

## LANGUAGE STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH & IMPLICATIONS FOR NOTRE DAME

*In an attempt to summarize and provide local interpretation for the talk by Dr. Beatrice Dupuy on Nov. 12, I have prepared the following bulleted précis of the most relevant issues raised as well as the likely implications for our discussions within the subgroup and Notre Dame at large.*

### **Demographic Shifts**

- More social science and business students and fewer foreign language students are studying abroad.<sup>1</sup>
- At the same time, Anglophone destinations are being selected more often and programs of shorter duration are increasingly common.<sup>2</sup>

### **Language Study Abroad Research**

- Initially, study abroad was proposed and validated as a panacea for language and cultural learning<sup>3</sup>
- Further research complicated this proposition and led to qualitative in lieu of experimental approaches<sup>4</sup>
- Recent findings suggest that language study abroad gains are highly dependent on a host of pre, during and post study abroad factors that are often overlooked by universities and study abroad providers<sup>5</sup>

### **Mismatch in Goals for Language Study Abroad**

- Students consistently articulate three major goals for language study abroad, and institutions reinforce and perpetuate these in promotional literature. However, there is little evidence to support these intended outcomes.
  1. Increase fluency in the target language: Study abroad gains tend to be minimal compared to domestic programs and are highly variable; students rarely take an active role in their language learning process outside of formal classes
  2. Meet people from the target community: Students are rarely provided with regular opportunities to interact with local natives outside of touristic and transactional encounters
  3. Experience the target culture and understand it better: Students rarely understand basic paradigms of cross-cultural difference and lack the preparation and tools to systematically investigate cultural phenomena while abroad and unpack-interpret these experiences upon reentry
- Additionally, there is a poignant lack of a thoughtful articulation of intellectual and educational goals for student learning by post-secondary institutions themselves. Indeed, there is both a lack of articulated vision and a lack of research of institutional rationales and learning goals for their programs.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1985 foreign business majors constituted 10.9% of study abroad participants while foreign language majors made up 16.7%. Today, 20.2% of study abroad students are business majors while only 6.2% are foreign language majors.

<sup>2</sup> The UK remains the top destination for American students studying abroad

<sup>3</sup> Carrol (1967) and Schumann & Schumann (1977)

<sup>4</sup> Firth & Wagner (1997)

<sup>5</sup> Pellegrino-Aveni (2005); Schmidt-Rinehardt & Knight (2004); Wilkinson (1998); Talburt & Stewart (1999); Wilkinson (2002)

### **Implications for Notre Dame**

- Notre Dame has a extraordinary history of promoting and supporting language study abroad and has already shown significant and proactive leadership by holding the current campus-wide discussions on language study abroad specifically and global citizenship generally.
  - We are at a critical juncture and at the leading edge of a wave of professional and academic interest in study abroad outcomes that requires movement away from just rhetorical support for study abroad experiences and towards more substantive intellectual engagement in programmatic and curricular development.
1. Demographically, we could consider ways in which Notre Dame business, science and engineering students can pursue a substantive form of language study abroad that does not necessarily require advanced proficiency and which offers intellectual, humanities-driven outcomes in addition to simple linguistic gains. With more than 80% of all Notre Dame students studying abroad in some capacity, and a three semester language requirement for the majority of these students, there is plenty of opportunity to link these often disconnected international experiences more concretely to academic programs of study in general and language programs of study in particular. Such an initiative will require significant coordination outside of the language programs and suggests a clear point of departure for our subgroup discussions.
  2. Academically, we (as an institution and as individual programs) could articulate the value and [intellectual] purpose of study abroad in general and language study abroad in particular. In an extension of the needs analysis questions we began to answer in our first meeting, we should identify universal goals alongside individual program goals and publish/publicize these to students, faculty and administrators as a part of our broader learning goals for our academic/professional programs. This foundation of stated goals would help guide adjustments to the ways in which we prepare and integrate study abroad experiences for students and allow our subgroup to establish a resource of universally applicable best practices alongside examples of program-specific best practices. Such a resource would provide a roadmap for interested programs to begin conceptualized how language study abroad could be academically integrated into their programs of study through the useful rubric of intended skills, knowledge and dispositions.
  3. Programmatically, we could introduce innovative approaches to language study abroad preparation, onsite structure/support and reentry in order to maximize student learning and intellectual engagement. Beatrice Dupuy cited a number of boutique programs experimenting with such programmatic changes: Creating comparative pre- and post-study using ‘Cultura’<sup>6</sup> or other systematic, comparative methods; providing structured task-based opportunities for interaction with natives speakers while abroad through service learning or interview protocols; incorporating reflective assignments through journaling, blogging and examination of cultural assumptions; training students in ethnographic methodology for pre- during and post-study comparative analyses; training students in language acquisition and cultural accommodation strategies before they depart; connecting undergraduate research/theses to language study abroad outcomes; the list goes on and on. Simply identifying such [potential] best practices at the pre-, during, and post-study abroad periods would provide significant substance to our current rhetoric and serve as an important resource for units and programs across the university.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://cultura.mit.edu/>