

"SMART" CONNECT-EXCHANGE INTERCULTURAL STUDY ABROAD MODELS

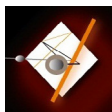
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Real solutions for international problems come from glocal communication approaches; that is, from an understanding of local cultural practice examined through intercultural exchange, through reciprocal teaching and learning, and through global application.

Unfortunately, many obstacles prevent sustainable intercultural exchanges that model and develop such communication skills. For instance, many students cannot afford to study abroad without increasingly rare scholarships, even though study abroad is an effective way to try on another culture's views for size. And traditional models require students and faculty to leave obligations behind for 3–4 months, where much time on location is spent adjusting to cultural differences. The 2–3 week shorter cultural tourism model



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has significant limitations for glocal communication skill-building as well.

Instead, “smart” connect-exchange intercultural study abroad models should be explored. We must embrace a philosophy of divergence (Robinson, 2006), of glocal practice, and of focused academic instruction that scaffolds extended intercultural professional relationships. Bhaduri (2008) points out that globalization defines our era and that we must embrace such complexity and change. According to Bhaduri,

Our aim should be to stimulate new thinking, research and policy work in a domain that remains largely ignored by scholars of education. Millions of youth are growing up in a world where global processes are placing new demands on educational systems that are traditionally averse to change. (Bhaduri, 2008, pp. 15–16)

Further, as Chen and Starosta (2008) write,

The citizens of the twenty-first century must learn to see through the eyes, hearts, and minds of people from cultures other than their own. . . . In order to live meaningfully and productively in this world, individuals must develop their intercultural communication competence. (Chen & Starosta, 2008, p. 215)

Knowledge-makers today communicate glocally by mashing together culturally diverse and socially complex content.

Indeed, the global economy often values homogenization rather than understanding and divergence (Hahnel, 1999; Levy-Livermore, 1998), emphasizing glocalization as selling a product in abbreviated, more

readily sellable forms, rather than celebrating local culture in full vibrancy (Felton, 2002). While some call for a process of demystifying the global economy (O'Connor, 2002), instead, what is needed is more organized and contextualized complexity, embracing dynamics provided by cultural immersion and media richness. Kock (2005), for instance, suggests that greater understanding comes from communications that are “co-located and synchronous” (p. 119), and ubiquitous mobile tools can approximate such media richness.

To attempt to develop such a model, two new central universities in India, in conjunction with a university in the US, have been collaborating through

- faculty visits and team-teaching;
- better preparing students to negotiate global societies; and
- making stronger connections between the academy, community, and workplace.

The model is flexible, designed to offer multiple cultural excursions and workplace ethnographic opportunities while connecting smaller lesson units between institutions—rather than full courses—in order to emphasize problem-based learning. The model requires a high amount of ongoing interactive participation and divergent thinking through peer-to-peer interaction with mobile devices and live/recorded audio/video lectures, and informal exchanges. In this 4-month model, students from India and the US interact virtually during the first month, continue their work in the US during the second, continue their work in India during the third, and return to their

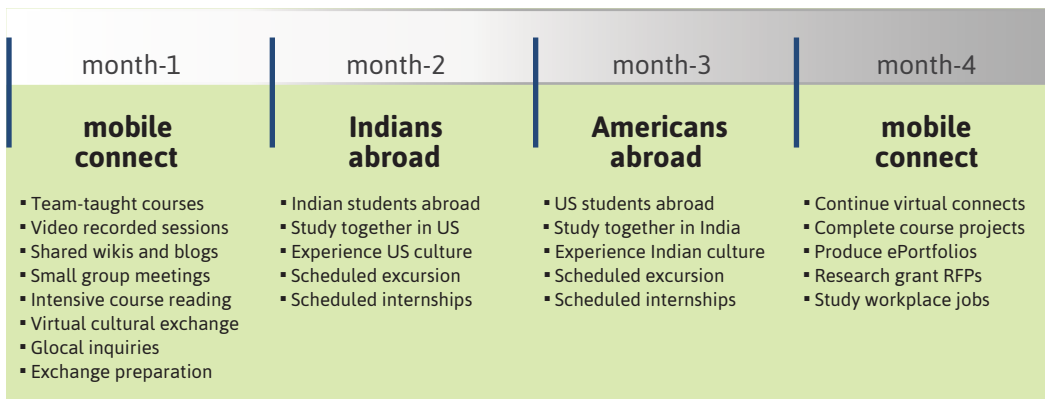
respective countries to finish out the semester during the fourth (see Figure 1).

The use of social media, other virtual communication tools, and ePortfolios for reflection and assessment purposes highlight what is often “lost in translation” between cultures. An ePortfolio is an electronic, selected collection of work that enables students to make cross-cultural, multimodal, and sustainable connections between artifacts and diverse viewpoints. Students can then effectively transfer this more glocally-responsible media rich knowledge to situations beyond the academy.

Students, thus, take a set of courses team-taught by instructors in both universities, courses which encourage multiple cultural perspectives on globally-impacting readings. Smaller modules from a variety of courses can be shared in order to maximize the direction each culture’s set of courses need to take. While abroad, students can participate online in other courses they’re taking outside of the

Figure 1

The smart connect-exchange study abroad model



exchange program at their home institutions. Teachers, too, who are also teaching courses or fulfilling obligations in other areas can more readily maintain hybrid-delivered courses; obligations at a distance are more manageable if arrangements need only be made for one month, instead of four. Yes, this requires much scheduling and organization. But yes, it is a more authentic, culturally-engaging, and glocally-responsible exchange model.

In order to better resolve international problems through negotiated glocalized thinking, we need smarter models of study abroad, such as the smart connect-exchange model, to better prepare our global citizenry. ■

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