparation of student participants through information sessions and one-on-one meetings with interested students.⁴ On-site directors also deal with a variety of local problems that can be quite demanding. Besides difficulties with faculty members and administrators at the host institution, they must troubleshoot problems as they arise, act as guides, intervene in homestay issues, run interference between students, and help with mundane daily tasks. Students abroad sometimes encounter psychological or medical difficulties, and faculty members must be prepared to assist in getting the necessary help. I often joke that on any given day for the students I function as a father, a psychologist, a police officer, a physician, a tour guide, and sometimes even a teacher! Faculty leaders need to be prepared for these realities, so, in recruiting collaborators, be honest about the upsides *and* the downsides of directing a program abroad. If a colleague is unwilling or unable to perform the required duties, you should look for someone else with whom to collaborate. Most of all, select a colleague whose company you enjoy, because chances are you will spend a great deal of time together at meals, at meetings, and on excursions. If you do not respect your partner, you will definitely have a short collaboration. Communication is crucial, along with the requirement that all students of all disciplines adhere to the same rules. Do not permit students or faculty members to sow division within the program.

PREPARING STUDENTS: THE BEFORE AND AFTER

More and more research is demonstrating that orientation and reentry courses are valuable in helping students both prepare for their trip abroad and assimilate their experience upon returning (Cohen et al.). Ensure that students receive predeparture advising to prepare them for

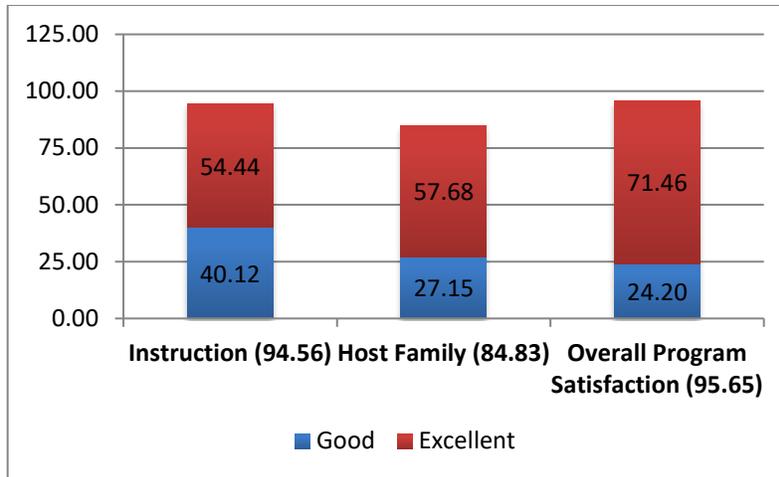
the challenging experience of living and studying abroad. We offer six ninety-minute orientation sessions that cover administrative issues, financing study abroad, health and security, Spanish culture and history, living with host families, taking course work at a Spanish university, and many other topics. Our program evaluation results tell us that, although nothing would truly equip students for all potential situations, these orientations help them feel as prepared as possible.

Both before the program and while in the host country, you will need to develop mechanisms for maintaining contact with students. A *Facebook* page, *Twitter* account, or *Blackboard* or *Moodle* page can provide a sense of camaraderie among the students, a go-to place for news and information, and a key avenue of communication.⁵

I also recommend meaningful reentry advising to help students understand their experience abroad and comprehend its impact on their personal and professional lives. My colleagues and I maintain contact with students through informal gatherings, conversations on campus, and *Facebook* or e-mail; in addition, my department offers a one-credit posttravel course that helps students assess what they learned abroad. It requires the enrolled students to give a presentation at a local high school on the value of their study abroad experience. In weekly guest lectures, faculty members, career services personnel, recruiters, and other students counsel participants on how to describe their study abroad experience and related skills in person or on a résumé. I have heard from a number of Fortune 500 recruiters that many job seekers have great difficulty explaining the significance of their experience abroad. Reentry workshops or courses go a long way toward fixing that problem.

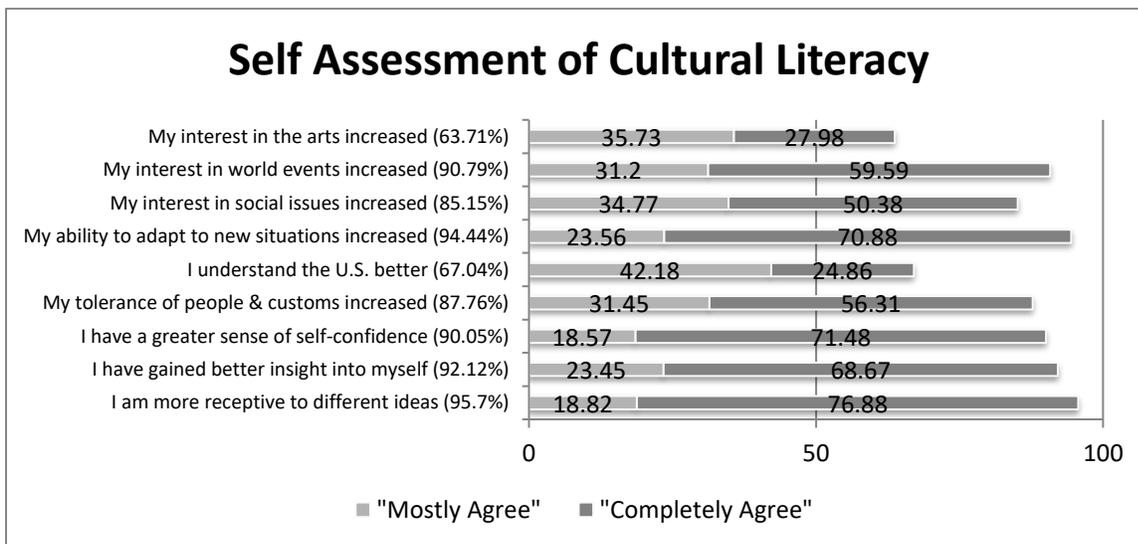
CASE STUDY: 2007–16 STATISTICAL REPORTING FROM ISU ON THE MEDITERRANEAN—SUMMER IN VALENCIA, SPAIN

Each summer, at the end of our program, we conduct an extensive online evaluation of program quality and management, including predeparture orientations, homestays, excursions, academic course work, and instructors. Students use a five-point Likert scale to rate these elements and to assess their language proficiency and their knowledge of social, cultural, and economic issues in Spain and the European Union. Of the 821 students participating in the program between 2007 and 2016, 534 completed the survey (73 percent). A brief reporting of the results may assist readers in evaluating our program's approach and efficacy.



Students have indicated in annual surveys that they are generally quite pleased with the program’s structure, organization, and rigor. Between 2007 and 2016, 94.76 percent of respondents rated the program overall as “good” or “excellent.” Two of the chief components of the program—instruction and homestays—received particularly high praise.

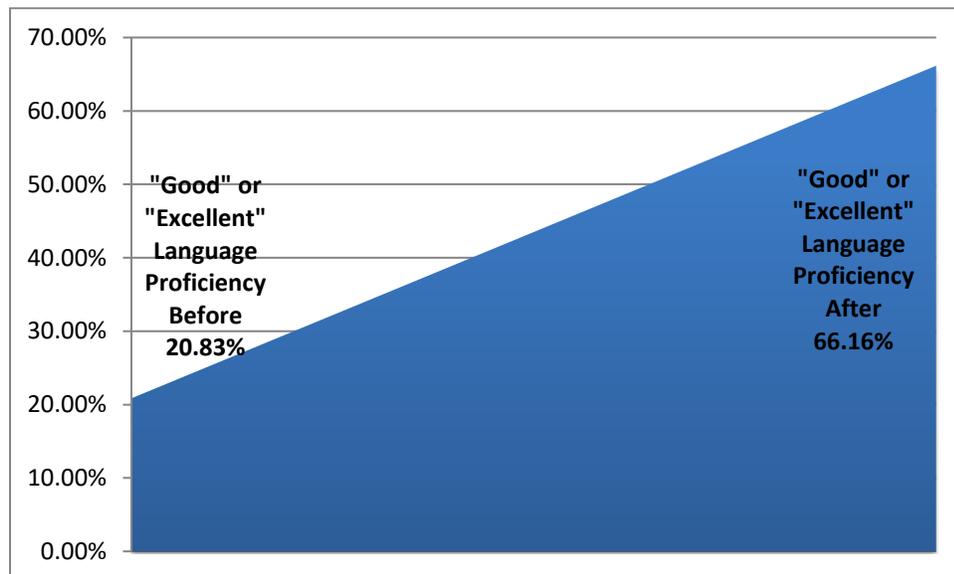
We also asked students to assess their understanding of culture abroad and in the United States. Respondents stated that their interest in world events and cultures, their receptivity to different ideas, their tolerance of others, and their self-confidence had all improved or increased as a result of participating in the program.⁶



These are consistent with findings by Vija Meldenson, whose study demonstrated that students who participated in a program abroad experienced profound changes such as “increased independence, self-sufficiency, maturity, and willingness to think with an open mind” (50).⁷

One of the more interesting effects concerns perceptions of language proficiency and cultural awareness: 20.83 percent of the respondents rated their language proficiency as either “good”

or “excellent” at the beginning of the program. That number increased to 66.16 percent at end of the program.



Although this proficiency level is self-assessed rather than measured by OPI or ACTFL testing standards, it indicates plainly that students view their abilities in Spanish with greater confidence after completing the program.⁸ Such self-assuredness in speaking a second language will help students perform better in class, encourage them to pursue work or further study abroad, and enable them to confidently represent their connection to the host culture. Since many students entered the program with little or no previous training in Spanish, it is not surprising that the immersion environment provided significant gains.⁹

Taken as a whole, our program evaluation statistics suggest that we are meeting many of the objectives we have set for ourselves: students believe we have designed and operated a high-quality program that has increased their global cultural literacy, their self-confidence, and their language proficiency. These are positive, repeatable results from a program that enrolls a large number of students.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Designing and developing a multidisciplinary program can take years. Making it sustainable takes patience, planning, and dedication on the part of the program directors. Since we founded our program in 2004, we have added new academic components almost every year—which means it has taken thirteen interesting and challenging years to get to where we are today. Along the way, there has been a huge payoff for the directors both personally and professionally as well as for our department. If you can manage to start an interdisciplinary program and make it sustainable, you can achieve the following:

- Advanced language and culture training in the target country, even for students who have little interest in learning a second language;

- Unique course work and hands-on training that may not be available at the home institution;
- Opportunities to work with instructors who have been trained very differently than you and welcome the opportunity to work with foreign colleagues and students;
- Higher enrollments in languages: many students continue taking a language upon completion of a program abroad, and some even become majors or minors;
- Increased proficiency and comfort in the target language for everyone, including those whose careers will take them abroad;
- Increased competency with regard to social, cultural, and political factors, making for better-informed, better-prepared future employees of global companies;
- Eyewitness view of difference: a step toward making the world more tolerant and understanding through personal contact with another culture;
- Reaffirmation of the viability of language instruction, helping obliterate unfounded claims about English being the only necessary tool for the global marketplace;
- Increased visibility of your language, your department, and maybe even your career. Because of the size of our program and the disciplines it cuts across, we have become a model of cross-collaboration at Iowa State University. Indeed, the directors and my Department of World Languages and Cultures are recognized for innovation in language learning and teaching and widely acknowledged as the leaders for internationalization at ISU. Two of us have been given the coveted all-university award for international service. The program itself was a 2015 finalist for the NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Spotlight Award.

PARTING INSIGHTS

Finally, I offer these guiding principles for the creation of your own program: First, large interdisciplinary programs often involve a great many individual constituents working at different times and at differing paces. Work to treat all students and faculty members across this unwieldy alliance as equally valued participants, and ask that they work for the common good of the program. Next, develop and offer unique courses that allow students ample time to interact with local residents or with their host families, which heightens cultural understanding and appreciation. If you are simply going to put students in a lab abroad for eight hours every day and house them in residence halls, then don't bother going abroad. In other words, don't just mimic what already exists at home. Third, advocate for language and experiential learning as cornerstones of a program abroad, which will provide experiences that cannot be replicated at the home institution. As students gain linguistic and cultural proficiency, those who are not language majors or minors will come to view language learning with greater respect. Similarly, faculty members from other disciplines will likely begin to champion the study of a second

language in meetings with students, colleagues, and administrators. Fourth, one great benefit of an interdisciplinary program is the opportunity for different groups to work together and increase mutual appreciation across diverse fields of study. Moreover, there exists an opportunity for faculty members from different disciplines to produce coauthored research, which was one unexpected outcome of my experience. Finally, keep your eye on the bottom line. Students often choose programs based on cost alone, and sharing expenses across a large group can help keep program costs down and student fees attractively low. If you can harness the power of interdisciplinarity abroad, the potential impact on your students, department, and university is great.

NOTES

1. Recent reporting on National Public Radio and *CNNMoney*, and in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *USA Today*, and *The Harvard Business Review*, argues that students with language skills or international experience earn more money, are recruited faster, and are generally more successful in their careers.

2. Julia Domínguez and Leland L'Hote (now program dean for Latin America and Spain at IES Abroad) were my original partners in creating this program. Julia and I were then joined by Cristina Pardo and Julie Wilhelm. Several other colleagues in engineering (David Sly), business (Pol Herrmann and Howard Van Auken), and biology (Steven Rodermel and Beatriz Spalding) have played significant roles as well.

3. Some arguments regarding cultural literacy and business practices have been expressed in other studies I have written.

4. Study abroad at Iowa State University is quite decentralized, and individual instructors take on significant leadership, development, and management responsibilities. The university has a study abroad center staffed with several advisers, a director and assistant director, and student ambassadors. The director and assistant director act as advisers for several programs in addition to helping to set policy in conjunction with university attorneys, a risk management office, the university accounting office, and a purchasing department. The business manager at our study abroad center handles billing and collecting student fees, paying overseas providers, and reimbursing program directors. While each college has a study abroad liaison or director who works with students and helps with marketing, policy, and agreements, the vast majority of the work on the program is carried out by the program directors.

5. Many students abroad use free time and digital technologies to blog about their experiences, keep online diaries or photo journals, or make videos. There are, of course, some potential downsides to being so “connected” while abroad, such as not integrating fully into the local culture, ignoring other group members, and being unable to detach from home. My personal view on this subject—from years of observation—is that social media provide helpful ways for students to reflect on their time abroad and come to grips with their daily experience. Online travelogues can also become helpful tools for marketing your program to future students. However, I have noted that the logistical effects of time zones and geography help reduce

students' use of these tools. In short, we do not see the numbers of students using *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Skype*, or other programs abroad as we do at home. Indeed, although our partner university in Spain is every bit as technologically advanced as our home institution, students tend to veer away from these mediums almost immediately. Anecdotally, students tell me that a combination of factors play a role in that change: on any given day there is much to do and see in the host country; the time difference (seven hours) makes it difficult to use social media in real time with family and friends at home; and they intensely feel part of a new group that they are still getting to know and enjoy. If students are overutilizing these resources, it may say something about the nature of your program or about certain students' personal issues.

6. Similar results regarding cultural sensitivity have been reported by Rob Martinsen. His study included only forty-five participants, and his program was language-based only. Nonetheless, he reports similar findings in improved cultural literacy. I would suggest that because our program is multidisciplinary, with Spanish study being only one of the foci, our results show even greater impact on intercultural competence.

7. Meldenson also showed that students identified the following outcomes as having the greatest impact on their own development: information (learning about study abroad and adapting expectations); integration (acknowledging but avoiding the home culture); interaction (pursuing target language and communication); intention (making a plan and pushing the comfort zone); and introspection (continually reflecting on experiences to put them in perspective) (54).

8. According to Joseph Collentine and Barbara Freed, students abroad did not exhibit more developed grammatical or lexical features than those who stayed in the United States, but they did have greater flexibility in using the language, could produce more sophisticated language, and generally communicated more freely and effectively.

9. Freed summarizes a number of studies that indicate that students with lower language proficiency at the outset of a program make greater gains ("Overview" 44).