

**Study Abroad: Linking Individual Leadership
to Organizational and Societal Change in the Global Community**

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Contemporary careers demand much more of college graduates than merely being subject matter experts in a focused discipline area (Bosshamer, 1996). Today's employers not only demand technical expertise within a focused area, but also broader interpersonal and organizational skills critical to successful business and industry. Examples include team building, multifaceted problem solving, critical thinking, visioning, and change management, each of which is integral components of leadership (Kotter, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 1995). Such skills are critical to developing and sustaining holistic systems.

The connection of a student's academic program with their future occupation and responsibilities as a citizen has become increasingly important in recent years. Concerns have been raised that colleges and universities are graduating students who may have expert technical or subject matter skills, yet be deficient in critical leadership and citizenship skills necessary to be successful in today's workplace and diverse society. According to the American Vocational Association (1994):

The new emphasis on the development of a comprehensive school-to-work system has grown from a series of changes in workforce needs and alarming facts about the preparation of American students for work and further education...If, as an educated society, we believe that all students have the capacity to learn and to be productive citizens, then the school-to-work system can contribute significantly to this goal. (p. 19)

Furthermore, contemporary businesses and industries recognize that an educated and motivated workforce is not only critical to organizational financial and commodity goals, but also serves as an important link to the broader community. Within the past decade, numerous scholars, citizens and authors have reexamined the role of higher education in preparing an educated citizenry. Although no authors disagree with the role of the university in transferring highly specialized knowledge within the scope of academic and professional disciplines, several have espoused the need to reexamine the relationship of such knowledge within the larger societal context (Bok, 1980; Boyer, 1987). Lynton and Elman (1987) suggested "that universities, in their teaching as well as in their other professional activities, related theory to practice, basic research to its applications, and the acquisition of knowledge to its use" (p. 3). Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) summarized this new perspective when they:

proposed that America's colleges and universities need a fresher, more capacious vision of scholarship...a new paradigm that views scholarship as having four separate but overlapping dimensions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. (p. 9)

Colleges and universities are in a unique position to nurture the development of new approaches to leadership that are required of leaders in the 21st century. Leadership development has been a strong component of land-grant institutions, ranging from community grass-roots leadership development through Cooperative Extension programs to discipline-focused programs such the adult agricultural Leadership Education And Development (LEAD) program. Historically, the discipline of agriculture has structured and encouraged traditional approaches to youth leadership development through 4-H and FFA. Brown and Fritz (1994) identified 35 university departments of agricultural education that currently offer traditional resident instruction courses in leadership at the undergraduate or graduate levels.

However, the type of leadership required in society as a whole is changing (Apps, 1994; Handy, 1989, 1994; Kotter, 1996; Rost, 1992). Traditional approaches to leadership have focused upon the leader's ability to work with and through others (i.e., transactional leadership). While these leadership competencies will continue to be a firm foundation for tomorrow's leaders, new leadership approaches will be as important if not more so. These new approaches (i.e., transformational leadership) utilize a leader's firm personal values and philosophy of leadership in order to create and communicate a shared organizational vision for the future; manage the ambiguity inherent in complex and rapid social and technological change; build bridges between people and ideas, communities and commodities; and develop and sustain effective empowered teams in the workplace. Burns (1978) stated that transformational leadership occurs "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality....Their purposes, which might have started out as separate...become fused" (p. 20). Transformational leaders are people with confidence, courage and vision. They "leave behind old ways of thinking and acting; ...build different structures and relationships and develop different procedures for carrying out their tasks" (Apps, 1994, p. 48).

Few current university degree programs adequately prepare undergraduates for the changing nature of leadership challenges due to a traditional, myopic focus upon a single curriculum or discipline; course and degree time limitations; and a lack of faculty expertise focused in such areas. According to Brungardt, Gould, Moore, and Potts (1997):

Over the past decade, more and more colleges and universities are beginning to offer programs and courses in leadership studies...With only a few exceptions, however, most college leadership programs offer only one or two activities. These efforts in leadership education are characterized by limited resources and with an absence of institutional priority. If higher education is going to play a more active role in addressing the leadership needs of our nation, learning environments must be created to challenge and motivate the new generations of college students for the complexities of our society. (p. 58)

According to the Globalizing Agricultural Science and Education Programs for America Task Force (n.d.), "Leadership training...on Land-Grant University campuses, should provide early and mid-career agribusiness representatives with opportunities to understand better the global dimensions of the contemporary agricultural economy" (p. 8). The author would expand this position to include future leaders, and would also argue that increased and sustained global understanding cannot be achieved without the leaders first understanding their own personal beliefs about leadership.

Importance of the Study Abroad Teaching Technique

According to Matz (1997), "the mark of an educated person has always been the development of a broad, cosmopolitan outlook about the world" (p. 115). Study abroad has been used as a teaching tool since 1923 when the University of Delaware sent students to France to study language (McNabb, 1996). The Ohio State University Office of International Education offers more than 100 study abroad programs in over 40 countries and in numerous fields of study.

Why is a study abroad experience important to college graduates? With the ever-increasing globalization of the world, instant access to information and people throughout the world, greater ability and ease to travel to many parts of the world, and the global economy, current and future leaders find themselves dealing with different cultures and languages almost on a daily basis. Motz (1997) stated, “the main benefit of study abroad is an increased maturity and a broader perspective about the human condition in the world. American students are first confronted with a new sense of history” (p. 120). Seeing that the U.S. is a young country can come as quite a shock to most students as they visit historical sites and museums and study the history of their host country. Other benefits cited by Motz (1997) included (a) students being shocked to learn that their foreign counterparts are much farther along in their major field of study; (b) being thrust into the role of being resident expert on American affairs and being unprepared to debate the U.S. position on foreign policy, economics, etc.; (c) coming to appreciate that other cultures are simply different rather than right or wrong when compared to the American culture; and (d) being humbled by how others who are less fortunate and struggle with greater obstacles in life than most Americans are able to preserve and still prevail.

Description of Study Abroad Program

The Alpha Zeta Partners (AZP) study abroad is part of a larger two-year experiential leadership development program for undergraduates in The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences who have demonstrated academic discipline excellence. The program enables these promising students to bridge academic disciplines with current and emerging leadership issues in food, agriculture, and natural resources systems by working with identified academic and commodity leaders in their food, agriculture, and natural resources profession. The students: (1) participate in three experientially focused seminars linking leadership theory to contemporary issues within agriculture and natural resources, (2) participate in a six-week study abroad, and (3) complete an innovation project by working with a faculty advisor and a commodity group mentor from their future agricultural or natural resources profession.

During a six-week period through study, direct observation, and first-hand experience, AZP students explored historical, institutional, organizational, and individual leadership perspectives of a contemporary foreign society (Brazil) that help them critically examine, reflect upon, and directly link individual leadership to organizational and societal change in America. Through formal and informal dialogue and teaching, at the individual and organizational levels, students gained knowledge and insight into transformational leadership by sharing knowledge and insights regarding leadership with others. Students explored, understood, and applied transformational leadership from a global perspective by:

- studying Brazil's historical and social development;
- exploring fundamental changes in Brazil's governmental, religious, educational, and cultural institutions;
- observing and experiencing fundamental changes in Brazil's industry, agriculture, social service organizations, and families; and
- experiencing (staying in host family homes) and reflecting upon both traditional culture and emerging issues facing people in Brazil, through active dialogue with current and emerging foreign leaders.

The program of study for the six-week study abroad program incorporated the contents set forth in the syllabi for the three five-credit courses included in the program: Agricultural Economics 697: Brazil's Agricultural and Natural Resources Economy; International Studies 697: Brazilian History, Culture, Government and Language; and Rural Sociology 697: Brazilian Rural Development and Natural Resource Management. These courses were taught by four Brazilian faculty members the University of São Paulo's Escola Superior de Agricultura Luiz de Queiroz (ESALQ) in the Department of Economics, Administration and Sociology. The courses specific objectives were:

International Studies 697 Learning Objectives

- a. To understand the main periods of Brazilian history in terms of cultural, political, economic and regional development.
- b. To understand the Brazilian political system and the basic organization of the Brazilian federal, state and local governments, as well as the interrelations between them.
- c. To understand the Brazilian educational, health and social systems.
- d. To develop an appreciation for Brazilian popular culture, the arts and regional differences in culture.
- e. To develop sufficient skills in the Portuguese language to be able to carry out daily living in Brazil.

Rural Sociology 697 Learning Objectives

- a. To understand the demographics of the Brazilian rural and urban sectors and the impacts of same on rural-urban migration, international migration, and the associated problems of rural and urban development.
- b. To understand Brazilian land reform and changes in government policy with respect to land tenure.
- c. To understand Brazilian programs of technology generation and transfer by means of research programs, extension programs, and the role of the public and private sectors in same.
- d. To understand the social and government organization of rural areas. This will include the church and the roles of federal, state and local governments in matters of governance and development projects.
- e. To understand the problems of natural resource degradation in rural areas and projects that are designed to rehabilitate, conserve and manage this resource base.

Agricultural Economics 697 Learning Objectives

- a. To understand the economic geography of Brazilian agriculture, in particular the sharp differences among different regions' production and marketing conditions.
- b. To understand agriculture's role in the past and current development of the Brazilian economy.
- c. To understand the role of the state and public policy in agricultural development.
- d. To understand root causes of rural poverty and how it is affected by agricultural development.
- e. To understand environmental constraints on agricultural development as well as environmental problems caused by increased crop and livestock production.

During the six weeks, students attended classes from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a two-hour lunch break Monday through Wednesday and participated in field trips Thursday through Sunday. There were numerous one-day field trips a three-day trip to São Paulo, a 10 day trip through five states, and a three-day excursion to Rio de Janeiro. During these field trips students visited sites such as the largest commercial farm in Brazil, a sugar mill and sugar plantation, a flower cooperative, the natural resources & environmental research station, the State Department of Agriculture's Research Center, a grain cooperative, a soybean research center, a cattle research center, a dairy cooperative, Nova India Genetica, the agronomic institute, the State University of Maringá, and the University of Uberaba.

Other field trips included the Ipiranga Museum, the São Paulo Zoo, Republica Square, Iguazu Falls and the Iguazu National Park, Itaipú (hydroelectric power plant), the Prata River, and Paraguay. The students also spent one weekend with a Brazilian host family as well as volunteered to paint houses for a housing for the homeless project. The end of the study abroad included a three-day excursion to Rio de Janeiro where the students visited Corcovado, Sugar Loaf, Maracanã Soccer Stadium, Carnival, took a sightseeing tour of the city, learned to samba, and spent some time on the sunny beaches. For a complete schedule, please contact the author.

Evaluations from Students

The students were asked to evaluate their study abroad experience immediately after they returned to the United States. Below are two questions that students were asked to respond to with some of the students' individual comments following.

Something(s) I about this study abroad experience that I valued and learned from...

- We learned so much about ourselves as leaders and how we approach different aspects of leadership. We learned that every person is a little different and how to respect those differences and communicate to those differences.
- The entire program has shaped my ideas and perspectives.
- The program allowed me to open my mind to whatever differences are out there.
- We have had a chance to mold together individuals that you don't get in a typical college experience.
- We should be looking for change and don't settle for how things are and say they are good enough. We should look forward to change because you can always improve things.
- We have learned how to communicate with people from different backgrounds, different knowledge bases, and to learned how to let everyone interact within a group and work as a team while accepting everyone.
- I'm much more open to experience new activities and able to support my feelings and beliefs and not as held back when discussing issues.
- Become more open and expand my ability to work with others. Resolving conflicts between different disciplines and thoughts is something that appeals to me -- created a future possibility for me.
- You learn so much with each little step you take even if it is a mistake, you learn a lot from it.
- This experience has helped us all realize what strengths we have as leaders and gives us more confidence to interact with others.

- I learned a lot about working as a group and respecting the group during this program. It definitely brought everyone together. I think most importantly I learned a lot about experiencing another country's culture. That was what I enjoyed most.
- I think I have learned many things on this trip and it has made me a better person. I learned more about being with people I don't know and how to deal with strange situations. If something went wrong we had to figure out how to fix it ourselves instead of relying on someone else.
- We have it really good in the U.S. Because of that, we are sheltered from other harsh realities of the rest of the world.
- I thought it was an excellent experience; I really appreciated learning about the Brazilian culture and seeing how other people live. I learned so much about Brazil as a country and how different the culture is. I also learned a lot about how to deal with a group in a group situation. It is definitely a unique experience to live and learn with a group for six weeks.
- Ability to share and discuss about different culture and opinions.
- There are some unique things about each culture you will never be able to learn or appreciate until you experience them yourself. Learning a second language is difficult, which makes communications also difficult. A study abroad makes you appreciate instead of take for granted the things you like in your own native culture.
- I valued that not everybody does everything like we do, and the experience I got from that fact was very important. Just because something is done differently in another country does not mean it is wrong, but rather, it opened my mind to this new way of doing things.
- Learning about another culture and learning to appreciate the differences between my culture and another. Learning how to work with a group of people especially in situations, which are stressful, and the group is divided over a decision. Discovered a greater appreciation for not only other cultures but also my own government and country.

How has your philosophy of leadership been changed or stretched as a result of participating in this study abroad?

- Over the last several weeks I have been able to see others and my own strengths and weaknesses of leaders. There have not been any profound changes in my leadership philosophy, but I do feel that my leadership skills have stretched as a result of this study abroad program.
- It has been stretched a lot. I got to see the group work out their problems and come together better. It helped me to not let little things bother me and to focus more on the big picture and what is best for everyone.
- I learned a lot about leadership just by observing our group and comparing them to the Brazilians' way of operating. I probably learned more by being a silent observer than I would have by being more vocal throughout.
- It has definitely been stretched. I found myself sharing more, being more accepting, and holding back unnecessary comment.
- I learned that as a leader, you have to be a member of the group first, and the leader second. As a leader, it is your job to keep the group together.
- Being in an unusual situation doesn't give you an excuse to be less of a person, no matter how hard it may be.
- I really learned a lot about working and living in group situations. I learned that a lot of the time you have to sit back and listen. I also learned though that sometimes you really need to

step up and get a job done because if you leave it to someone else it might never get done. My philosophy has changed because I have learned that you need a good balance of the two.

- Learn to cope with different varieties instead of just avoiding them.
- I believe this trip has built on the diversity seminar. In another culture you have to keep an open mind in order to adapt to the culture. Also, there are times that you have to be assertive and ask questions to gain the maximum amount of knowledge.
- My philosophy of leadership has broadened greatly, I think because of seeing different ways of doing things. I feel that my ability to lead is much greater than before because I have this added knowledge.
- I have recognized the need for extreme patience in trying times and that a good leader must step up in times of stress and disagreement rather than let himself be taken over by emotions. Also, I learned people are more willing to follow someone who they feel has treated them with respect and are even more willing if they consider the person a friend.

Implications for Leadership Educators

As leadership educators we need focus on developing quality study abroad experiences for our students, whether they are high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, or adult learners. A study abroad experience can enhance an individual's leadership skills and capacities in areas such as communication, diversity, multiculturalism, conflict management, self-awareness, group dynamics, and many others. Motz (1997) affirmed:

“the expectation of study-abroad programs is that the students will return from their time abroad not with only factual knowledge, but also with a broader outlook and with tolerance and empathy for others who are different. This truly is what multicultural education is about.” (p. 123)

Leadership can be taught in many different ways using multiple teaching strategies. The study abroad technique uses classroom teaching, experiential and interactive approaches, and group dialogue, and debriefing sessions to help students learn new leadership skills and capacities, which will help them in their future. Brungardt et al. (1997) stated it “is not so much to teach students to *be* leaders, but rather, prepare them to be *capable* of participating in the leadership process” (p. 57). Study abroad is an excellent teaching technique for preparing students to participate in the leadership process in their future careers, their home community, civic organizations, families, and many other everyday life experiences.

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