

Why TRIO Students Need To Study Abroad!

BARBARA BURKART, HOLLY HEXTER, DONNA THOMPSON

The emergence of "the global village," the increasing interdependence of economies and the advent of new telecommunications technologies have brought changes to all American institutions, including institutions of higher learning. As pressures have increased upon us. Corporations to "internationalize" their operations, so have colleges and universities been urged to expand their curricula and train students and faculty to operate in an international arena.

Resulting initiatives reflect a growing awareness of the importance of learning other languages and studying other cultures. In 1992, the American Council on Education announced that "the conviction is spreading that opportunities to acquire international knowledge, foreign language competence and study or work experience abroad should be available to (or even required of) all students at all levels of higher education" (Pickert and Turlington, 1992).

Authors Pickert and Turlington documented ways in which the "internationalizing" movement on many campuses has transformed the college curriculum and methods of instruction through increased interdisciplinary cooperation and expanded international offerings. Institutions have accomplished this by infusing international components into general education courses, emphasizing language proficiency and global studies and offering more inter- and multidisciplinary majors and minors, concentrations and certificates with an international emphasis.

The growth of international exchanges has also affected the educational landscape. Foreign students have become an increasingly large presence on many U.S. campuses. More than half a million came to study at American institutions in the 1999-2000 academic year, according to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) annual Open Doors survey (The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 17, 2000).

The number of American students who opt to spend part of their college careers overseas has grown significantly-by more than 45 percent in the last four years (Institute for International Education, 2000). In the 1998-99 academic year, more than 129,770 U.S. students flocked to study in another country, a one-year jump of almost 14 percent.

Increasingly, students are choosing less traditional destinations when they study abroad. Although Europe continues to attract the most American students, the proportion of U.S. students going to Latin America has doubled in the last 10 years, and hundreds of students are heading to countries in Asia and Africa, according to IIE.

Many students in the U.S. today view study abroad as a rite of passage and as a way of gaining advantage in preparation for their professional futures. About half-48 percent-of high school seniors responding to American Council on Education survey said they planned to study overseas during their college years (ACE, 2000).

Minority and Low-Income Students are Underrepresented in Study Abroad

Despite the apparent surge in interest in international study and travel experiences, only a fraction of the nation's undergraduates are gaining "international or intercultural competence," according to a recent status report from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2000). Estimates of the share of students who will travel at some point during college range from three percent (ACE) to nine percent (IIE), and the proportion of low-income students and students of color who participate is much smaller. In the 1998-99 academic year, 85 percent of the students traveling abroad as reported in the Open Doors survey were white; five percent were Hispanic; four percent were Asian-American; three percent were African-American; one percent were American Indian; and one percent were classified as multiracial (The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 17, 2000).

The multiple barriers to access to international opportunities by minorities and low-income students have been well documented. They include the program costs; program structure; language requirements of many programs; the length of study; admissions requirements; marketing; lack of faculty or departmental support for study abroad in some cases, the campus culture: state legislature-mandated course requirements, and difficulty in transfer of credits (Carter, 1991). Taken together, the factors, as well as family attitudes towards the value of international experience, operate to discourage low-income students from participating in program attended by their more affluent peers.

Study experiences outside of the United States can be more than enriching for low-income and minority students; they can also produce profound and lasting changes in students' self-image, their academic and professional goals and their attitudes about their roles in the society. One faculty member, writing about the experiences of her African-American and Hispanic community college students who traveled to Denmark for a semester of study, observed that:

When they returned home... [the American students] had become determined to continue their education beyond community college. Three of the five formed a study group and devoted a third year to preparing to enter four-year institutions—a goal they achieved. At last report, all five were attending four-year colleges and universities. That they were willing to delay their entry into the job market and were motivated to pursue advanced study attested to their improved self-image and a new sense of the academic and professional possibilities open to them (Carew, The Chronicle, January 6, 1993).

The recognition of such intrinsic and extrinsic benefits that minority and low-income students can derive from study outside of the United States has prompted organizations and universities to expand opportunities for these underrepresented students. What follows in this article are examples of five institutions that have implemented initiatives, some within TRIO programs and some campus-wide, to demonstrate their commitment to international study and travel experiences for low-income and minority students.

Michigan State University

Michigan State University has made a significant commitment to international education, as attested by the number of study abroad programs it has developed and the sizable numbers of its students that enroll in them. Last year, MSU sent more than 1,500 students overseas, more than any other college or university in the U.S. except Brigham Young University. By the year 2006, the university hopes to have 40 percent of its undergraduates study abroad during their college years (The Chronicle, December 10, 1999). MSU is paying particular attention to increasing the number of minority students who go abroad, according to university administrators, and in summer 2000 collaborated with the Council for Opportunity in Education on a study program in South Africa involving 16 TRIO students.

MSU commitment to international study and travel extends to the pre-college students served by the MSU Upward Bound program. In summer 2001, a trip to Greece and Italy will be the third that the Upward Bound project has organized to send TRIO students to Europe, according to UB Program Director Glenda Hammond. Each year, the project selects an outstanding sophomore, junior, and senior based on summer program participation and first-term grades, attendance and application of what they learned in the summer. When they return from travel abroad, students create displays that are used in orientations and other project events.

Plans are arranged through a University travel agency, and the trip takes place over spring break. The \$1,600 per-participant cost includes guides, transportation, hotels, and restaurants and is supported by discretionary institutional funds. UB helps students raise their spending money through letters to community organizations and churches. The accompanying staff member pays half the fare. The international travel opportunity serves as an incentive for student participation, academic scholarship, leadership, and community service and provides students a heightened appreciation for people's differences and cultures.

The MSU/UB project will continue to offer international travel opportunities and is looking to develop trips with more academic content and exchanges that involve family stays, and to coordinate its plans with other TRIO projects.

University of Wisconsin Whitewater

The University of Wisconsin Whitewater has integrated international study travel into its curriculum since 1994, according to Roger Pulliam, UW-W assistant vice-chancellor for academic support services. "It's part of a comprehensive initiative designed to increase retention and graduation rates," Pulliam said of previous trips sponsored by UW-W to Brazil, Mexico, Ghana, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Egypt, Morocco and Spain. TRIO students make up 75 percent to 85 percent of the more than 300 students who have participated in the UW-W study tours in the last six years. "We don't want students to 'return to the block.' We want them to gain a broader perspective."

"We believe it is important to expand the historical perspective of students of African and Latino backgrounds," added Nelia Olivencia, UW-W director of Latino Student Programs, who has led many of the study tours and who led a COE-sponsored trip to Mexico in summer 2000 administered by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. We begin with contemporary society and ask them to examine the historical foundations of conditions that exist today."

Olivencia described the difficulties in establishing the program because of initial faculty

resistance and unfamiliarity with the notion of studying abroad as part of the academic experience. Now these initiatives for multicultural students include a student exchange program with 26 campuses in Mexico "and have served as a catalyst for other departments in the university," according to Olivencia. The university hopes to offer its TRIO students at least one study abroad opportunity during their four years on campus.

Most of the UW-W students are able to use financial aid to attend the study abroad programs and the university supplements those funds with scholarships. Pulliam noted the benefits of students' international experiences have been apparent in their improved interpersonal relationships with students and faculty alike and their stronger academic performance.

University of Illinois at Chicago

As part of an academic exchange program developed four years ago by John Long, then director of TRIO programs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, more than 40 Upward Bound and other TRIO-eligible students for the last three years have traveled to Germany for a four-week intensive language and cultural program in Berlin. During the program students study German, attend classes in African German history, visit museums and immerse themselves in German culture and society. The program costs families about \$1,500; the rest of the program cost is subsidized by the Chicago public schools.

"Minorities don't tend to feel a part of mainstream [foreign exchange] programs because they don't see themselves in the culture," Long, now an assistant professor of education at the university, writes in the Winter 2001 issue of *The German Quarterly*. "The activities are usually geared around Euro-centric culture."

Long chose to focus on German and German studies to highlight the fact that "Germans of the African Diaspora face similar problems to those faced by African-Americans... [such as] discrimination in housing and employment, discrimination in educational opportunities, isolation from the broader German society.... and marginalization as German citizens.

"Initially I faced a number of barriers to establishing these programs, writes Long in *The German Quarterly*. "First, many of the teachers, parents and students could see no reason to learn any foreign language. Second, there were no longer any German language programs in those public schools that had predominantly low-income or minority populations. Finally, in most African-American communities, Germans were perceived as being all white, racists and proponents of Nazism."

Long believes strongly that effective study abroad programs must be "designed with the flexibility to be tailored to meet the needs of the population(s) they will serve." He hopes to take 24 students to Humboldt University in Berlin this summer.

TRIO 2000

Based on the conviction that low-income students should have access to international experiences similar to their more affluent counter-parts, the Council for Opportunity in Education in 1999 developed a study abroad program for Student Support Services and McNair students. In summer 2000, the first of two programs were launched as TRIO 2000. COE contributed a \$500 stipend for each participant and several of the state and regional TRIO associations helped to underwrite the students' tuition and travel expenses.

Working with Michigan State University, COE sponsored a four-week, credit-bearing program of study, "Educational Transformations in South Africa" that examined the impact of apartheid and the rapid changes affecting that society. MSU SSS Director Florence Harris, Salt Lake Community College SSS Director Barbara Burkart, and COE senior fellow Nicole Norfles accompanied a group of 16 TRIO students to Capetown, Johannesburg, Durban, and other towns. Led by MSU faculty member John Metzler, students attended lectures on the campus of several South African universities, visited schools and townships, and met with students and community leaders.

The second program, administered by the University of Wisconsin Whitewater, was a two-week, credit-bearing study tour of Mexico, coordinated with Mexican universities in Monterrey and Guadalajara, and was designed to introduce students to Mexican culture. COE Board member Marc Malone escorted the group that was led by Nelia Olivencia, UW-W director of Latino student programs. Students visited campuses, museums and major industrial, cultural and historical sites.

"From TRIO 2000 study abroad," wrote one student who participated, "I gained more insight into the world, Africa, matured quite a bit, learned about myself and what I would like to do with my life. I've made some friends and contacts for life. This experience will forever be one of the best, most profound, enriching, awakening and beautiful experiences.

The University of Massachusetts Boston

In 1990 the University of Massachusetts Boston Upward Bound and Urban Scholar programs sponsored 24 students from the New England region on a 10-day sailing trip through the British and U.S. Virgin Islands ending with two days in Puerto Rico with TRIO students.

The trip initially was conceived to recreate the voyage that brought the first blacks to Boston, part of a citywide celebration of the 350-year anniversary, according to Joan Becker, University of Massachusetts Boston assistant vice provost for academic support services. The Middle Passage Voyage curriculum included a historical perspective developed in collaboration with U Mass Boston faculty. An advisory committee was instrumental in raising \$15,000 for the sailing trip and airline donated the round trip airfare.

One of the UB student participants, who now works at U Mass Boston, believes the experience changed her life. Although she had only recently come to the U.S. from Cambodia and was not well versed in U.S. history of slavery or African American issues, she was able to draw parallels between experiences of Cambodians and those of African Americans. Participants developed an increased understand of African-American contributions to the Western Hemisphere, experienced the world outside of their customary environment, and connected with TRIO students from diverse backgrounds.

Fitchburg State College

In spring 1998, Fitchburg State College sponsored a short-term cultural exchange program to Edgehill University College in Olmskirk, England for 12 students, three staff and one sign language interpreter. The culmination of almost a year of planning and fundraising efforts by each of the students and staff, the two-week exchange called "Project Adventure" focused on disability rights, leadership and self-advocacy, according to Willa Peterson, director of Expanding Horizons (Student Support Services) at Fitchburg State. Student participants were all members of a campus organization, which promotes disability awareness. The Office of Disability Services organized and promoted the program, although no college funds were used and there were no academic credits awarded. All attending students were TRIO eligible (the college SSS program had just entered its first year and therefore was not actively involved). The trip cost less than \$1,000 per person and all the funds were raised. No student was turned away for lack of funds; all the original registrants attended the trip. Among the group were students with a variety of documented disabilities and students without disabilities.

During the first week, students met with peers to discuss disability related issues such as access, laws and attitudes in the UK and in the USA, presented a panel discussion for college faculty and interested students, met with the director of a professional organization devoted to higher education and disability, shadowed their peers in classes and participated in a community service volunteer day. A group of acting students from nearby Skelmersdale College joined with Project Adventure participants for a day of theater games developed around the theme of living with a disability. The second week of the trip was spent as London tourists. The following spring (1999) a group of students from Edgehill spent one week in Fitchburg on a return exchange.

Due to the resounding success of Project Adventure, another trip was planned, to Innsbruck, Austria in spring 2000. Students from state colleges throughout Massachusetts traveled first to New Orleans, where five University of New Orleans students joined the program, and then departed for Austria. The program focus was very similar to that of previous trip. All participants were involved in planning and fundraising activities for the trip, which cost less than \$1,000 per participant.

Conclusion

Low-income students and students of color remain significantly underrepresented among American students who travel abroad. Costs and cultural factors persist as barriers to participation. As the previous examples demonstrate, students in TRIO programs can derive academic, cultural and personal benefits from study abroad. TRIO project directors and staff thus play an important role in facilitating such opportunities, whether they directly organize programs or assist students in identifying appropriate programs. Through their interest and advocacy they can help students understand the importance of studying in another country to their academic and professional futures and can aid them in assembling the necessary resources.

STUDY ABROAD INFORMATION			
Program	Contact	Name/ Title	Phone / e-mail
MSU / UB	Glenda Hammond director of Upward Bound at MSU		517-353-6701 hammondg@msu.edu
UW-W	Nelia Olivencia director of Latino Student Programs		262-472-1913 olivenc@uwwvax.uww
Berlin Exchange for Upward Bound	Dr. John Long Assistant Professor of Education Policy Studies Department College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Education Administration		312-355-3238 long@uic.edu
Middle Passage Voyage	Joan Becker Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Support Services, University of Massachusetts Boston		617-287-5841 joan.becker@umb.edu
Fitchburg State	Debra Roberts Director of Disability Services Or Willa Peterson Director of Expanding Horizons Student Support Services Program		978-665-3427 droboters@fsc.edu 978-665-3576 wpeterson@fsc.edu

References

- Carew, J. G. (1993). "Minority students abroad: an inspiring experience," in The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 6, 1993
- Carter, H. M. (1991). "Minority access to international education," in Black students and overseas programs: Broadening the base of participation. New York; Council on International Educational Exchange
- Desruisseaux, P (1999). "Fifteen percent rise in American students abroad shows popularity of non-European destinations," in The Chronicle of Higher Education, December 10, 1999, p. A60
- Internationalization of U.S. higher education: Preliminary status reports 2000(2000). Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education
- Long, J. (2001). "German studies and minority communities," in The German Quarterly
- Open Doors 2000 (2000). New York: Institute of International Education
- Pickert S. and Turlington, B. (1992). Internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum: A handbook for campus leaders. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.
- Wheeler, D.L. (Nov. 17, 2000). "More students study abroad, but their stays are shorter," in The Chronicle of Higher Education, A74.

Online Resources

<http://www.nafsa.org/secussaforuiu/>, "The Forum on Under representation in Education Abroad," which includes a newsletter and related resources designed to aid "diverse constituencies that continue to be left out of participation in international education." The newsletter provides examples of best practices and new approaches to issues related to underrepresented groups abroad. The NAESA/SECUSSA website also includes a link to "Internet Resources For Education Abroad" by William Nolting of the University of Michigan International Center.

<http://www.istc.unm.edu/study/scholarships.html>, an online database of scholarships for study abroad, by region, program subject and eligibility category, maintained by the International Study and Travel Center at the University of Minnesota.

<http://www.iiepassport.org> identifies study abroad and learning travel opportunities available worldwide. The service enables students to search among 35 categories, including location, field of study, cost, college credit availability, and eligibility for scholarships. IIE Passport also links travelers directly to the U.S. Passport Office site, where they can download a passport application.

<http://www.opendoorsweb.org>, the website of the IIE survey "Open Doors," contains data on U.S. students studying abroad, by nationality, academic level, field of study and sex, and leading institutions enrolling international students.

<http://disserv3.stu.umn.edu/abroad>, the Access Abroad World Wide Website developed by the University of Minnesota, Pennsylvania State University and the Institute for International Education of Students in Chicago, is designed to make existing study abroad opportunities accessible to college students with all types of disabilities. It provides resources in areas including accessibility in accommodations, student information, and tools for international and disability professionals.

Barbara Burkart is the director of Student Support Services, Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, Utah. She is the Past President of the ASPIRE region and has served ASPIRE as Utah Chapter President, Financial Aid Liaison chair, and 1992 conference co-chair. Burkart serves on the Council for Opportunity in Education Board of Directors and is co-chair of the International Access Committee.

Holly Hexter is a consultant to the Council for Opportunity in Education and worked on the implementation of the TRIO 2000 and TRIO 2001 study tours. Previously, she worked as policy analyst for the American Council on Education and as a consultant to federal education advisory committees and education associations in Washington, D.C.

Donna Thompson, project director of the Wesleyan Upward Bound/CONNCAP program in Middletown, CT. She has been actively involved in the federal TRIO programs for more than 20 years. Thompson recently served on the Council for Opportunity in Education's Board of Directors as International Access co-chair, where she assisted the Council with the creation and implementation of the TRIO 2000 and TRIO 2001 study tours.

Why TRIO Students Need to Study Abroad is part of a continuing series of National TRIO Clearinghouse Short Papers. The purpose of the short papers is to provide a research framework for project practice. These papers are available as reprints and are downloadable from the National TRIO Clearinghouse website at <http://www.trioprograms.org> / clearinghouse.

The National TRIO Clearinghouse collects and disseminates information; applied program materials, resources, and research related to TRIO Programs and TRIO students. It is housed in the Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education. The National TRIO Clearinghouse is an adjunct Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity affiliated with the ERIC Higher Education Clearinghouse. The National TRIO Clearinghouse is funded by a grant from the United States Department of Education. For additional information about the International Access co-chair, Clearinghouse, contact Andrea where she assisted the Council with Reeve, Director.