

Starting from Scratch: The Challenges of Developing and Funding a Study Abroad Program
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As we all know, study abroad is an integral component of global learning. Students increasingly view study abroad as part of their college career, and more are studying abroad each year. The 2008 Open Doors Report found that study abroad increased 8% from the previous year and almost 150% during the last 10 years from under 100,000 in 1996/1997 to almost a quarter million in 2006/2007. Closer to home, in the last 4 years, 25 Shepherd University students studied abroad mostly on affiliate programs, and 331 Shepherd students from 16 classes studied abroad on faculty-led trips.

How does a state university strapped for funds establish a study abroad program? How does study abroad fit into the institution's mission? Should study abroad find its home in academic or student affairs? What about funding? What support services are needed? How does a university address the study abroad potential when commuters make up more than a third of its student body? How is the teaching faculty involved when the only study abroad programs are faculty-led trips that operate independently? The session will address these questions as well as others.

Shepherd University is a West Virginia state-supported institution about 70 miles from Washington DC that began as a normal school in 1871. We offer baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts, education, professional fields such as business and nursing, and a limited

number of master's degrees. We are accredited by North Central, and have about 4200 students with an FTE of 3568. Even though our student body has increased over the years, the proportion of state funding, as with many other public institutions, has decreased making it difficult to fund new programs.

Against this background, the development of our program was based on a real need. As a reference librarian, students approached me about study abroad opportunities. Prospective students also inquired about study abroad, but there was no written information anywhere about even our faculty-led programs. One of our library student assistants studied abroad for a semester but had difficulty returning to campus because the system didn't recognize her as a Shepherd student. This was in sharp contrast to my very positive experience studying abroad as an undergraduate when I encountered no difficulties returning to my home institution. Given this and Shepherd's tight financial situation, I approached Dr. Stern, our Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), in the fall of 2004 and volunteered to coordinate study abroad and explore study abroad options for our students. I created two study abroad brochures. The first described our faculty-led programs providing dates and contacts. The second was a study abroad checklist of steps for non-Shepherd programs that I worked out with the Registrar's office and Financial Aid. Dr. Stern paid for the brochures, and I distributed them to the admissions office and around campus. When classes began in the fall of 2005, I organized two study abroad interest sessions that attracted over 30 students. I provided general information, had them complete interest sheets, and invited them to a study abroad fair at West Virginia University (WVU) a couple weeks later. Because WVU is almost 3 hours away and students were reluctant to miss a full day of

classes, I only took 4 students to Morgantown. Of these, one found a program provider and spent a year in Costa Rica.

Library Dean John Sheridan arrived in fall 2005 and has supported study abroad from the outset. Later that fall a group of us, including the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA), the Registrar and the Honors Director and other faculty members, met with Dr. Stern. We agreed that study abroad would come under Academic Affairs. I was charged with drafting study abroad by-laws to establish a campus wide study abroad board with representatives from the faculty, staff, and students. The study abroad board first met in December 2005, and the study abroad office opened in March 2006 for three half days a week. The library provided office space, extra furniture, my old office computer, and release time for me—about 9 hours a week. Dr. Stern provided funds for student help, furniture and supplies.

It has been over 4 years since Shepherd University began its work on study abroad. As study abroad director, I now spend about $\frac{3}{4}$ of my time on study abroad. Looking back on the growth of the program, we identified the following 12 key challenges that include 12 lessons learned as well as future challenges that are summarized in the handout.

1. Campus Climate: There has to be a willingness on campus to support study abroad. In our case, all the key players supported study abroad generally and my efforts in particular. We had student interest, the Library Dean's willingness to grant me release time, and seed money from the VPAA and the library. Academic Affairs is the major source of institutional support for the development of study abroad at Shepherd University.

The VPSA supported study abroad reporting to Academic Affairs and not Student Affairs even though our international students fall under Student Affairs. This is because we have only 15 international students, and our VPSA is an active member of the study abroad board, so Student Affairs are always in the loop.

Our Registrar is a former study abroad student and is also very supportive. She has gone the extra mile to fix problems and develop new procedures to streamline the process. The Registrar also sits on the study abroad board.

The faculty have been supportive—some much more than others. It has helped that Shepherd has faculty-led programs in 8 departments: art, business, education, English, environmental studies, Modern Languages, history, and music. Many students who participate in faculty-led programs frequently hope to study abroad for a longer period of time. A number of the faculty who lead short term programs are on the study abroad board.

Internationalizing the curriculum has been a West Virginia state priority since 2005 when the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) sponsored a state-wide conference on internationalizing higher education. Since 2005 HEPC fully funded 3 state wide workshops, partially funded my attendance at 2 conferences, and provided a \$15,000 competitive grant to Shepherd to develop a teacher practicum in Jamaica. HEPC is offering a competitive \$1000 grant this spring to promote study abroad and is partially funding a site visit to three Mexican universities that participate in the ISEP exchange program that is available at all West Virginia state institutions. Shepherd's Compact with the state includes

goals for the promotion of global awareness, internationalizing the curriculum, and the development study abroad opportunities.

Dr. Suzanne Shipley, our university president since 2007, is passionate about international education. She began a Create the Future Fund with a personal contribution of \$25,000 to endow scholarships for Shepherd students to study abroad and for faculty to conduct research abroad. Finally, our Strategic Plan supports internationalization.

2. Integrating study abroad into the curriculum: In addition to the elective faculty-led study abroad courses, the Spanish major requires a study abroad experience, and the international concentration in political science encourages study abroad. The French program offers a study abroad trip each summer, and the Art department runs a study abroad program each spring break. For the last 2 years I taught a one hour study abroad first year experience interest group that enables freshmen to research and to plan their study abroad experience.

Although our faculty-led programs are proliferating, there is no central mechanism for creating faculty-led programs, and they are competing against each other for our limited number of students. In at least one case, a trip was cancelled because of small numbers, even with the participation of community members.

3. Funding: Funding is our greatest challenge. For the last three years, budget requests for dedicated study abroad funding from the university have failed. However, Academic Affairs has committed more funds to study abroad each year. Last fiscal year study abroad received

its own separate budget under Academic Affairs that paid for a graduate assistant. This fiscal year Academic Affairs permanently moved \$15,000 into the study abroad budget to fund a part-time project coordinator and travel and office expenses. However, my salary is still being paid by the library even though I am spending almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of my time on study abroad. This year we are submitting a budget request for a full-time director of international programs. I believe we have been unsuccessful because there are so many competing needs, such as more faculty slots and adjunct salary increases. Finally, Dr. Stern is stepping down as VPAA, and a new VPAA will begin July 1 which complicates the situation.

We have had to be creative with funding. The library and Academic Affairs both paid for my first NAFSA conference in 2006. The Admissions Office funds for the study abroad brochure updates. My NAFSA membership fee is paid from another budget. We frequently co-sponsor events with Student Affairs, women's studies, and career development that assist with costs. The study abroad office is a practicum site for our graduate students in our Master of Arts in College Student Development and Administration (CSDA) program. Two graduate students completed a study abroad practicum each working about 120 hours in the study abroad office.

4. Personnel: As I mentioned earlier, I am getting release time from my library position to work on study abroad. However, I feel increasingly torn between the two positions. Study abroad keeps growing, is very time consuming, but I love the challenges and working with the students. Meanwhile my library job is changing, too, with the incorporation of new technology.

I recommend using returned study abroad students as volunteers for programming because they are enthusiastic promoters. I am very fortunate to have a project coordinator who studied abroad three times, is passionate about the field, and is creative, organized, and willing to work part time. She was our first graduate student.

5. Learning the field: Being self-taught in study abroad management means I quickly investigated outside resources and joined NAFSA: the Association for International Educators. NAFSA was founded in 1948 and focuses on all aspects of international education. Although membership must be individual, your institution should provide funding. NAFSA has 5 knowledge communities, one of which is Education Abroad. NAFSA's One Person Office Interest Group has been invaluable and along with NAFSA, produces a wide range of resources including best practices and sample forms and agreements. We use many of their publications. The One Person Office listserve has proven a good way to gather information such as job descriptions. The annual NAFSA conferences explore cutting edge issues, provide opportunities to network, and to connect with study abroad providers. It is truly an international event. NAFSA also offers a variety of training opportunities such as a two day management development workshop and a nine month Academy for International Education that provides broad exposure to key issues and is tailored to individual needs. I hope to take advantage of some of these training opportunities budget permitting.

The Institute for International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919 and administers over 200 programs such as the Open Doors Survey, the Fulbright grants, and Gilman

scholarships. IIE sponsors best practices conferences. I attended a very useful Gilman workshop that focused on the characteristics of successful applications. Shepherd University received a complimentary one year IIE membership upon completion of the workshop that provides access to many resources. The Forum on Education Abroad created in 2001 focuses solely on study abroad.

Closer to home, the West Virginia state sponsored workshops and conferences have been learning experiences, particularly the workshop on faculty-led programs led by nationally recognized consultants. I have sought advice from the study abroad offices at West Virginia University and Marshall University. I visited study abroad personnel at three nearby institutions: Frostburg State University in Maryland, Shippensburg University in PA, and the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. The University of Mary Washington is one of our peer institutions. Chris Musick, the international director there, is chair of NAFSA's One Person Office Interest Group and has been extremely helpful. Everyone has been very willing to share information and ideas. Finally, I joined the listserv SECUSS-L that focuses on current education abroad issues such as study abroad visa problems and international grade conversions. My questions are answered quickly from a variety of institutions, and I share my findings with the group.

6. Program Selection: Shepherd's goal, at this point, is to develop exchange programs where Shepherd students "swap" places with students from a partner institution paying Shepherd tuition and fees. However, this takes time and commitment. To get the program off the ground, we investigated the use of third party study abroad providers. These

companies work with individual institutions to provide programs that include tuition, housing, support services abroad, and more. I interviewed several providers at WVU's study abroad fair in 2005 when I was there with our 4 Shepherd students. That was the first study abroad fair I attended. What I learned was that there are a large number of third party providers that have different programs all over the world. They want to establish agreements with universities that can benefit your students. You can negotiate agreements that provide discounted prices for your students, and many programs offer scholarships. Some may even allow you to give scholarships to your students, which really amounts to a program price reduction. You may have an option to receive money for each student who travels on a provider program, but we decided that it would be better to give that money to the students in the form of scholarships.

It took over a year to work out our first 6 agreements. Our 7th agreement signed in 2007 is with Global Learning Semesters that includes a very useful study abroad webpage template. Developing our first webpage in 2006 was a big job, even with the assistance of Shepherd's webmaster, and updating it was time consuming. In contrast, the new website features country and program search functions, the ability to create student accounts, and a student management system. Global Learning Semesters updates the program information, and it is easy to edit our individual pages.

7. Process Development: What are the steps to study abroad? We continue to update and streamline our process. We encourage students to visit our webpage, view the study abroad checklist and create an account. Our budget worksheet is available in paper and

downloadable off the website. The Registrar and the Admissions and Credits Committee created a study abroad course approval form that streamlines the process and keeps study abroad in the loop. This transfer approval form is necessary for the financial aid consortium agreement. We can now save places for study abroad students on Banner thus enabling them to remain in the system so they can register before they return. However, as more students study abroad, we have revised our procedures. We replaced our initial interest sheet with the online account that also lets us enter advising notes.

The study abroad board plays a large role setting policies and procedures. It raised the minimum GPA required to study on a non-Shepherd program from 2.0 to 2.5, knowing that many programs require a higher GPA. The board decided that study abroad grades will be included in the GPA rather than having them transfer back as pass/fail. It also developed a process for students wishing to study in countries for which the State Department has a travel warning.

8. Promotion: We market study abroad in a variety of ways—the webpage, posters, email, meetings with campus groups, Facebook, and using returned study abroad students for programming and also as peer tutors for the one hour study abroad interest group for freshmen. Our study abroad materials are prominently displayed just outside the study abroad office door. I speak to honors students, to parents at summer orientations and to high school students and their parents at our college prep conference. Our project coordinator participates in open houses and runs sessions in the residence halls. Our study abroad fairs are in the student center where there is a lot of traffic. Our annual international week

features discussions, passport day, international food, a photo contest, and more. Returned study abroad students are featured in the alumni magazine, and the student newspaper covers our events. I report to the faculty Senate on study abroad issues and plan to address other faculty groups.

9. Office Operations: As I mentioned earlier, we have streamlined office procedures. Most study abroad electronic files are on a shared computer drive, but we have individual paper files for each student who studies abroad on non-Shepherd programs. The office is open 10 hours a week, but a sign directs students to my library office. Communication is very important, and we make a point of keeping each other in the loop, especially copying each other on emails.

10: Advisement: Advising students is rewarding but time consuming. Many students express interest, but a much smaller number actually go abroad. It is becoming increasingly common to have emails or phone calls from parents. It is tricky to balance the needs of the students with those of their parents. The student must be independent and flexible to succeed on a study abroad program. Our project coordinator created a PowerPoint presentation for study abroad 101 sessions that we are using this semester with student groups. Again communication is very important not only between the two of us but also with Student Affairs, the Registrar's office, Financial Aid, and the faculty.

Cost is a major issue for our students. Shepherd's in-state tuition, fees, room and board are about \$6,000 per semester and \$10,000 for out-of-state. We developed a budget worksheet

that we provide to students. We advise them about scholarships and refer them to Financial Aid for more specific information. Most students take out loans.

We run a predeparture orientation for our outgoing students where we review our predeparture guide and show a health and safety DVD. I keep in touch with them when they are abroad through email. We meet informally with students when they return. We also offer a reentry pizza session for all former study abroad students where a career center counselor offers advice on effectively incorporating a study abroad experience into a resume. We show a re-entry DVD, too, that addresses issues facing the returning study abroad student such as reverse culture shock.

11. Connection with International Students: Even though we have a small international student population, our goal is to provide programming that brings them together with our study abroad students. However, it has been difficult to engage international students. Shepherd's international students face significant challenges because the university provides almost no support services for them such as ESL, targeted orientation, transportation, housing during breaks, dietary options in the dining hall, and health insurance. Financial aid, student employment, and scholarship opportunities are limited. To survive our international students are extremely self-reliant and inventive in addition to being highly focused on their studies.

12. Assessment: We analyze and compile statistics for all our events with notes on lessons learned and how to improve the next time. We also compile data on our study abroad students and those participating on faculty-led programs for the Open Doors Survey and

others. We informally ask our study abroad students for their feedback, too. This is an area we will develop further.

Those have been our challenges and how we have addressed them. As far as our future challenges, permanent funding is the top issue. We also need to standardize our faculty-led programs, work on liability issues, develop a crisis management plan for all students who are abroad, and provide study abroad scholarships. Shepherd is presently exploring exchange programs with institutions in Korea, Thailand, and Italy. There is a lot in the works and even more opportunities coming forward. We hope we will be able to develop these opportunities, but a small university environment poses ever more issues, especially in the current economic environment.