Undergraduate Research Abroad and Links to Career Interests

Career Integration Conference, July 21-22, 2014, University of Minnesota

**Good afternoon, my name is Laurie Black** and I am the Dean for External Relations and SEM at SIT Study Abroad. I have been in the field of study abroad for over 20 years, but it’s only been in **the last 10 years or less that we have been talking about undergraduate research** even though, in reality we’ve been doing it for a lot longer. When I was in college and in my early years in education abroad, the term undergraduate research would **have conjured images of students in a lab in a white coat or perhaps students working as an assistant to faculty on campus on their existing research projects.**

**Fast forward to today:**

* **NSSE—National Survey of Student Engagement—**lists undergraduate research as a key high-impact practice for student retention and success
* Campuses hosting undergrad research **symposia**
* **Forum on Education Abroad Award** for Undergraduate Research

**CUR--Council on Undergraduate Research and NCUR who run annual student research conferences**

What is Undergraduate Research?

An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline.

What are the Benefits of Undergraduate Research?

* Enhances student learning through mentoring relationships with faculty
* Increases retention
* Increases enrollment in graduate education and provides effective career preparation
* Develops critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and intellectual independence
* Develops an understanding of research methodology
* Promotes an innovation-oriented culture

**You may recognize some of these benefits as similar to those they we often associate with study abroad. Interestingly:**

**CUR connects u.g. research to careers**

**International education is connecting study abroad to careers**

**BUT, not sure that undergraduate research as part of the study abroad experience has been connected to careers**

**SIT now talking about its longstanding Independent Study Project as undergraduate research.** Originally, we observed the impact of the ISP and touted positive outcomes such as critical thinking, writing skills, intercultural communications, similar to what we see on slide. Then evolved into focus on other outcomes such as feeding into senior theses, Fulbrights, doctoral dissertations, usefulness to the host communities.

**Only more recently have we realized the connection to and impact on career interests and pathways for students.** Many studies have shown the impact of study abroad on careers. In 2006,SIT was part of the SAGE study that came out of University of Minnesota in which 55.8% of all respondents said that their occupation/career choice was influenced to a large or some degree by study abroad. For SIT respondents only , that rate goes up by 20% to 75.8%. Given the centrality of undergraduate research to the typical SIT semester program model, is it possible that this is the piece that makes such a difference?

**In January 2014, Marianne McGarrity, a graduate student at SIT Graduate Institute, undertook a research project entitled “SIT Study Abroad Alumni Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes Survey”, with a particular focus on career choices and paths, along with looking at unique features such as SIT’s emphasis on developing countries.** Among other things, the study attempted to isolate the effect of the Independent Study Project. We wanted to see if there were additional or different impacts when compared with outcomes of similar research on alumni of other study abroad programs.

Sent to over 16K alumni from 1982-2011, got 2107 responses, a 13% response rate.

Lots of interesting data related to general career impact such as 72% said experience influenced career choice to some or large degree; 81% experience helped gain a sense of social responsibility or interest in social issues that influenced career choice, 72% experience helpful in job interview,

**90% of respondents stated that the ISP impacted their overall study abroad experience to some or a large degree**

**59% have continued to engage with issues explored in ISP research**

**Typical comment: ISP research was my first time conducting community-based interviews and that method has continued through grad school and professional life**

**Some reported that their research project coupled with their unique study abroad locations causes their resume to stand out—one student said she has been asked about her research in every job interview she’s ever had**

One alumna of the China program said: “It’s definitely an interesting and attractive line on my resume. Even if it’s not directly related jo jobs that I’m applying or, employers have often asked about it and have been interested in hearing about my research projects. I think it helps demonstrate my ability to navidgate new situations and be self-directed in completing a major project.” **Read other quotes from Page 35**

Outcomes related to careers was quite striking on health and environment programs compared to other programs, almost 100% of those on health programs earning advanced degrees. It was also significantly higher for students studying in developing countries rather than in Europe or Australia.

**READ QUOTES ON IMPACT FOR HEALTH STUDENTS**

I’d like to show you what some of our most recent students are saying about the career impact of undergraduate research. This video features Spring 2013 students on SIT’s program based in Serbia, but I think it is representative of the undergraduate research abroad experience in general.

**VIDEO**

**In conclusion, more research needs to be done because lack of a control group means we can only attribute correlation and not causation at this point….however, as study abroad becomes more of the norm, undergraduate research as part of the program can be a differentiator, something that employers want to talk about. Perhaps undergraduate research should be considered as having an impact on career development similar to, if not greater than, that of internships. It’s time to not only foster discussion between the study abroad office and the career center, but to broaden that conversation to include the office of undergraduate research. If you don’t know these folks on your campus, I urge you to meet them as soon as possible to discuss your joint interests.**

**End quote on screen: The ISP set the trajectory for the work I love and will continue throughout my career (SIT Kenya 2007 alum)**