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TEACHING ABROAD: ENSURING A GOOD OPPORTUNITY IS REALLY GREAT

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Abstract- With increased globalization, more colleges and universities are establishing faculty exchanges, study abroad programs, collaborative research efforts, and technical assistance programs with counterparts overseas resulting in enhanced faculty development, increased learning for students, revenue generation and prestige for the partnering institutions. For faculty, the opportunity to teach abroad can be a fulfilling and career enhancing experience. However, if faculty are inadequately prepared and supported, valuable time and resources are wasted, student learning is impacted, and the image of the institution and faculty member may suffer. The purpose of this research was to determine how faculty and their home institutions can ensure those teaching abroad are not just ‘okay,’ but great experiences for all involved. To study this problem, faculty with international teaching experience and overseas country coordinators were surveyed and a literature review was conducted. Data were compiled to identify actions which can be taken to ensure greater success in overseas assignments. The researcher will share results exploring why educational institutions are expanding operations overseas, the benefits faculty can derive from teaching abroad, the negative impact of failing to adequately prepare for overseas assignments, and actions which can be taken to ensure adequate preparation.

Index terms - Travel, teaching abroad, study abroad, international, globalization, expatriates

I. INTRODUCTION

With increased globalization, more colleges and universities are establishing faculty exchanges, overseas study options, collaborative research efforts and technical assistance programs with their counterparts overseas (McCully, et al., 2009). This expansion benefits the institutions, students and faculty in both the home country and country being visited in areas such as faculty professional development, increased learning for students, revenue generation and prestige for the partnering institutions (Hulstrand, 2013). Colleges and universities frequently rely on faculty to serve as the institution’s representative teaching or conducting research abroad. Experience has shown that in today’s global environment, small cultural gaffes with students

or partner institution administrators can often have significant repercussions which threaten the image of the institution, the investment of time and money, and the professional standing of the faculty member (Sutton & Obst, 2011). In this article the author will share the results of research exploring why colleges and universities are expanding operations overseas, the potential negative impact of failing to adequately prepare and support faculty for overseas assignments, and actions which can be taken to ensure faculty are adequately prepared and supported for their overseas assignment.

Institutions of higher education such as New York University are expanding their operations abroad as part of their mission to become ‘global universities’ (Gordon, 2012). Willhelm notes that fully half of all colleges and universities have identified internationalization as one of their top

five strategic priorities (2012, p. 2). This is in part because students in other countries see value in obtaining a degree from colleges and universities in the United States (Gordon, 2012). The scale of the demand for faculty to teach abroad is suggested by the fact that of approximately 655,000 full time faculty in the United States, one third reported they had taken at least one trip abroad to teach or conduct research (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2009). Further, the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) reports that eight hundred scholars take advantage of the core Fulbright Scholar Program and over four hundred professionals take advantage of their short term programs from the United States to teach or conduct research abroad each year (CIES, 2014).

Benefits for colleges and universities that establish international partnerships include revenue generation, attaining international recognition and image enhancement through international teaching, research and outreach (Sutton & Obst, 2011). Faculty are often the representatives from a college or university with responsibility for teaching classes, conducting research, leading study abroad programs or providing technical assistance. A faculty member's ability to communicate effectively, adapt their teaching style, and respond appropriately to cultural differences can be an important element of student learning, the success of a research effort, and to the perceived image of their college or university. Given the investment in time, money and prestige of these efforts it would seem prudent that institutions of higher education take reasonable steps to ensure that faculty are well prepared and supported in their assignments.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR PERFORMANCE

Experts in the corporate world estimate the failure rate of assignments abroad range from 25

– 70 percent and with potential losses to a corporation ranging from \$40,000 to over \$1,000,000, depending on the nature of the assignment (Yaton & Hall, 2008). These outcomes reflect this authors' prior experience directing the global leadership and succession planning efforts for a high technology company. Over the years, the company expanded its manufacturing, research and development, and sales offices to a number of countries in Europe and the Far East. During the initial years of expansion employees were often assigned to international projects with little consideration to interpersonal skills, understanding of cultural differences or clear direction as to desired business outcomes. Not surprisingly, many of these assignments did not go well. For example, some engineers discovered their 'no-nonsense' communication style, work ethic, and standards for productivity, timeliness and accountability were not always shared or appreciated by their foreign counterparts. Similarly, sales associates discovered that their zeal to 'close the deal' often went nowhere and on more than one occasion, actually alienated potential customers. As the 'face' of the company, these well intentioned employees relied on practices and behaviors that were common-place in the United States but were perceived as arrogant, demanding, 'know it all's' by their foreign working associates and customers. As a result, tens of millions of dollars and countless hours of effort were wasted due to basic cultural ignorance and poor preparation. It took significant time, money and effort to rebuild trust, respect and the company image with overseas clients.

Institutions of higher education and their faculty also run the risk of seeing faculty exchanges, overseas study programs, collaborative research efforts or technical assistance programs partnerships fail if those leading the efforts are not well prepared. As with the experience of corporations, colleges and universities can find

the cost of failure to be significant in terms of loss of revenue, damage to the institution's image, little to no learning by students, or damage to the career or reputation of the faculty member.

1. Loss of Revenue

University projects or assignments abroad can include short term or long term efforts. Examples of short term initiatives may include providing technical assistance, short study abroad trips, research projects, and faculty teaching. The financial costs of such short term initiatives may include employee salary, travel, per diem and lodging ranging from a few days to a few months in which expenses can run into tens of thousands of dollars. Examples of longer term efforts include establishing satellite campuses overseas, long term teaching assignments, and major research projects. Depending on the scale of the effort and number of faculty and staff involved, these initiatives can incur expenses into the millions of dollars per year.

2. Institutional Image

A recent article on college expansion overseas observed that leaders in institutions of higher education in the United States believe that a 'global footprint' is a requirement for fulfilling the institution's mission and influences how the institution is perceived by students, alumni, faculty and others is important to administrators (Kamenetz, 2013). It stands to reason that the more successful a high profile overseas operations can be, the greater the positive impact on the institutions image. In recent years, several institutions of higher education have suffered high profile criticism or failure that has drawn unwanted attention. These include New York University whose president, John Sexton, recently received a vote of no confidence by faculty who are highly critical of the University's expansions into Abu Dhabi and other locations

(Kamenetz, 2013). Other expensive failures have been experienced by Michigan State, George Mason University and Suffolk University of Connecticut and the University of Montana (Pope, 2011). Failures of this magnitude are not welcome by any institution.

3. Student Learning

James Citron, an intercultural specialist at Dartmouth College said, "Being an outstanding academic does not always prepare you to handle all the expectations of students, parents, host country contracts, and home campus administrators have of you when teaching abroad" (cited in Hulstrand, 2013). The country's culture, religious traditions, student learning styles, prior education, familiarity with American research requirements, local technology support and internet connection and other factors can significantly impact learning. Faculty who assume that what works in their classroom in mid-west America will also translate clearly into other cultural settings can be in for a dramatic shock. Because English is a second language for most students in overseas settings, their ability to read text material, handouts, power point presentations and course handouts is influences how fast a faculty member can cover material in a classroom. A faculty member from New York University noted, "...because English was not the first language for the majority of students, I overestimated how much they could read" (Gordon, 2012). The faculty member observed that as a consequence, she needed to adapt her curriculum and pacing to allow students time to absorb the material. This example suggests that faculty who do not understand local cultural traditions, learning preferences, and language abilities may not be able to adapt their teaching to ensure students in other countries learn the material. As a result, students learning may be far less than desired.

4. Faculty Reputation

When in another country, the faculty member is the representative of a college or university. If a faculty member is not cognizant of local communication styles, cultural traditions, religious requirements, laws and customs, they can make unintended errors that may offend students or administrators of the host country. Even if it is not the faculty member's fault that their institution did not adequately prepare them for the overseas assignment, the failure of an assignment can still rest squarely on their shoulders. One can imagine the potential career damage if an overseas institution specifically requests that a faculty member who has been evaluated poorly by students or who has committed a cultural gaffe of grand proportions not be included in future exchanges or projects.

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY PREPARATION

The legendary Yankees coach, Yogi Berra, famously said, "If you don't know where you are going, you might end up someplace else." What is true in baseball is certainly true when it comes to planning overseas academic efforts; knowing where an institution is going makes a big difference to the success of an overseas initiative. The good news is that between corporate experience in sending employees abroad to do business and that of colleges and universities over the past decades, a lot has been learned to ensure proper planning of global academic initiatives and assignments. Keller (2001) found that an effective process for preparing academics for work in another country included reliable selection, pre-departure training, on-site socialization, and effective repatriation. In preparing for this article, this author conducted interviews with representatives of educational institutions in Oman, Poland, Slovakia and Grenada as well as with several faculty from Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio who have taught in one or more countries. Responses from

these two sources support the four elements identified by Keller (p. 31) and is integrated into the information which follows.

Reliable Selection. First impressions are important. Ensuring the right person to complete an overseas assignment is identified as an important first step for any institution. Selecting the right faculty member includes ensuring that the individual understands the assignment and how it supports the school mission. Other considerations (see Table 1) include selecting a faculty member with the right academic and institutional knowledge, interpersonal skills, tolerance for ambiguity and stress, and adaptability (Keller, 2001; Yaton & Hall, 2008). Several representatives from educational institutions overseas stressed the importance of ensuring that individuals who are selected recognize that how things are done in the United States is not the only way. As one country coordinator said, "Some faculty fail to understand that the world is a big place and there are many ways of solving the same problem." She went on to say, "These faculty are perceived as inflexible, disrespectful and out of touch with the global environment." In some cases, it may also be important that the faculty speak and read in the language of the overseas partner. Finally, some faculty may not understand the value of the assignment to their own career; therefore the faculty member should understand how the assignment can serve as a positive personal and professional development opportunity.

Table 1 - Reliable Selection Considerations

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fit with mission, goals of institution• Positive career or learning opportunity• Has appropriate content knowledge• Confident, independent, adaptable, flexible |
|--|

- If needed, has language skills
- Socially and culturally sensitive
- Excellent interpersonal skills

Pre-Departure Training. Today it is easy to hop on a plane or take a cruise and visit other countries. However, visiting another country as a tourist and doing so to fulfil a need for one’s university or college is another thing. Companies, universities and colleges have found that it pays great dividends to ensure faculty have the opportunity to learn about the country or regions they will visit. Understanding a country’s culture, religious traditions, history and geography helps ensure that faculty respond appropriately in different situations (Yaton & Hall, 2008). At Franklin University, faculty are given the opportunity to talk with other faculty who have already visited a country and they may also access videos, books and articles that are kept on file at the university library. Some faculty also seek out international students and speak to the country coordinator through Skype or by telephone to learn more about the culture, traditions, and student learning styles. In addition, the university has staff that help faculty understand emergency procedures in case of accident or illness, whom and how to communicate overseas, travel advisories and other key points.

Faculty also stressed the importance of developing an understanding of practical aspects of life in another country (see Table 2). For example, a faculty member from the school of business shared, “I made it a point to learn more about where I would be staying, could get meals, how to access technology, how to exchange money, what transportation to expect, and how to dress for various events.” He went on to say, “However, it never occurred to me that some of our cash might not be accepted overseas. I learned the hard way that in many countries, banks and money exchange centers will not

accept bills from the United States any earlier than 2008, because the bills are easier to counterfeit. There I was with a thousand dollars in cash, and no way to convert any of it into local currency! Thank goodness for credit cards!”

Table 2 – Pre-Departure Training

- Explain why faculty was chosen for the assignment
- Explain how they will be compensated and/or reimbursed for expenses
- Explain travel policy
- Discuss visa and passport requirements
- Obtain appropriate immunizations
- Whom to contact if problems arise
- Discuss how to ensure smooth communications (phone, email, etc.)
- Ensure they understand their accommodations (hotel, apartment, location, etc.)
- Discuss transportation expectations (taxi, metro, a driver, etc.)
- Review pertinent legal & cultural norms

On-Site Socialization. Once a faculty member arrives in a country it is helpful to provide them with an orientation. In our experience this may include an overview of pertinent local laws, where and how to exchange money, transportation plans, dignitaries the faculty will meet, teaching/research itinerary, time for sightseeing, and whom to call to resolve problems or if there are questions (see Table 3). In addition, almost all Franklin University faculty stressed their desire to become familiar with their teaching location. “As soon as possible, I like to visit the building and classroom where I will be teaching so I know what to expect. I want to see the room first hand, test the technology, and meet students if possible,” said a professor of operations management. Country coordinators also found that helping faculty socialize to the local environment was helpful. The coordinator from Oman observed that the socialization process appeared to help faculty relax, anticipate

any problems, and engage more quickly with students.

Table 3 – On-Site Socialization

- Plan time for faculty to become familiar with local facilities, technology and audio-visual support
- Coordinate any copying or other support needs in advance of first day of class
- Orient visiting faculty to the bank, money exchange, restaurants, and other key resources
- If time permits, provide a tour of the city

Effective Repatriation. There are two good reasons for ensuring returning faculty are repatriated effectively upon return from an overseas assignment (see Table 4). First, the institution has made a significant investment in time, energy and resources in supporting the overseas assignment. Debriefing the faculty member can help administration understand what went well and where improvements are needed. If the assignment was long term the institution should also ensure the faculty member knows they have a job waiting for them upon their return and that their new experience, skill and knowledge is appreciated and will be utilized (Yaton & Hall, 2008). For example, faculty can make recommendations for improving current or future course offerings, research efforts or expansion plans. Second, leading a group of students on a study abroad program, conducting research or teaching a course overseas is an exciting learning experience. Consequently, institutions should provide a forum where returning faculty share their experience and learning with others.

Table 4 – Effective Repatriation

- Plan how to capitalize on faculty learning upon return (should tie to mission, goals)
- Recognize value of learning
- If a long term assignment, ensure a responsible position is waiting

- (communicate this with the faculty member before they return)
- Debrief the faculty member (what worked well, where can improvements be made)
- Ensure faculty expenses are reimbursed as quickly as possible

COUNTRY COORDINATOR TIPS

As noted earlier, coordinators of overseas visits in another country have pertinent suggestions on how faculty can improve the effectiveness of their visit (see Appendix A for a more detailed list of tips). First, coordinators in Poland, Oman, Slovakia and Grenada stressed that their students appreciate and enjoy the learner centered approach most American faculty bring to the classroom. Coordinators emphasize the need for faculty to slow the rate at which they speak, enunciate clearly (our accents can be confusing) and to give students extra time to read and absorb content. And while students enjoy our teaching styles, coordinators also noted that students needed extra time and attention to understand topics such as assignment quality expectations, grading, research requirements, plagiarism and APA, and assignment deadlines. Second, coordinators observed that faculty should also plan to be flexible in the classroom. This would include customizing curriculum to include local cases, examples and illustrations when appropriate. Flexibility also includes the ability to adapt assignments when technology or other factors disrupt the normal flow of a course. For example, in some countries, internet connection for students is poor and it is not uncommon for classroom technology to fail in any country (including the United States). Faculty should be prepared to continue their teaching even if they discover they cannot use their well-prepared PowerPoint presentation. Another faculty member was teaching a graduate course in business communications in Oman when the Sultan proclaimed a two-day holiday a

few days into the class requiring him to adjust his planning to accommodate the revised schedule.

FACULTY TIPS

Faculty who taught in one or more countries from Franklin University also shared a number of suggestions to better prepare faculty for overseas assignments (see Appendix B for a complete list of the tips). Prior to leaving, they recommended that faculty conduct their own research into areas such as cultural do's and don'ts, country and city geography, history, tourist attractions and currency. Faculty also recommend obtaining information on students, faculty or other key individuals with whom they will meet. As appropriate, this information may include a picture, job title, prior education, competency level reading and writing English as well as technology. To ensure students are prepared, faculty should communicate with students well before they arrive. Messages to students may include directions for pre-class reading and preparation, research, assignment and grading requirements, and other key points that will help students understand the course material and faculty expectations. Finally, faculty provided some very practical suggestions regarding planning for a long flight in uncomfortable seats, and bringing the right clothes and shoes for the country and weather. Faculty stressed that planning for these types of issues can make a dramatic difference in the quality of student learning and the success of the assignment.

CONCLUSION

Colleges and universities in the United States are moving quickly to expand their programming overseas. This article has emphasized the importance faculty play in teaching classes, conducting research, leading study abroad programs or providing technical assistance. In a very real sense, faculty are the 'face' of the institution and putting the appropriate amount of

time and effort into preparing faculty for overseas assignments is important not only for the institution, but for the faculty member as well. The institution has a responsibility to ensure they have selected the right person for the job, prepared them prior to departure, ensured they are properly socialized and supported while abroad, and that the faculty member and institution benefit from the experience upon their return. Faculty also have a responsibility to ensure they have developed their cultural awareness, planned their work abroad to adapt to local sensitivities, and planned for unexpected contingencies. By ensuring that both the institution and faculty do their due diligence to ensure faculty are well prepared for overseas assignments, the potential for success is greatly enhanced.

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Appendix A
Preparation Tips from Country Coordinators

Question	Common Coordinator Responses
1. What should U.S. faculty know about teaching at the college level in your country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speak slowly and clearly, some students speak & understand English better than others - Give students time to write (comprehend) - Students are eager to share experiences - Customize to include local cases, examples - Recognize that the U.S. way is not the only way - Computer access at home may be challenging - Many students are not familiar with APA or turnitin - Some students are not accustomed to being self-directed learners
2. What should your students know about US faculty teaching methods & expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They should read course emails messages several times a week and read them closely - Students may not understand policies/grading/deadlines are not always negotiable - Clarify your expectations for quality, use of English, APA, turnitin, library research, etc. - They may not understand the self-directed nature of our teaching methods
3. What is the biggest challenge your students have with the U.S. MBA or its faculty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students can speak and read English, but not as well or quickly. Some reading & writing assignments will take more time than you planned. - Network coverage (for classes needing a lot of internet work) - Deadlines and time management - Understanding fast speakers, accents
4. What do your students enjoy most about working with MBA faculty from the U.S.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like cutting edge expertise, knowledge - Learner centered approach - US faculty can be more lenient than local faculty
5. What common mistakes would you like faculty from the U.S. to avoid?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid talking about drugs, alcohol or smoking in some countries - Not including enough local examples, cases - Our way (US) is the best way mentality - Not holding students to high standards - Be respectful of local customs
6. Are there any other observations or suggestions you would like to share?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get faculty flight itinerary to coordinators ASAP - Send photo of faculty to coordinator and vice versa so they can find each other at the airport - Share important phone numbers and ensure cell phones work <u>before</u> you leave so faculty can reach the coordinator easily - Faculty that need handouts printed for classroom use should email or provide hard copies of the handouts to the coordinator at least one day in advance

Appendix B
Preparation Tips from Faculty

Question	Common Faculty Responses
1. What would you like to know about the country before you go?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographical location - Basic cultural do's and don'ts - Time of year (what to wear) - Currency and exchange rate (where can I do so easily) - Logistics – who will meet me, when, where, room set up, technology - Local shopping, sights and restaurants - Any big local news items
2. What would you like to know about the students before you go?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student's name, picture, current job title, company (if employed), prior degree, why pursuing degree - Receptivity to learner centered approach, group work, language ability - Technology ability (comfort, MS Word, Excel, PPT, etc.)
3. What is the biggest challenge students have with the U.S. faculty and coursework?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They should start reading before class starts, become familiar with online platform, & check email frequently - We teach both theory and practice - Substantiating writing with citations, use of APA style (give them links, examples, instructions) - Deadlines, grading, quality expectations, showing up prepared, etc. - Out of class expectations (writing, reading, research, etc.) - Many are used to being lectured to and not the interactive involvement we expect (but they like it better) - Some understand English (read or hear) better than they speak it, so need to be encouraged to participate with direct questions - Our common words, phrases, and examples are not common for them
4. What are the biggest challenges you faced when traveling or teaching internationally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coach seats for long flights in both directions (jet lag) - Go 1-2 days early, take 1-2 days upon return to recuperate - Know who to look for when you get to the arriving airport - Not familiar with currency - Technology – spotty WIFI and cable networks for students and faculty - University & text publisher websites not working properly
5. What do you enjoy most about teaching internationally?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It helps improve your professional practice and knowledge - Opportunity to travel, expand cultural awareness - Gives you great info & experience to share with domestic students
6. What are the top two mistakes you made when teaching overseas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not checking on currency exchange (which US bills/dates are accepted) - Not taking time to get to know the students (jumped right into teaching) - Using jargon or slang - Underestimating need to slow down, adapt content, give more time for students to discuss, interact, read, etc.
7. Other?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You are traveling through time zones, so be aware of the local time so you don't miss your flight - Bring a filled RX for antibiotics, a first aid and a sewing kit - It's a great opportunity to take your spouse, a child, etc. - Get out of your room and experience the culture - Ask the coordinator to provide a local map of sights, gift shops, grocery stores, transportation costs, schedule, etc. - Plan for a flight delay (long wait, possible overnight stay) - Know who to contact in case of an emergency – local coordinator, university contact, embassy, home, travel agency, etc.