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JESUIT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: CURRENT APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES

Dennis R. Gordon*

The variety of programs in international education at Jesuit colleges and universities challenge organizers to be flexible and innovative in designing, monitoring, and evaluating such programs.

As a Jesuit institution, Creighton University seeks to provide its students an integrating vision of the world through on-and off-campus opportunities

This statement, which greets visitors to Creighton's Study Abroad web page, is emblematic of Jesuit universities' commitment to internationalizing their campuses. Indeed, since before there was talk of globalization, or interdependence, neo-imperialism, colonialism, or even the modern nation state, the Society of Jesus has pursued a world-wide educational mission. Today, U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities offer a variety of overseas opportunities for their undergraduates. Study Abroad, as it is generically called, however, is not without controversy. From the thoughtful analysis found in the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to the sensational "reality" shows on MTV, study abroad is stereotyped as academically lax, alcohol-laden, and a general hazard to students' physical and moral well being. While there may be some basis to these criticisms, international education on Jesuit campuses is an increasingly professionalized field, rapidly expanding from the traditional junior year

abroad to a diverse range of classroom, community-based, experiential, and service learning programs. Like globalization itself, international and intercultural education is the result of both stated policies and a myriad of random actions and unintended consequences. Thus Jesuit educators must continually ask the hard questions about how overseas programs affect students, the communities where they learn and serve, and the broader society.

Current Trends

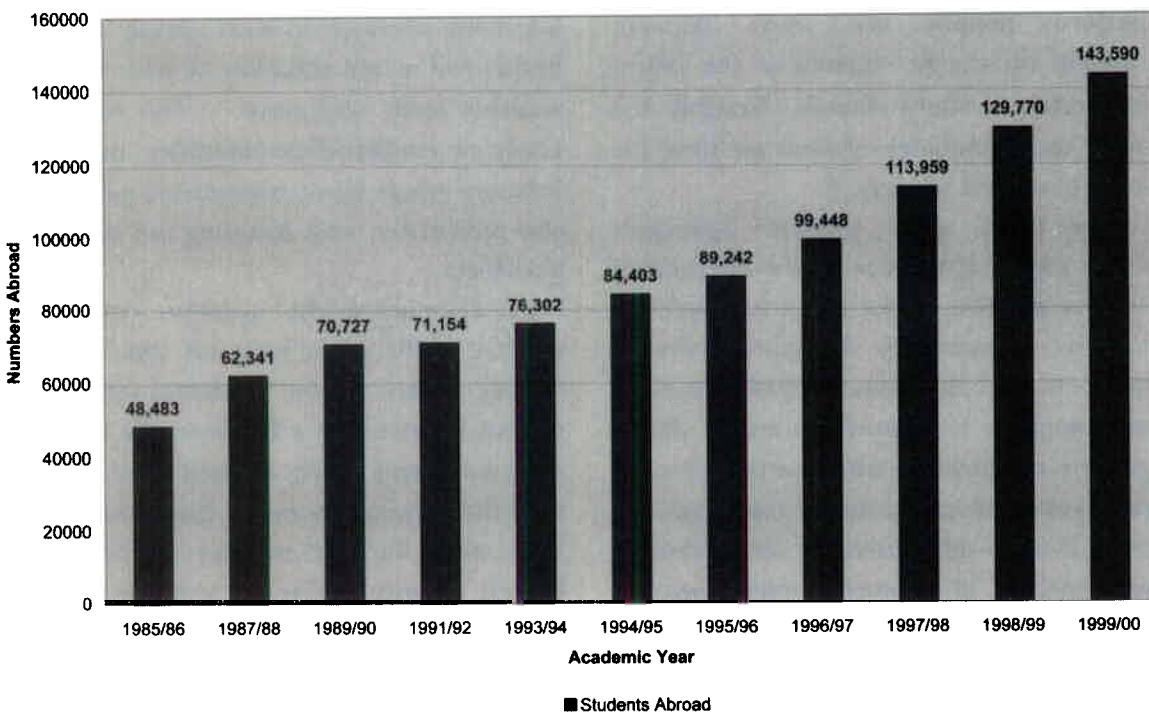
Study abroad and experiential learning today are characterized by growth and diversity. The available figures show the number of undergraduates having a formal international experience tripling between 1985 and 2000. The rate of growth, moreover, is accelerating.

Today, students are choosing a more diverse range of locations abroad. While the United Kingdom remains the single most popular destination, non-European destinations are growing in popularity with Australia and China leading the way.

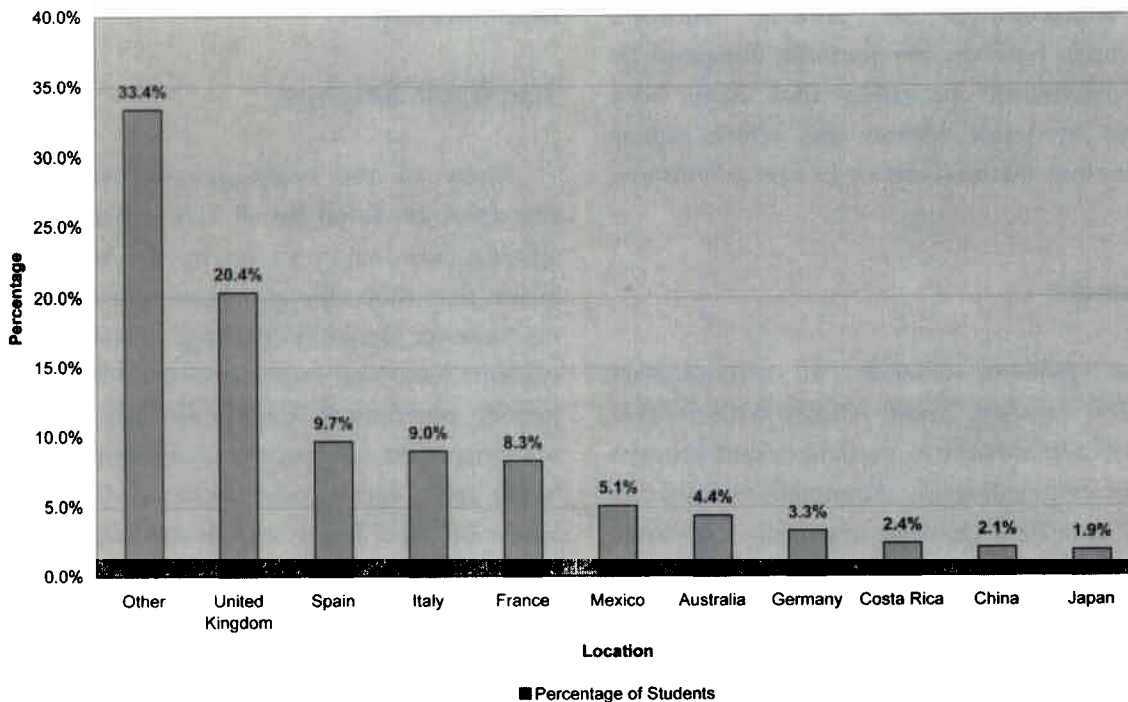
Social Science, followed by Business and Management, provide about forty percent of students going abroad. Participation by language

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U.S. Study Abroad Students, 1985-2000



Popular Study Abroad Destinations, 1999-2000



majors has fallen by half over the past fifteen years, which explains in part why English-language programs and English-speaking destinations remain the most popular. Participation by science students is the fastest growing sector in study abroad. Roughly ten percent of undergraduates overseas are from the physical and natural sciences.

A final trend, which presents significant challenges and opportunities, is the duration of the overseas experience. For about forty percent of students, a semester or quarter abroad continues to be the most popular option. Summer programs have grown to attract thirty-five percent of students, while participation in academic year courses has fallen from eighteen percent in 1985 to eight percent in 2000. Besides increased interest in summer abroad programs, other shorter term options -- including spring break travel study -- are growing in popularity. The trend towards shorter programs, along with increased interest in English language programs, is a major concern for those who see cultural immersion as a primary goal of study abroad. The shortcomings of shorter duration experiences, however, are partially mitigated by community-based programs that have been initiated by Jesuit schools and which plunge students into the local setting in new and intense ways.

Challenges

The growing interest in international education presents Jesuit schools with a wide array of administrative, academic, and student development challenges. Administratively, study abroad can be expensive, especially for small Jesuit schools which cannot establish their own centers abroad. A successful study abroad office may thus find itself in conflict with budget planners as tuition dollars flow from the home

campus to programs abroad. Perhaps the biggest administrative challenge is in the area of risk management. For both legal and ethical reasons, international educators must actively monitor the health and safety situation at sites where their students study and serve. The world's most needy or conflicted communities, precisely the locations where Jesuit students are called, might also present the most daunting risk management challenges.

Academically, the question of rigor and transfer credit is an issue on some campuses. Closely related to the academic setting is the undeniable fact that a highly visible minority of students spend much of their time socializing with their classmates rather than meeting locals. Bars, social life, and tourism appear to be the highest priority for these students. Skeptics wonder how much real learning or growth is taking place when students try to recreate their home campus life overseas. This behavior is often associated with so-called island programs where U.S. students study and live together rather than with host families or become integrated into a local university.

The Jesuit Response

Many of the challenges of international education are faced by all U.S. schools. Jesuit schools, however, must go further in order to insure that they offer programs that respond to the Superior General's challenge to not only help students learn and understand the world, but to provide experiences which lead them to choose solidarity with the poor and oppressed and to "serve faith and promote justice." In order to appreciate how Jesuit schools are responding to these challenges it is first necessary to recognize that undergraduates pursue international experiences for a variety of reasons. Some students reach college with a long-held dream of

full immersion in a distant culture. Be it Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Africa, these students take mastery of another language as a given and are ready to study hard alongside their newfound friends and colleagues. Other students are driven abroad by the love of a discipline or topic. Still others, encouraged by their faith, a political perspective, or the Jesuit Volunteer experience of parents or friends, feel called to service abroad. I have been fortunate to work with students answering these calls in the shanty towns of Jamaica and the rain forests of Trinidad. It is one reason why many of us feel privileged to play a part in Jesuit education.

Helping students answer the call, be it academic, cultural, social, or spiritual, is what most people have in mind when they argue that the financial and administrative costs of quality international education are more than balanced by the benefits.

Unfortunately, not all students possess such clear and admirable motivations. Some are called by a more generic desire to learn about life in another country and see the sights. Other students find that their major does not lend itself to study abroad or that sports, employment, or family responsibilities limit their options. Of course, there are also those students who, at least on the surface, do fit the stereotype of loud, beer-guzzling mono-lingual chauvinists, helping create a new definition of the "ugly American." Given the various motivations students bring when they cross the threshold of the study abroad office, Jesuit schools cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. Fortunately, creativity abounds on the

various Jesuit campuses in the U.S..

For students seeking a classroom-based full immersion in the local culture, nothing can beat direct enrollment in a traditional university. While there are many routes to direct enrollment, formal exchange programs can satisfy student and institutional goals. Most U.S. Jesuit schools have established exchanges with some of their fifty sister institutions around the world (as well as with other Church affiliated universities). One example of a successful partnership is the direct exchange between Santa Clara and the Universite Catholique de Lille in France. The

"Catho" offers a diverse selection of courses for undergraduates, helps students arrange lodging in university facilities or the local community, and provides advising and support from a professional staff that appreciates the needs of students coming from church affiliated schools in the United States. As a Catholic university, the faculty and staff at Lille share a common mission with their counterparts at

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Santa Clara. Students interested in local volunteer work are helped with placements, and they find easy access to faith-based groups and activities. Of no minor importance, direct exchanges keep tuition on the home campus, an arrangement which pleases both students and university budget managers. As student interest in non-European locations grows, U.S. schools have forged relationships with the Australian Catholic University system of campuses, Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Santiago de Chile, the Ateneo in Manila, Assumption

University in Bangkok and a long list of other schools.

Direct exchanges, as we have seen, are not for every student. Language barriers, conflicting academic calendars, and differing institutional cultures mean that students need alternative opportunities for year and semester programs. A popular alternative are overseas institutes and centers operated by U.S. Jesuit schools. Venerable examples include Loyola Chicago's Rome Center, St. Louis University's Madrid campus, Gonzaga's, Loyola Maryland's, and Fairfield's programs in Florence, and several others. A new initiative begun in 1997 by Loyola Marymont is a good example of maximizing resources. Building upon a Jesuit initiative to create an MBA program in China for local students, the Beijing Center for Language and Culture provides a wide array of courses, social activities, and excursions. Students living together in housing provided by the Beijing Institute of Technology are assigned a Chinese host family to insure immersion into local life.

Another solution for schools with limited resources is to forge strong relationships with consortia and independent institutes. While these programs help expand the scope of international offerings, Jesuit schools can and should be asking more of the organizations to which they entrust their students. Faculty and staff should take part in the governance of these organizations and conduct regular site visits to insure academic quality, assess the level of student services, and the health and safety situation. The best programs will work as partners and colleagues to offer classes and extra-curricular activities consistent with Jesuit values. Santa Clara's relationship with the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) is a good example of how a private provider can go out of its way to accommodate a valued partner. The President of Santa Clara has served several

terms on the IES Board of Directors, and its International Programs staff take part in annual meetings and curriculum review committees. The IES has made a point of understanding Jesuit education and offering courses, student development support, and community service opportunities for students. The IES also develops custom overseas "turn key" programs incorporating faculty and courses from the partner school. The IES is but one of several institutes which welcomes partnerships with Jesuit colleges and universities.

Students with a keen social justice orientation can combine academics with more direct community-based learning and service opportunities through a growing number of Jesuit school programs. Creighton's Semestre Dominicano, for instance, is a well respected program which has been offering students a mixture of community involvement and classroom study in the Dominican Republic since 1977. The Semestre Dominicano includes language and social science courses, electives taught by visiting Creighton faculty, and a community service requirement.

The growing interest in summer programs offers the opportunity to experiment and create experiences in the spirit of Jesuit education. In 1994 Santa Clara initiated the Trinidad and

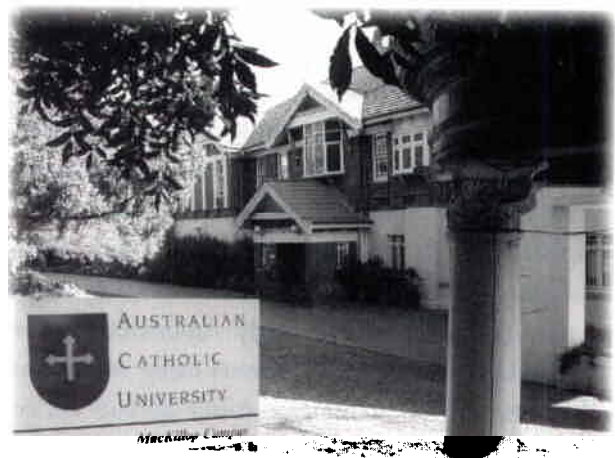


Photo Courtesy of Santa Clara University

Tobago Summer Program combining environmental science and environmental policy courses. In keeping with Santa Clara's goal of learning across disciplines, the courses -- biology, political science, and environmental studies -- are team taught. Biology students, who come to Trinidad for its biodiversity, interview local residents and observe community life alongside their colleagues from the social sciences. Political science students, for whom the only Byrd of interest may have been a venerable senator from West Virginia, conduct rain forest wildlife surveys for local community action NGOs. A key component of the program is the commitment to conduct research which aids the work of local environmental groups.

An entirely different approach to international learning is Seattle University's International Development Internship Program. This three-phase academic program sandwiches a ten-week internship abroad with CARE, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision or other non-governmental organizations between predeparture and reentry seminars on the Seattle campus. Seattle's combination of classroom-predeparture preparation with post-internship analysis and reflection is a model of the best practices in study abroad. For the student with the maturity to work in an independent setting, Seattle's International Development Internship offers a unique learning opportunity.

The Future

The desire to provide undergraduates an "integrating vision of the world" will continue as a key aspect of Jesuit higher education. In spite of offering programs which, in some cases, have been in operation for nearly fifty years, Jesuit international education is still in its infancy. Responding to the academic, financial, and student development challenges requires that

study abroad and community-based learning become a top priority of campus leaders. On some campuses and in some departments, international education is still viewed as an exotic diversion, a chance for students to sow a few more wild oats, get their picture taken in front of Europe's prime attractions, and transfer credit from courses of questionable academic quality. To the extent this is a valid image, it is incumbent upon faculty and staff to devote the resources and energy necessary to create or revise programs so that students may choose experiences which are academically challenging, personally enriching, and consistent with the Jesuit mission. There is no alternative but to accept this challenge, for the simple fact is that incoming freshmen, their parents, and the world around us demand that we offer first-rate international programs.

The interrelated issues of academic rigor and student development will continue to challenge Jesuit international educators. Ideally students would all take part in exemplary experiences such as Casa de la Solidaridad in El Salvador or other fine Jesuit programs. As we have seen, however, students seek an international experience for many reasons, and they come with varying expectations. Certainly study abroad cannot be expected to eliminate disagreeable and dangerous student social behavior overseas when it has yet to be fully mastered on the home campus. Still, there are steps that can be taken to improve students' commitment to the academic and service dimensions of international education. First and foremost, there needs to be more involvement by faculty and staff in international programs. Here I am speaking of involvement not just on formal campus review committees, but more intimate and sustained involvement with overseas programs. The development of faculty specialists who know a given program or location well and work with students before they depart, while they are overseas, and especially

when they return, should be a top priority. Campus ministry offices ought to know a school's international offerings well and be involved in creating predeparture and reentry programs for students. Domestic community-based learning and service also needs to be overtly linked to their international education counterparts on campus. The pedagogic and personal development benefits of linking multiculturalism with intercultural/internationalism present a wealth of opportunities. Why shouldn't students seeking an international experience also be expected to become acquainted with the immigrant communities in their own neighborhood?

As Jesuit schools establish community-based and service-learning around the globe, it is important to recognize the potential for inadvertent exploitation which exists when comparatively rich and privileged students are interjected into disadvantaged communities. There is a tendency among some faculty and staff at both Jesuit and non-Jesuit schools to "go where the action is," be it Haiti, El Salvador, Colombia, Chiapas, or whatever hot spot is currently catching the media's eye. As well-intentioned as this tendency may be, it can lead to short-term programs which extract much from a local community (even exposing members to risk), and then pull out as the immediate crisis dissipates (though its underlying causes remain). I have seen the look on friends' faces when told "our students won't be returning next summer." These colleagues are not just losing jobs or paying lodgers; they are suffering the loss of a relationship forged in mutual commitment and shared struggle. Thus programs must not interject themselves into a community lightly. The relationship needs to be multifaceted and sustained. In exchange for the privilege of having students and faculty learn from the local community, schools should be prepared to give back with meaningful service and financial

contributions. Ultimately, a full and equal partnership will create opportunities for local residents and students to visit and learn at the sponsoring campus in the United States. Although it is a small step, the Casa de la Solidaridad is raising funds so that Salvadoran students and community members who work with the Casa de la Solidaridad can visit and study on the Santa Clara campus.

No doubt increasing campus involvement with and oversight of international education and service are expensive. Some of these costs, especially in the areas of risk management, are not optional. In reality, internationalizing Jesuit education can no longer be thought of as an exotic option for a few lucky students and faculty. Just as one cannot offer a science or engineering curriculum without expensive laboratories, study abroad and experiential learning must be considered basic to a school's educational mission. Currently, at Santa Clara, about twenty-five percent of a given graduating class will have had an international education or service experience. While this is a higher percentage than at some other Jesuit schools, it might well be the norm in the not too distant future.

Obviously much work remains in order to perfect Jesuit international education and service opportunities. We need to explore further what should be asked of students when they return to campus so that the broader community can share and benefit from their time abroad. It is also important to develop more sophisticated assessment tools to verify the personal growth that is assumed to result from an international experience. While thoughtful young scholars, like Casa de la Solidaridad co-director Kevin Yonkers-Talz, are developing these assessment instruments, for the time being much of our evidence remains anecdotal. After twenty-five years of teaching International Relations and running study abroad programs, anecdotal

verification is convincing enough for me. I do believe that exposure to other cultures changes students for the better. The transitions may be subtle and in some cases not really apparent until five or ten years down the road. Perhaps these personal changes amount to nothing more than a certain skepticism when their government demonizes and dehumanizes other nations. Ultimately, if the time and effort required to get students out into the world serves only to put a human face on so-called collateral damage, then it is still time well spent.



Photo Courtesy of College of the Holy Cross

Jamaican-born Dwayne Henclewood is currently a junior physics major at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. Before coming to Massachusetts, he attended St. George's College High School, a Jesuit-run high school and post-secondary school in Jamaica, where he was head boy. It was his dream to go to college in the United States, but he knew that financial constraints would prevent him from being able to attend even the local university.

While most students complete just two years of post-secondary education before entering the work-force or continuing with higher education, Dwayne went back for a third year at St. George's

Resources and Further Reading

Institute of International Education, *Open Doors: Report on International Education Exchange*. Copies and updated information available at www.opendoorsweb.org.

Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities, *Resource Book for International Education at U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities*, Sixth Edition.

William W. Hoffa, *Study Abroad: A Parent's Guide*. National Association of International Educators, 1998.

*Heather Browne of Santa Clara University served as research assistant for this essay.

in order to increase his chances of getting a college scholarship. By returning to post-secondary school for another year, Dwayne became eligible for the newly established Presidential Scholarship, which awards full tuition to a St. George's student who has been accepted at Holy Cross.

Dwayne considers himself truly blessed to have been among the first recipients of such an opportunity. With his Holy Cross education, he plans to return to Jamaica and help improve science programs within the school system there.

In the summer of 2000, Dwayne competed in the CARIFTA Games, an annual junior athletic competition for members of Caribbean countries, where he broke the record in the discus event for young men under twenty, and came in first place in the shot put event. Dwayne also competed in the Central American and Caribbean Games (C.A.C.) where he set a new national junior record in the discus event. At Holy Cross he manages to be a part of the track and field team, while maintaining a grade point average above a 3.0. In 2001 he came in third in the discus event at the Patriot League Championships. He placed second in the same event in 2002. Dwayne is currently training with the 2004 Summer Olympic trials in mind.