

Gaining Intercultural Competency Skills Through Short Term Study Abroad Programs for Collegiate Student-Athletes

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The focus of this research is on creating short-term study abroad programs for US student-athletes to help them build intercultural competency skills. Student-athletes are a part of the population of college students who do not get the opportunity to study abroad like most of their peers do due to their commitment to their sport at the collegiate level (Terradotta 2016). Study abroad is one of the most popular global education experiences to gain intercultural competency skills. The research that is currently being proposed is a qualitative study on two Division I sports teams at The George Washington University and how their experiences abroad moved them along the intercultural competency scale, according to Darla Deardorff's model.

Darla Deardorff created an intercultural competency framework and model to help international education professionals develop strong programs for students to enroll in overseas. Her framework, created in 2009, states that "intercultural competence is about our relationships with one another and our survival of humankind, since we all work together to address the global challenges that confront us in this century" (Deardorff 2009, p. 2). In her model she describes the following attributes to help support this effort in gaining cultural skills: attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes like flexibility and empathy, and external outcomes like effective communication skills (Deardorff 2009). Anthony Ogden (2008) mentions that "The education abroad field will need to discover what motivates students to want to step outside of their comfort zones in spite of perceptions of risk. What makes education abroad a truly transformative experience for these students will be found in their ability and willingness to engage the unknown and for international educators to remain as equally open and receptive to new learning pedagogies" (p. 50). Ogden understands the importance of the field and study abroad, but wants to challenge students and the scholars who emphasize the importance of this educational experience, to really treat study abroad as a learning experience and push oneself outside of the comfort zones. In this article he mentions that majority of students who choose to study abroad, do so in an

English speaking country like the United Kingdom or Australia, so are students really stretching outside of their comfort zone? One might question if a student who studies abroad in China becomes more intercultural competent than a student who studies in London for a semester. The student who studies abroad in China is clearly in a more diverse and different culture compared to the United States versus the student studying in London, where the culture is somewhat comparable to the United States.

More opportunities are becoming available for collegiate student-athletes to go abroad, but where my research is unique is the measuring of cultural competency skills being gained from these trips through very specific curriculum framed around Deardorff's model, created through meaningful short-term immersive study abroad programs, would contribute greatly to the comparative and international and higher education world.

This new trend within higher education and the athletics realm is gaining interest very quickly. Universities like Duke, Stanford, New York University, and other higher education institutions are beginning to make plans for their student-athletes to go abroad to fully internationalize the institution and give access to every student at the university to an opportunity to go abroad.

The main take-away of this research would be to show that by providing short term study abroad opportunities, collegiate student-athletes can take advantage of these kinds of programs, without affecting their status as a collegiate athlete, and be able to gain intercultural competency skills. The teams featured in the study would only be two examples that can be used to explain further the importance of the research, with hopes of further research on more teams and more destinations with specific programming designed specifically per team, per university, as the next step in this research. By briefly analyzing each university, their strategic plan, and where internationalization and study abroad opportunities fall into the over-arching institutional plan, one hope would be to create and implement customized plans and guides for athletic

departments across the nation to further student athlete intercultural competency skills.

References

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