

A Lifetime of Change: The Transformative Value of Short-Term International Mobility

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Tags

Education Abroad; Education Policy; Experiential Education; Student Learning and Development; University/Higher Education

Setting

At a large comprehensive research-based university in India, the Director of Global Initiatives considers whether academic credit should be granted for short-term international programs. Up until this point, only semester-long programs have been awarded credit, and short-term programs were not-credit bearing. However, two recent comments from alumni are prompting the Director to reevaluate the policy.

Case

The Director of Global Initiatives reflects on how she should gather information in order to assess the policy. She decides to begin by talking at greater length to each of the two students who had expressed dissatisfaction with the current policy, Mira and Priya.

Mira shares that when she looks back, her decision to go abroad undoubtedly altered her path, through the short-term internship that she completed at a university in Taiwan. She says that it sounded unconventional initially and even risky. While most of her contemporaries had devoted themselves to training at local organizations, she decided to walk away from the traditional path and learn something new. The internship was short, but enlightening for her. Through the internship, she was able to gain technical skills but, most importantly, she learned how research is conducted globally and how collaboration can bridge cultures.

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That brief experience was the catalyst for all that happened afterward. It gave her the confidence to pursue other global internships, specifically one at a prestigious cancer treatment institute in Germany. That internship boosted her levels of confidence further, enabling her to reach out to teams at a highly-respected U.S. university without hesitation. Every step led to the next, broadening her expertise, viewpoint, and vision of what she wanted to accomplish in her area of interest focusing on AI in medicine.

What surprised not just Mira but also her peers and professionals within the University ecosystem is that one small, ambitious decision through short-term mobility could be so impactful. That brief internship brought opportunities that Mira had never even conceived, developing a global mindset that made her very determined in her goals, and today she is pursuing her Master's in Germany at a top-notch university. All the short-term mobility experiences gave her a competitive edge for admission and scholarships. She says that taking the road less travelled provided her with experiences, opportunities, and a vision that would not have been possible had she taken the safe route.

Another student, Priya, shares that in her final year as a pharmacy student at the university, she explored some international opportunities through short-term mobility that created a chapter of rediscovery of her passions, perspectives, and purpose. She had the opportunity to attend summer programs abroad, first in Japan and later in Taiwan. Both experiences profoundly changed her, not just as a student, but as a person.

Japan had always been a dream destination for her and, through short-term mobility, this was achievable. Being immersed in a new culture and new way of life helped her emerge as a more well-rounded person with a strong foundation of mutual respect and discipline. Her experience in Japan enabled Priya to believe in herself, to embrace who she was, and to carry mutual respect in everything she did.

Priya was able to expand her perspective, enriching her student experience overall. She was able to adapt to new learning experiences which were more hands-on and based on discovery. She says that it made her realize that pharmacy is not just about formulas and doses, it's about curiosity, observation, and human connection.

As the Director considers these conversations, she recognizes that the personal growth experienced by students is exponential. Although the short-term mobility international experience may be brief, the impact is long-lasting. The programs offer students an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones, experience new cultural contexts, and develop global perspectives that cannot be replicated within the confines of a classroom. Students gain firsthand exposure to different ways of thinking, communicating, and solving problems. This fosters adaptability, empathy, and intercultural competence qualities that are essential in today's interconnected world as a baseline for success.

The conversations also highlighted the career impacts of short-term programs as they spark deeper curiosity and confidence. Students often return inspired to pursue further international opportunities or to apply their new insights within their own communities. The friendships and professional connections formed during these programs can evolve into lifelong global networks.

The Director realizes that short-term mobilities cannot be underestimated. Short-term mobility programs create a powerful intersection of learning and living where academic knowledge meets real-world situations that require cultural understanding. The scope and opportunities of programs should be broadened and students should be encouraged to add international mobility to their academic plans. If these programs counted towards the students' overall educational journeys, they would be an even more attractive and desirable option.

Convinced by the students of the merit of rethinking the current policy, the Director considers the next steps in her consultations with stakeholders and in drafting an updated policy proposal.

Discussion Questions

As you consider these cases, discuss:

- What other stakeholders will the Director need to consult before drafting a policy proposal? What resistance might she encounter?
- How can international education professionals advocate for students to get credit for short-term mobility experiences?
- How can short-term mobility experiences be integrated into degree curricula?
- Can international short-term mobility enhance the global ranking of a university?
- What are the benefits of an international internship in contrast to a study abroad program? What unique institutional barriers might short-term international internships encounter?
- How would you advise a student who is considering applying for an international internship? How would your advising differ if the program is highly competitive for admission?