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About CSIE

Case Studies in International Education (CSIE) is an open access, online, peer-reviewed publication that utilizes case studies for the development and advancement of the field. CSIE seeks to promote further professional development through engaging case study discussion. We offer publication opportunities for scholar-practitioners, including working professionals, faculty, and graduate students at CSIEpub.org. Each case study provides an opportunity to integrate theory and practice through interdisciplinary analysis/insight for the benefit of the field's future growth.

International education is defined by Punteney (2019) as "the profession of designing, managing, and facilitating programs and activities that help participants to appropriately, effectively, and ethically engage in interactions with culturally diverse people and ideas, often across national borders."

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Pills, Perception, and Perspective: A Host Family Pushes Back on a Student's Medical Plan

Kamryn Kinlow

Independent Author, New York, NY, USA

kamrynkilow@gmail.com

Tags

Crisis Management; Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Primary and Secondary Education

Setting

This case takes place within a short-term, faculty-led education abroad program for secondary school students in a Western European country. The program brings U.S. students to a European capital for six weeks in the summer. The program is designed to promote language acquisition, cultural immersion, and global awareness through homestays with local host families. Each student lives with a host parent who provides meals, cultural guidance, and daily support. A global education organization with on-site staff is accountable for student welfare, communication, and coordination between host families; and faculty oversee the teaching and curriculum.

Case

One of the participants, referred to here as Ava, was an American student with a documented anxiety disorder. Prior to the program, her parents informed the organization that Ava took prescribed medication daily to manage her condition. Her physician had approved travel and confirmed that her medication routine was stable. During the pre-departure orientation, staff reviewed the importance of communication, mental health awareness, and flexibility when adapting to a new environment.

Ava's host parent, Elena, had been hosting international students for nearly a decade. Known for her warmth and enthusiasm for cross-cultural learning, she had developed an approach to student support centered on CSIE cases are offered as professional development for readers and are not meant to focus on specific individuals or organizations. Names and other identifying details within the cases have been changed. In some instances, cases may have been amalgamated.

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structure, shared meals, and limited technology use. Elena spoke conversational English, and her primary languages were Spanish and German. The language gap between Elena and Ava occasionally led to miscommunication about expectations and routines, though both remained patient and respectful.

Within the first week, Ava began experiencing increased anxiety symptoms such as tension headaches, difficulty sleeping, and moments of overwhelm. She told the on-site staff that she was adjusting more slowly than expected and missed her family. The staff provided reassurance and encouraged her to continue practicing grounding strategies while communicating openly with her host parent.

However, tension emerged when Elena expressed concern over Ava's medication use. In her cultural context, medication for anxiety—particularly among adolescents—was viewed with skepticism. Elena believed that anxiety could be managed through routine, diet, and discipline rather than medical intervention. During a group meal, she gently suggested that Ava try “disconnecting from the pills” for a few days to see if she felt better naturally. Ava felt uncomfortable and confused, unsure how to respond without offending her host. She later contacted her father in the United States for advice and emotional support.

As days passed, Elena became increasingly frustrated with what she perceived as Ava's dependence on her phone and frequent family contact. She interpreted the calls home as avoidance of immersion, while Ava viewed them as necessary for managing her anxiety. Misunderstandings grew when Elena restricted phone use during the evenings, believing it would help Ava engage more with daily life. Ava, however, experienced heightened distress, describing feelings of isolation and panic during her check-in with the program staff.

The on-site program coordinator, Lucia, met separately with both Ava and Elena to better understand the situation. Elena reiterated her concern that the student's reliance on medication and phone calls was “not healthy.” Ava explained that her doctor had prescribed the medication and that taking it consistently was essential for her well-being. Lucia tried to mediate the cultural differences by acknowledging Elena's intentions to support student growth while emphasizing the importance of respecting medical needs.

Despite the discussion, the relationship between host and student remained strained. Ava began spending more time alone in her room, while Elena reported feeling uncertain about how to help. After consulting with the program's leadership team and Ava's family, the organization decided to relocate Ava to on-site housing for the remainder of the program. This move was presented as a neutral adjustment rather than a disciplinary measure. Ava expressed relief but also sadness that the homestay experience had not gone as planned.

Following the incident, the program team held an internal debrief to reflect on lessons learned. Questions emerged about how best to prepare host families for students with mental health needs, what level of disclosure was appropriate before placements, and how to balance cultural sensitivity with non-negotiable health requirements. Staff also discussed the growing need for mental health training among international education professionals, particularly as more students who have diagnoses and treatment plans study abroad.

This case illustrates the challenges that can arise when cultural beliefs about mental health intersect with the duty of care and student support. While both the student and host parent acted with genuine intentions, their

differing perceptions of wellness, independence, and care created a situation that required mediation, cultural humility, and swift decision-making.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In this case, there were differing beliefs about medication use. What other cultural beliefs could become a point of conflict in a homestay situation?
- Considering both this case and question 1, where should the line be drawn between a host parent's right to set house rules and a student's expectations?
- How should programs select host families that will support high school students? What criteria should they screen for? What ongoing monitoring is appropriate? How should programs review the host family's contributions before renewing their positions?
- How can programs prepare host families to understand the generational and social climate of the students they are hosting, rather than assuming shared norms?
- When should on-site staff intervene in cultural misunderstandings, and when might intervention unintentionally reinforce one cultural worldview over another?
- What mental health training would help support international education professionals?

Paving Purposeful Partnerships: Designing and Implementing Transnational Dual and Joint Degree Programs

Sara Ahmad

Admission Operations Credentials Analyst, Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, CA, USA

Email: sahmad@soka.edu

Tags

Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Enrollment Management; Internationalization and Global Learning; Leadership and Strategy; Management and Operations; Partnerships; Program Design; Student Learning and Development; University/Higher Education

Setting

Whitmore University, a small liberal arts institution in the United States, has a mission to cultivate global citizenship and foster intercultural learning. Study abroad, language immersion, and faculty-led international research are core components of the curriculum, and international students comprise a large proportion of the student body.

The Provost and international education leadership at Whitmore seek to expand international partnerships and offer students innovative academic pathways. Universidad de Castilla, a mid-sized public university in Spain and long-time study abroad partner, has proposed a dual Bachelor's degree in International Studies, in which students would spend two years at each institution and receive degrees from both. Students would complete core requirements at their home institution before transferring to the partner university for advanced coursework.

Case

Whitmore University stakeholders must make a decision about whether or not to enter into a transnational bachelor's degree partnership with Universidad de Castilla. Leaders at both institutions see great potential in the collaboration. Whitmore students would earn an international credential and gain access to a larger public university in Europe, while Castilla students would receive a U.S. credential from a respected liberal arts institution. Both institutions anticipate that the dual degree will enhance global branding and broaden recruitment pipelines.

Nonetheless, Whitmore faculty voice concern that Castilla's curriculum, while rigorous in International Relations, may not fully align with the liberal arts requirements at Whitmore. Maintaining academic standards is an institutional priority. Faculty also worry that advising responsibilities will increase as they help students to navigate two different curricular systems.

Admissions and registrar staff raise operational questions. How will GPA be calculated across two grading systems? How will course equivalencies and transfer credits be determined? Which institution will issue diplomas, and how will transcripts show both degrees? Without clear policies, staff warn that students could face confusion or misrepresentation of their academic achievements.

Students respond with mixed feelings. Some are excited about the possibility of studying in two countries and earning two degrees. Others are concerned about affordability, the applicability of financial aid abroad, credit transfer, and time to graduation. Some students wonder whether holding two bachelor's degrees would enhance career or graduate school opportunities. Preliminary surveys suggest stronger demand from Castilla students than from Whitmore students, raising questions about mobility balance.

Looking at broader implications, complicating factors and questions are numerous. Will U.S.-Spain political relations change in the upcoming years to affect program viability? How can the program be designed to benefit all students, not just financially advantaged students? Does a dual degree program reinforce the liberal arts mission, or could it dilute institutional identity?

The Provost views the dual degree program as a strategic opportunity to demonstrate Whitmore's commitment to global learning and enhance institutional prestige. Trustees, however, worry about reputational risk. If Universidad de Castilla were later perceived as lower quality, how might this affect Whitmore? Castilla leadership has its own priorities, expecting Whitmore to recruit actively and market the program enthusiastically.

After six months of deliberations, the Provost and Whitmore's Academic Affairs Council must make a final decision, should Whitmore proceed with the dual degree program, and if so, under what conditions? Stakeholders must balance visionary goals, such as international prestige, global learning, and expanded student opportunity, with practical considerations, including curriculum alignment, operational feasibility, workload, equity, and financial constraints.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the major advantages and potential challenges to joint and dual degree programs?
- What are traits of successful joint and dual degree programs?
- What governance structures or agreements (e.g., memoranda of understanding, curriculum committees) are needed to manage these transnational partnerships effectively?
- Are there ethical concerns about the proposed dual degree structure in this case?
- From a student perspective, does the opportunity to earn two degrees from two universities in two countries outweigh the challenges of such a program?
- Would inbound and outbound student mobility be balanced in a partnership such as this, and if not, how should differences be addressed?
- If Whitmore goes forward with the partnership, how could staff and faculty concerns about curriculum alignment and operations be managed while still supporting innovation and internationalization?
- Thinking about this case in its entirety, do you recommend that Whitmore move forward with the partnership? Why or why not?
- How might the equation change when discussing a dual MA, PhD, online, or any other transnational degree partnership? Would certain countries or academic fields pose unique challenges?

Building Global Knowledge Bridges: A Student-Led Library Initiative in Nigeria

Muhammad Aliyu

Carnegie Mellon University

Email: maliyu@andrew.cmu.edu

Tolulope Temitope Adegbayi

Hostel.ng, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: tolut.adegbayi@gmail.com

Ayobami Glory Olajide

Endeavor, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: gloryolajide7@gmail.com

Chika Ike, PHRi

Nigerian University of Technology and Management (NUTM)

Email: chika.ike@nutm.edu.ng

Samuel Ayokunmi Adesanwo

UVEST Realty Limited, Ogun, Nigeria

Email: adesanwosamuel0@gmail.com

Tags

Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Internationalization and Global Learning; Leadership and Strategy; Management and Operations; Partnerships; University/Higher Education

Setting

This case at AITM, a higher education institution in Lagos founded in 2020, highlights growth amid challenges in infrastructure, funding, and resources. AITM aims to train future leaders in technology and management, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs, especially in technology, business, and leadership. Its flagship Scholar Program (SP) selects top students for full scholarships and expects excellence. Despite

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recent investments in digital tech and faculty, traditional resources like libraries remain limited. The case unfolds within broader African higher education struggles to balance technological innovation with conventional resources and to meet international standards amid local infrastructure issues.

Case

Folake was browsing her digital course materials on her tablet, reminiscing about her undergraduate days at Eagles University library, which she felt was a hub of global knowledge. Working late on a group assignment in the Accra breakout room, Praise shared that he missed having access to a real university library, unlike the outdated textbooks at his secondary school. They discussed how, despite AITM's global ambitions, it lacked a resource library, an essential tool for critical thinking. That night, instead of finishing their tasks, they drafted a proposal for a new AITM library to serve as a knowledge hub supporting the institute's mission. They planned to frame it as a student-led project aligning with AITM's goal of developing global leaders and enhancing its reputation.

The following morning, they sent their proposal via email to Dr. Okonkwo, the Academic Director, and Professor Mensah, the Dean of Student Affairs. To their surprise, they received a reply that same afternoon asking for a meeting. "Your proposal comes at the right time," Dr. Okonkwo told them during their meeting three days later. "While we have been busy building our digital infrastructure, I have always valued physical books and library spaces," he added. Professor Mensah remarked, "This type of student initiative exemplifies the leadership qualities we aim to cultivate at AITM. We will provide a room and offer some initial support, but the ongoing development and management will be your responsibility."

Encouraged by this endorsement, Folake and Praise swiftly assembled a team. Ngozi, recognized for her organizational abilities, joined as Operations Lead. David, with prior experience in public relations, took responsibility for communications and outreach. They developed a shared document detailing their action plan and roles. Their initial campaign concentrated on internal donations. David created digital posters, which were circulated across AITM's platforms, bearing the slogan "Build Knowledge, Book by Book."

The response surpassed their expectations. Within two weeks, faculty members donated over 30 books. Dr. Balogun, a visiting management consulting professor trained in Europe, contributed a set of business strategy books. "This is about educational equity," he told the team. "When I was a student in the UK, the library was my refuge. African institutions need these spaces as much as Western ones to prepare students for the global stage." The initiative gained further support when Professor Adichie, an internationally renowned author, visited AITM for a leadership talk. Inspired by the students' enthusiasm, she donated signed copies of her books and promoted their project on her social media channels, encouraging donations from her worldwide followers.

As their collection expanded, challenges arose. In a team meeting in August, these issues became evident. Ngozi emphasized, "We need to consider sustainability," noting, "Our intake is 50 scholars annually. How will we sustain this after graduation next year?" David pointed out another concern: "Most of our books are on business and literature, but since we're a technology institute, we also need technical resources, which tend to be costly international publications." The team discussed how to allocate their limited space and resources.

They debated whether to prioritize academic texts or include materials for personal growth. They also considered how to balance physical books with digital resources within their space limitations.

Their discussions became more intricate once external stakeholders engaged. A local tech firm, inspired by the project, proposed a donation on the condition that it primarily fund materials for computer science and engineering. This led to an internal debate over balancing financial urgency with curriculum autonomy. "We need the funding," David stated. "Technology resources are costly but essential for global employment." Folake responded, "However, accepting conditional donations might skew our collection toward an external, possibly foreign-influenced, focus. We must ensure balanced resources reflecting AITM's comprehensive vision for African leadership."

By the start of Fall 2023, their collection had expanded to 124 titles, and the library was increasingly popular among students. Requests for access from students outside their program grew, prompting questions about the library's overall scope and purpose. Praise recommended creating a formal governance structure, such as a rotating committee of current scholars, to manage the library until AITM could hire a professional librarian. Conversely, some were concerned about maintaining consistency amid changing leadership and advocated for greater administrative involvement.

Meanwhile, two promising partnership opportunities arose. RovingBooks, Nigeria's largest bookstore chain, expressed interest in supplying discounted books to the library. Additionally, Wellington Polytechnic Institute in the UK provided virtual guidance on setting up proper cataloging systems, providing a straightforward path to implementing international library standards.

A new opportunity emerged when Professor Mensah arranged for Folake and Praise to spend two weeks observing library operations at a TIM (a U.S. university library) as part of a global exchange program. This was seen as an opportunity to compare AITM's efforts with international standards and to learn best practices in digital and physical integration. However, the trip was planned for the end of the trimester, coinciding with a crucial book donation drive and final exams. The team needed to determine how to maximize the learning opportunity without disrupting their ongoing activities or causing resentment among non-participating scholars.

As Folake, Praise, and their team contemplated these opportunities and challenges, they recognized that their modest initiative had evolved into something more significant: a case study in cross-cultural resource acquisition, institutional internationalization, and the management of global exchange opportunities.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How should Folake and Praise approach the two-week U.S. university exchange to extract maximum value given the time constraints?
- What cross-cultural principles should guide the team when engaging with both the U.S. university and the Wellington Polytechnic Institute (UK) to ensure that the imported library standards are appropriately adapted to the Nigerian academic context and to AITM's resource-constrained environment?

- What are the ethical considerations of sending only two student leaders on a highly selective, expensive international exchange program, and how should the team manage the perception of the opportunity among the wider student body?
- How can the team strategically balance the need for globally-sourced academic knowledge with the imperative to curate content that is culturally relevant and supports an African-centric curriculum?
- How might international exchanges contribute to global power imbalances? How can program designers control for this issue?
- What structure would best ensure both student ownership and long-term sustainability of the library initiative while also facilitating its growth toward international academic standards?
- What role do student-led initiatives play in building institutional capacity and driving the internationalization of emerging higher education systems? What are the benefits and potential pitfalls of this approach?
- This case involved an initiative that started as a spark of an idea and was given encouragement to grow. This can be contrasted with internationalization initiatives that start with defined goals and benchmarks. What examples can you share of emergent initiatives that grew larger than expected and had positive impacts? How does a leader recognize those initiatives and give them space and support?

Tutoring on the Margins: Supporting a Migrant Student as a Visiting Educator

Robert Broom

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Austria; M.A. Candidate, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, United States

Email: rbroom@middlebury.edu

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Ethics, Equity and Social Justice; Language Education; Primary and Secondary Education; Student Learning and Development

Setting

This case took place in an all-girls Catholic secondary school in Austria. The events occurred in the early 2010s, within a classroom environment in a mid-sized Austrian city. Unlike in the United States, Austrian students stayed in the same classroom all day while teachers rotated in and out. Teachers shared long tables in a common lounge, where reputations circulated quickly. This system fostered both familiarity and hierarchy, as teachers' shared impressions could influence how students were treated across subjects. These informal networks functioned as an unwritten governance system—an example of how micro-cultures within schools can regulate belonging and marginality without explicit policy. Such shared impressions often extended beyond social gossip, subtly shaping professional reputations and even influencing evaluative decisions—a reminder of how informal culture can quietly steer formal outcomes.

The classrooms were teacher-centered: students sat at rectangular desks, three to a table, lined up side by side. The rooms were small and tightly arranged, making interaction limited and lessons largely lecture-based. During English lessons, most students copied notes in silence while only one or two answered questions—a structure that left little space for quieter voices to emerge.

As a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA), my role was to prepare students for the oral-proficiency

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portion of the *Matura*, Austria's rigorous university entrance exam. We discussed topics such as gun control, the U.S. electoral system, healthcare, and comparative education. Unlike my Austrian colleagues, I had no grading authority and held limited influence over curricular decisions—boundaries that shaped how I could intervene in students' learning experiences. From the outset, I was aware that my position as a foreign teaching assistant came with both symbolic privilege and structural powerlessness. This lack of institutional authority would later complicate my ethical decision-making as I tried to support a student within a system that constrained my role. This case reflects a core dilemma within international education practice—how visiting educators navigate equity, professionalism, and cultural partnership across differing educational systems.

Case

Among the upper-secondary students I taught was an Eastern European learner who rarely spoke in class, Simona. A colleague who also taught her English class frequently remarked on the student's socioeconomic background and questioned her language skills. In front of classmates, the teacher sometimes contrasted her performance with that of a more fluent peer, setting a benchmark that made Simona feel perpetually “less than.” The air in the room would tense for a moment, the silence heavy with embarrassment—a reminder of how easily comparison could wound in a public space. At times, she responded with quiet humor or a small smile—subtle gestures of resistance that hinted at both resilience and fatigue within the rigid classroom hierarchy.

Later, the teacher explained, “She's bright, but she needs extra support. If she fails the *Matura*, her options will be limited.” I sensed that the teacher's comment came from genuine concern; however, it was one framed by deficit assumptions. Valencia (1997) describes deficit thinking as the way in which teachers' well-meaning judgments can unintentionally frame students' backgrounds as barriers rather than assets. Privately, Simona admitted how painful those public comparisons were. “It feels like no matter what I say, it's not good enough,” she told me one afternoon. Students in this system remained in the same classroom all day, so there was no easy way to escape those dynamics. At the same time, I recognized that what appeared as deficit thinking might also reflect systemic pressures—teachers navigating accountability metrics and exam outcomes that leave little space for differentiated empathy. Each actor in this scenario—the student, the teacher, and I—was negotiating institutional pressures larger than any single classroom, a reminder that even well-intentioned educators can become constrained by the systems they inhabit.

At the teacher's request, I began tutoring Simona after school in a quiet space on campus, often in an otherwise empty building. In those sessions, I encountered a very different learner. Though her pronunciation blended elements of her heritage language and local Austrian German, her sentences were clear and thoughtful. Her ease in this one-to-one setting revealed how institutional design, not individual deficit, often determines who gets heard. When gaps appeared, I offered short translations, which Simona quickly absorbed. Interestingly, she drew comparisons across her three languages, using multilingualism as a bridge—an example of what Yosso (2005) describes as linguistic and navigational capital. These insights made me wonder how the trust and intellectual risk-taking that emerged in one-to-one tutoring could be translated into a full-class context—what structural or pedagogical conditions would allow similar growth for all students?

While our sessions were meant to prepare her for the *Matura*, they soon expanded into conversations about

politics, education, and social issues. In these dialogues, Simona's confidence and critical thinking flourished. The paradox grew sharper each week: in private, she revealed intellectual curiosity and courage; in class, she remained constrained by comparison culture and deficit narratives. Yet I also recognized that my individualized support could be perceived as favoritism—an ethical tension that complicated my efforts to advocate for her within institutional norms. Other teachers began questioning why I was giving Simona “special help,” even though the arrangement had been approved. This scrutiny reminded me that allyship within hierarchical cultures can be perceived as deviance, illustrating how professional boundaries can inadvertently protect bias under the guise of neutrality.

As trust deepened, I also became more aware of the ethical tightrope between advocacy and overstepping my role. The school's Catholic ethos of humility and obedience—intersecting with gendered expectations of quietness—further complicated the space for resistance. At this turning point, I wrestled with competing responsibilities: Should I continue tutoring her privately, honoring her progress? Or, should I confront the teacher's bias and risk conflict? Could I find new ways for Simona's voice to emerge in the classroom without singling her out as ‘different’? The dilemma also raised a broader question: when institutional expectations collide with moral obligation, whose definition of professionalism ultimately prevails? This question echoed broader ethical debates in intercultural education: whether moral courage requires quiet subversion or visible confrontation. Taken together, these moments reveal how structural power, professional identity, and moral agency intersect in cross-cultural education, challenging educators to reflect critically on their own boundaries and values.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How do educational structures, such as teacher-centered classrooms, fixed student groups, and reputational staff cultures shape opportunities and limitations for students from migration-related backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants, children of migrants, and refugees?
- How can international staff in state-sponsored international education programs (such as Fulbright, the Peace Corps, or the JET Program) navigate cultural differences and professional hierarchies while maintaining collegial respect and professional integrity? What training or supervision structures could help international educators negotiate such ethical gray zones?
- What ethical responsibilities does an international educator have when asked to support students by an institution whose culture perpetuates deficit narratives? Based on your answer, what challenges might an educator face?
- How can educators reframe a multilingual student's language repertoire as an asset rather than a deficit? How can they reinforce this mindset in the classroom?
- How might the culture of an all-girls faith-based school influence comparison, conformity, and authority in the classroom? What pedagogical approaches could expand space for diverse voices in such environments?

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Crisis Management during Political Unrest: Coordinating Evacuations during Winter Break

Samuel Gras

Associate Director, Global Safety & Security, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA

Email: samuel.gras@bc.edu

Tags

Crisis-Management; Education Abroad; Management and Operations; University/Higher Education

Setting

Prison riots, escalating gang violence, and a rapid deterioration of safety conditions leads a South American country to declare a state of emergency and enforce a curfew. At the same time, a university has three distinct programs occurring there with more than fifty students, four faculty leaders, two program partners, and one resident director. There is one spring semester study abroad program with four students in homestays and a resident director, and two faculty-led experiential learning programs during Winter Break—one with a program provider and the other with a volunteer service-learning organization. The person at the university responsible for the safety of international travelers coordinates the response with the trip leaders, program managers, study abroad office, insurance company, on-campus offices, security assistance company, travel agent, and travel committee.

Case

Day One (Monday)

News reports start coming in of ongoing riots in prisons across a South American country. Prison officials and police officers have reportedly been taken hostage. Riots broke out after the leader of a prominent criminal group escaped the previous day during a scheduled transfer to a different prison.

While the capital city and touristic offshore islands had remained suitably safe for educational travel, conditions overall were on a negative trendline; with growing links between local criminal groups, international drug-trafficking routes, and powerful cartels in other countries—particularly along the coastal provinces—with

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the largest coastal town becoming one of the most dangerous cities in the world. As risks from criminal groups increased, there had also been increased political instability and violence (e.g. mayors, officials, and even a presidential candidate assassinated the previous year); a significant downturn in economic conditions since the pandemic; and hydroelectric energy challenges resulting from drought; all of which compounded to create conditions conducive to the outbreak of a more generalized and nation-wide state of unsafe travel conditions.

After learning about the developing situation, the International Travel Risk Coordinator communicated with the study abroad advisor and program managers who had students in the country, and requested an update from the local resident director and on-site faculty trip leaders. Later that evening, the government declared a state of emergency and announced the imposition of a curfew from 11:00pm-05:00am. The Coordinator sent updates to all travelers, the university's travel committee, and had a phone discussion about the situation with the program managers.

Day Two (Tuesday)

Tuesday morning, the resident director and trip leaders were still reporting that the situation remained calm in the capital despite the curfew and prison riots: *"all good here, no sign at all of the prison issue or impact on our itinerary."* At 03:00pm, armed groups in masks took hostages in the newsroom on live TV in the coastal city. The video was shared widely across social media platforms and international news channels. The Coordinator contacted the university's travel insurance and assistance provider to start a new case should a decision be made to initiate an evacuation. An update was sent to the travel committee, program managers, and travelers that the situation was quickly deteriorating to the point where safe educational travel was not viable for the time being. The recommendation was for everyone to consolidate, shelter in place at their current location, and wait for further updates.

At 04:40pm, the President declared an internal armed conflict against criminal groups. Soon thereafter, one of the trip leaders reported that their program partner was now recommending to stop the program and depart early. The Coordinator convened a Zoom meeting with key stakeholders. Both short-term winter programs requested for their groups to be evacuated. The four students on a semester-long study abroad program with a resident director were provided with the option to depart early or continue to shelter-in-place until conditions improved. The resident director reported that the disturbances remained outside the capital city and the students were safe and well-provisioned in their homestays.

The Coordinator gathered copies of everyone's passports from the travel registry and provided them to the security assistance provider to arrange flight departures. One of the programs had used a travel agency for their original flights, so a request was also made with the travel agency, to see which resource could secure flights the soonest. A request was also made through the assistance provider for secure ground transportation to the airport.

Day Three (Wednesday)

At 01:40am, the travel agency reported having flights arranged for the first group for departure on Thursday.

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A message was received around 07:30am from the assistance provider that they were having difficulty arranging flights for the second group, but that they were able to arrange ground transportation. Frustrations began to be voiced about the time it was taking to secure departing flight tickets, and one of the trip leaders reported that several students bought their own flight tickets online. The Coordinator encouraged the trip leaders to do their best to keep everyone together while arrangements were made for the entire group. An emergency meeting was held with the travel committee to discuss options and the cost of arranging a charter flight. It was decided that if flights couldn't be arranged for the second group quickly, a decision would need to be made by the end of the day to pay for a charter flight. The Coordinator communicated with other universities who had students in the country to discuss a potential collaboration on a charter flight for anyone with travelers needing to depart. Between 02:30-04:00pm, the Coordinator fielded calls from six very concerned parents, including one who had seen the video of the hostage taking at the TV station, and who were fearful that they were never going to see their child again.

Throughout the day, coordination occurred with on-campus resources in student affairs and resident life to arrange lodging accommodations and counseling support for returning students. At 04:09pm, the travel agency was able to secure tickets for the second group on two departing flights scheduled for Friday. An update with the itineraries and transportation pickup time was provided to the students, trip leaders, travel committee, program managers, and parents.

Day Four (Thursday)

At 02:35pm, confirmation was received from the secure transportation company that the first group had arrived safely at the airport. An update was provided to their parents. During the day, one semester-long study abroad participant decided to depart early. Flight arrangements were made for the student. The remaining three study abroad students decided to stay in their homestays and complete the semester program with the support of the resident director. Buses were chartered to pick up each returning group at the airport upon arrival in the USA for transportation back to campus.

Day Five (Friday)

The first group returned to campus at 11:30am. They were picked up with vans arranged by campus police for transportation to their dormitories. The Coordinator confirmed each arriving student by checking their name off a roster as they exited the bus. At 02:10pm, confirmation was provided by the secure transportation company that the second group was safe at the airport waiting for departing flights. Updates were sent to everyone. Of the original 33 students in the second group, six made their own flight arrangements and departed early.

Day Six (Saturday)

At 04:30am, the Coordinator met the first arrivals from the second group, and then the final arrivals at 09:30am. Each student and faculty were welcomed back to campus and the full roster was confirmed for 100% accountability. A final update was sent to the travel committee, university leadership, program managers, and university communications office. One of the groups met that evening to hold a religious gathering and group reflection.

Counseling and support resources were provided to all students and staff. The Coordinator took the next Monday off as a rest day. The three students who remained successfully completed their semester-long program without any safety incidents.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are some indicators to monitor at study abroad destinations for the risk of significant political unrest and criminal violence? What conditions at a location differentiate between political unrest, crime, and protests at a level that is acceptable for educational travel with those that are unacceptable?
- To what extent should university administrators, program managers, and study abroad professionals prepare students during pre-departure orientation for a shelter-in-place or evacuation scenario? How can they best prepare resident directors and trip leaders?
- What methods and technologies could work best for communicating with people across countries during a crisis, given the potentially complicating factors of different time zones, business hours, system shutdowns, and the high level of urgency?
- What leadership methods or group dynamics could be used to keep the group together and prevent some students from making their own flight arrangements, if that is the university's goal? Under what circumstances would keeping the group together be a priority? When might it not be?
- In a similar crisis situation, what kind of communication between the university and the students' parents would be appropriate and ideal? Are there any legal concerns?
- What support resources were essential for the students on the semester-long program to be allowed to remain until conditions improved? Do you think that they should have been required to evacuate early with the students on the short-term programs?
- What could have been done better or differently during this scenario? What went well? What could've gone much worse? Did the university fully meet its duty of care responsibilities?
- What are some self-care methods for people in crisis management positions?

Not So Clear Cut: What to Prioritize for Internationalization-at-Home

Joseph G. Hoff

Director of the Global Learning Office, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA
jhoff1@charlotte.edu

Tags

Internationalization and Global Learning; Leadership and Strategy; Program Assessment; University/Higher Education

Setting

A large U.S. research university has turned to Internationalization at Home (IaH) initiatives to reach their students who do not study abroad. While they have 25,000 undergraduates, only 9% of them study abroad. To accomplish the university's internationalization goals, they must focus on IaH initiatives to reach the other 91% of students. IaH focuses on embedding global learning through the curriculum, campus events, and residential life and is another tool institutions may use to give students the intercultural competencies they need to be career ready for the global workforce. While not as well-known as education abroad, IaH initiatives have the potential to be more embedded across the institution with broader impact.

Case

William is the Senior International Officer with responsibility for comprehensive internationalization, including overseeing IaH initiatives. In many institutions, only a percentage of US students are able to study abroad. And yet, part of the mission of international programs offices and institutions is to prepare our students, all students, with global competencies for work in the global economy. Thus, internationalization-at-home initiatives are important to engage those students who are unable to go abroad.

Over the years, the portfolio has grown to include a range of programming that could be classified as intensive, medium-level, or basic-level in terms of its effect on participating students. Unfortunately, as the university faces budget cuts, William is tasked by the Provost with cutting the budget for internationalization-at-home

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initiatives by 30%. Considering the dilemma, William weighs which programs could be cut with the least negative impact.

Internationalization-at-home (IaH), as with all international education programming, involves the dedication of resources, including staff/faculty time and financial resources. IaH has been defined as "...the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Program offering decisions are often made based on how many participants a program engages, what type of effect the program has on the participants, and the cost benefit of the program, amongst other things. In addition, the programs must be evaluated for effectiveness. This implies then that staff must have the capacity and financial means to assess a program.

If one refers to all international education programming as part of a larger "Global Learning Ecosystem" (Gobbo & Hoff, 2020), then the effects of different programming can be categorized into three levels based on the depth of student learning:

- intensive-level global learning (e.g. collaborative on-line international learning (COIL));
- medium-level global learning (e.g. a residential program where international students and U.S. students live together, or a certificate program that involves co-curricular and possibly academic components); or
- basic-level global learning (e.g. globally-focused lecture series, international coffee hours where U.S. students meet international students, or a large cultural festival).

William must evaluate each IaH program on campus to make his decision. He will have to determine his primary assessment factors, such as attendance count and learning outcomes. He worries that some of the data may be unavailable or incomplete. In addition, William considers other aspects related to IaH programs such as the university's strategic plan, the mission of the office, available resources, institutional history and politics, and more. The decision weighs heavily on his mind.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- When considering budget cuts, which decision metrics are the most important? Quantity of participants, depth of learning, staff effort, program prestige that might lead to funding/donations, mission alignment, or other criteria?
- When considering budget cuts, is it important to keep programs that might engage faculty, for example, COIL programs?
- When considering budget cuts, should William prioritize preserving programs that have been a long-standing tradition on campus?
- When planning IaH, how can you customize internationalization efforts to the specific needs and makeup of the student population?

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- How can a university's mission statement and academic focus impact the direction of IaH efforts? For example, if you work at a liberal arts college versus a STEM-focused university, what programming would you emphasize?

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From Lecturer to Learner: Navigating Role Reversal in a U.S. Graduate Classroom

Arwin Ahmad Mitu

M.A. Candidate, Educational Leadership and Societal Change

arwin.mcj@gmail.com

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; International Student and Scholar Services; Student Learning and Development; University/Higher Education

Setting

My background is as a lecturer in mass communication in Bangladesh. In order to pursue a masters degree in Educational Leadership and Societal Change, I moved to the U.S. and became a graduate student. In Bangladesh, I was used to standing at the front of a classroom, guiding students through lectures, and managing large classes of forty or more. Upon arrival, I was on the other side of the classroom, no longer the teacher but a student.

Case

At my U.S. university, I am the only student from Bangladesh. While diversity is celebrated, the absence of peers with similar cultural backgrounds often leaves me feeling isolated. Friends from Nigeria, the Philippines, and Uzbekistan share similar experiences, each of us adapting in our own way while missing our food, language, and sense of belonging. Upon arrival, we attended a rigorous week of orientation, but none of the sessions allowed us to voice our emotional or cultural needs. We were told about coping with culture shock but never given space to express what that felt like.

As an international student, I have to manage the practical realities of living in a new country: finding on-campus employment, obtaining a Social Security Number, and adapting to unfamiliar systems. These

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pressures exist alongside my coursework and emotional adjustment. In addition, many graduate students, including myself, arrived with years of professional experience, yet we receive the same hourly wage as undergraduate students, about \$16 per hour for on-campus jobs. For international students managing living expenses in California, this income barely covers basic costs. This situation reveals a more profound concern: institutional structures sometimes overlook the financial and personal realities of international graduate students, particularly those who are older or supporting families.

Challenges extend into the classroom. Although my professors and classmates are welcoming and kind, everything around me felt unfamiliar at first. The pedagogy, the classroom structure, and even the rhythm of academic life are all different. My classes in the U.S. often have only six students and last for three hours, compared to the one-hour lectures I used to give back home. With smaller classes, there is no place to hide. Engagement is constant, reflection is profound, and silence feels heavier. The American classroom encourages open discussion, continuous participation, and critical questioning. In contrast, the Bangladeshi classroom is hierarchical, structured, memorization-based, and exam-oriented. I initially found it overwhelming to speak up so often or to be challenged by peers. Back home, silence is a form of respect; here, it is perceived as disengagement.

This shift forced me to rethink my understanding of what it means to “learn” and to “lead.” I realized that leadership in education is not about holding authority but about creating shared spaces for growth. The participatory learning culture I encountered taught me that every voice contributes to the collective understanding. Gradually, I began to engage more, not by abandoning my cultural identity, but by integrating the respectful listening of my past with the active dialogue of my present.

Through this transition, I have come to see education as a continuous act of cultural negotiation and self-discovery. The move from lecturer to learner reshaped not only my understanding of pedagogy but also my sense of self. It reminded me that openness, vulnerability, and adaptability are essential qualities of effective leadership and cross-cultural learning.

I also realized that institutions could better support international students by creating spaces for emotional connection, pedagogical orientation, and intercultural learning. Integration is not just academic; it is also personal, social, and deeply human.

In this journey of adjustment and self-discovery, I recently joined the Graduate Executive Council of my university. This role provides an opportunity to contribute to building the very sense of community and support I once longed for. My personal transition into student leadership and shared governance reminds me that the most meaningful learning occurs when we use our experiences to empower others.

Today, I see my journey not as losing one identity for another, but as gaining the ability to move fluidly between them. My experience as a Bangladeshi lecturer and an American graduate student has taught me that true leadership begins with empathy and the willingness to understand and value both sides of the classroom.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How can universities design orientation programs that address not just logistics but also the emotional and cultural needs of international students?
- How can universities continue to provide support to their international students throughout their program, beyond the orientation?
- In what ways can institutions recognize and value the professional experience of international graduate students?
- How should compensation rates for on-campus jobs be established? Are the needs of the specific employees relevant? What expectations about on-campus employment should be communicated to international students in advance of their arrival?
- What actions can be taken by newly-arrived international students to help them adjust to a new teaching environment? What steps can the university, the faculty, and the host country students take to offer support?
- How might educators adapt their teaching practices to bridge the gap between hierarchical and participatory learning cultures?
- How can international students advocate for themselves and each other?

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

Hazel Siromoni

Pro Vice Chancellor, Strategic Initiatives, Chitkara University, Punjab, India

hazel.siromoni@chitkara.edu.in

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?

“Everything You Do Reflects On Us”: Student Leaders Serving as Informal International Diplomats for their University

Muhammad Aliyu

Carnegie Mellon University

Email: maliyu@andrew.cmu.edu

Rasheed Mudasiru

Federal University of Technology, Minna

Email: rasheed.m1802463@st.futminna.edu.ng

Taoheed Abdulraheem

Federal University of Technology, Minna

Email: t.abdulraheem@3mtt.fmcide.gov.ng

Tags

Citizen Diplomacy/Education Diplomacy; Cross-Cultural Issues; Internationalization and Global Learning; Partnerships; Leadership and Strategy; Student Learning and Development; University/Higher Education

Setting

At a higher education institution in Nigeria that attracts international students from around the region, two students, Aremu and Jalani, frequently served as student ambassadors at international events. Aremu participated extensively in student innovation networks and educational communities, representing his university at national and international programs focused on technology and entrepreneurship. Jalani, a development and operations engineer and developer advocate, engaged in international conferences and partnerships that linked his university with industry sponsors and other academic institutions.

Both individuals were regarded as the public face of their universities, despite limited formal preparation for these responsibilities. Their experiences illustrate the increasing expectation for student leaders to function as

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cultural and institutional diplomats, navigating complex intersections of personal beliefs, global identity, and professional obligations. The experiences of Aremu and Jalani underscore the balance between institutional objectives and personal integrity, as well as the opportunities and risks associated with visibility in international arenas.

Case

Aremu first experienced the weight of representation when his department nominated him to lead a student technology community. What began as organizing workshops quickly became a test of diplomacy. Faculty reminded him that “everything you do reflects on us.” That message stayed with him.

When Aremu attended a national innovation summit, he realized that his institutional reputation traveled with him. Every introduction, question, and handshake carried implicit meaning. Later, when he represented his university at a European conference, he prepared thoroughly by watching videos on intercultural communication, revising his slides, and even researching local etiquette. “I wanted to be ready,” he said, “not because I was afraid to fail, but because I knew people like me rarely got a second chance.”

His preparation yielded positive outcomes. By demonstrating professionalism and humility, he established connections with scholars and policymakers who had not previously interacted with young African presenters. Aremu recognized that representation extends beyond personal achievement to challenging prevailing assumptions regarding capability and credibility.

For Jalani, institutional representation required managing the expectations of multiple stakeholders simultaneously. University leadership wanted Jalani to increase institutional visibility and potential partnerships by delivering impressive presentations. Peers and classmates wanted him to identify internships, funding, or exchange opportunities and serve as a “bridge” to external programs. Sponsors and partners wanted him to promote brand values by publicly endorsing products. All the while, Jalani also had his own personal ethics and identity that he wanted to stay true to. These pressures were persistent, though seldom explicitly acknowledged.

At one event, an international sponsor distributed materials promoting a social campaign that conflicted with his religious beliefs. Rather than avoid the issue or challenge it openly, Jalani reframed his message around respect and inclusion. “I learned that diplomacy is not silence,” he reflected. “It is finding words that build bridges instead of walls.”

He faced additional challenges when peers tried to turn a professional forum into a platform for political advocacy. Balancing solidarity and neutrality, he emphasized their collective mission and redirected discussions toward learning and collaboration. Each scenario required empathy, composure, and adherence to core values.

Both Aremu and Jalani observed that success in international contexts frequently relies on understanding implicit norms and demonstrating cultural competence. Appropriate attire, clear communication free of local colloquialisms, and recognition of others’ expertise serve as indicators of professionalism.

Their awareness also encompassed digital environments. During a virtual hackathon, a participant alleged bias by the organizing team due to not everyone receiving souvenirs by mistake. The complaint rapidly spread on social media, jeopardizing the organization's credibility. Jalani and Aremu coordinated a transparent response, clarified event procedures, and issued an apology for the oversight. This incident, which could have escalated into a public relations crisis, instead served as a lesson in digital diplomacy. Subsequently, they established communication protocols to mitigate future occurrences.

The most significant challenges arose from ethical ambiguities rather than technical issues. When Aremu's association received a limited number of corporate scholarships, he faced pressure to prioritize his home university. Instead, he implemented transparent merit-based criteria, despite potential unpopularity with his home university.

Jalani faced similar dilemmas in balancing innovation with compliance. University policy required all external communication to go through formal channels, which slowed projects but ensured accountability. When a sponsor pushed for immediate publicity, he chose to wait for approval, protecting both his team and his institution. These moments highlighted that ethical leadership in academia sometimes means delaying success to preserve trust.

Despite their dedication, both students noted limited formal recognition. The university referenced Aremu only indirectly in institutional reports, while Jalani's achievements were publicly acknowledged but seldom attributed to him. Over time, both recognized that the primary impact resided in institutional learning rather than individual visibility.

Now at the end of their studies, Jalani and Aremu look back on their experiences and feel like the university could have done a better job supporting them for their informal student ambassador role. They recommend that universities should regard student representation as structured experiential learning rather than informal goodwill. They brainstormed potential measures, including the following:

- Pre-departure workshops on intercultural communication
- Mentorship programs that pair returning students with new delegates
- Conduct post-event debriefs to capture key lessons and reflections
- A digital repository of "student diplomacy cases" for training

As Jalani put it, "If we learn from every trip and every mistake, the next one becomes a better opportunity to grow and to represent." For Aremu and Jalani, representation served as a form of leadership education. Their experiences demonstrated that students frequently act as their universities' most visible ambassadors, regardless of formal designation. Each communication and presentation contributed to the institution's reach in ways that traditional marketing cannot achieve.

They assert that universities should formally recognize this influence while enabling students to maintain authenticity. Excessive structuring may transform genuine engagement into mere performance. Institutions should instead offer guidance, ethics training, and reflective platforms that foster student agency.

Aremu summarized it best: “We were never trained to be diplomats, yet that is exactly what we became.”

Their experiences suggest that diplomacy originates in educational settings, including classrooms, conferences, and community venues, where students learn to represent broader interests. With appropriate support, students can serve as ambassadors that benefit both institutions and the students themselves.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How can student leaders like Aremu and Jalani balance personal beliefs, institutional expectations, and sponsor interests when representing their universities internationally?
- What responsibilities do universities have in preparing and supporting students who act as informal diplomats in global forums?
- In what ways can cultural misunderstandings or ethical conflicts be transformed into meaningful learning experiences for both students and institutions?
- How can student experiences abroad be captured, shared, and documented to strengthen future global engagement efforts?
- Should universities formalize student representation as part of their international relations strategy, or keep it informal to preserve authenticity and flexibility?

You've Won the Lottery: Staff Capacity Limitations End High-Contact Selection

Caro Zeiher

(Formerly) Global Competitions and Program Coordinator, Global Business Center, Foster School of Business, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

Email: caroline.zeiher@gmail.com

Tags

Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Management and Operations; Student Services; Technology; University/Higher Education

Setting

This case takes place within a large public university's business school that enrolls approximately 550–650 undergraduate students per cohort. The school maintains a small, dedicated global programs office that manages study abroad opportunities for business students. This office operates separately from the university's central study abroad office, granting it partial autonomy over advising and program oversight.

Among its offerings, a ten-week program in Western Europe has earned enduring popularity and strong student word-of-mouth. Each term, about 100-200 applicants compete for 20–30 available spaces. For many years, the global programs office coordinators have manually reviewed application essays and conducted group interviews of all candidates. There is an initial selection and then several rounds of selection from a lengthy waitlist, when initial offers are not accepted. This process can take several months. Applicants who are not selected sometimes then apply to other available study abroad programs, but others elect to stay on the home campus. Unfortunately, other programs are left wondering if they will be able to meet their enrollment minimums as the selection process drags on and they wait in hopes of waitlist referrals.

Case

To address both staff workload capacity and equitable admission considerations, the business school's global programs office implemented several procedural changes in collaboration with the third-party provider. The most significant adjustment was replacing the traditional essay-and-interview selection process with a randomized lottery system. This shift aimed to reduce staff workload and eliminate implicit bias in selection outcomes. This reform reflects principles of procedural fairness and efficiency but may also reduce opportunities for student engagement, as suggested by Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984). Early results indicated that admitted students' GPA distribution and other demographic characteristics remained consistent with prior application cycles.

Additionally, the office transitioned from in-person pre-departure orientations to asynchronous virtual modules. Previously, these sessions provided opportunities for discussion-based learning and activities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in intercultural contexts. While effective, the sessions required substantial staff time and coordination. The pre-recorded format was introduced to streamline operations and ensure consistent content delivery across terms.

Over successive application cycles, several unintended consequences became apparent. Without in-person interactions, students demonstrated lower engagement with informational materials, resulting in repetitive advising questions – especially about course approvals, degree applicability, and funding. The reduction in staff-to-student contact also limited opportunities for holistic assessment of student readiness. The loss of synchronous dialogue lessened chances for intercultural reflection and ethical advising conversations that shape professional readiness. This shift challenged the advisor's understanding of their role as a mentor who cultivates student learning and self-authorship.

An additional trend involved a modest increase in applicants with prior academic or conduct concerns. Although all students are screened and cleared by the university's central study abroad office, the absence of interviews and live discussions made it more difficult for program staff to qualitatively evaluate individual motivation and growth. In earlier cycles, students met multiple times with program coordinators through interviews, advising appointments, and in-person orientations. These touchpoints helped establish rapport, set expectations, and foster community among participants. Under the virtual model, student responsiveness declined. Fewer students completed required provider registration and visa documentation by the established deadlines, and withdrawals later in the process became more frequent.

Both the coordinator and provider noted that especially when it came to steps where both the provider and university study abroad office had to enforce contractual accountability of pre-departure tasks, student accountability appeared to have weakened. This raised concerns that the loss of personal connection and real-time engagement might be contributing to procedural noncompliance and reduced overall preparedness.

Despite these challenges, the procedural changes also yielded notable benefits. The randomized selection process improved perceptions of fairness and transparency, while simultaneously reducing staff workload and burnout. It is important to acknowledge any reduction in institutional and individual constraints, as burnout and

workload for program coordination can directly lead to staff turnover, causing a reduction in consistent staff support to students overall.

Furthermore, the lottery system resulted in a quicker turnaround on the secondary selections, making the waitlist and selection process much shorter. As a result, students not selected in the lottery maintained their enthusiasm and still opted to study abroad. They showed increased openness to other locations. As more students participated in study abroad programs beyond Western Europe, word-of-mouth helped to promote these destinations further and enrollment patterns across the portfolio became more balanced.

Looking forward, the office must choose whether to continue with the reforms, go back to the previous system, or find a third way forward.

Discussion Questions

- What were the advantages and disadvantages of the high contact selection process (essays, interviews, etc.)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the lottery selection process? Is there a selection process that combines the advantages of both, while mitigating the disadvantages of both?
- What educational or social theories would or could guide decisions about which selection process to utilize?
- What blend of in-person, live virtual, and asynchronous components best supports student engagement, accountability, and preparedness?
- How can a small global programs office balance staff capacity with the individualized student support usually associated with high-impact learning experiences?
- To what extent are these challenges unique to this program, or do they reflect broader trends in student engagement and advising across higher education?

One Size Doesn't Fit All: Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Design

Vanita Verma

Assistant Director, Office of International Affairs, Amity University Haryana, Haryana, India
Email: vverma@ggn.amity.edu

Tags

Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Management and Operations; Program Design; Program Assessment; University/Higher Education

Setting

The Study Abroad Program (SAP) of a private university in South Asia is a short-term (approximately five-week) initiative designed to foster global exposure, cross-cultural learning, and engagement with international pedagogy. Program staff designed the curriculum for broad interdisciplinary appeal, intending to serve students from diverse academic backgrounds. Incorporating management, engineering, and business modules, university students go to destinations such as Singapore, Dubai, Australia, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Case

During the scheduled post-program review, the international education team read student feedback surveys from the Study Abroad Program (SAP). Many students were very satisfied with the program opportunities and reported that it served as a stepping stone to global learning and career readiness. Through the interdisciplinary course materials and the study abroad experience, students learned about diverse academic systems, teamwork, and foreign cultures—fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. They also learned about international business and management principles, and global engineering contexts.

Yet feedback suggested that the curriculum may not fully meet the academic and professional expectations of students from non-STEM or specialized fields. Recent feedback from a law student revealed this challenge. CSIE cases are offered as professional development for readers and are not meant to focus on specific individuals or organizations. Names and other identifying details within the cases have been changed. In some instances, cases may have been amalgamated.

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The student appreciated the academic and cultural exposure but noted limited alignment with her legal training. Although she completed a project comparing corporate law policies across Indian and international contexts, the experience only partially met her academic goals. The law student suggested adding discipline-specific components such as modules on international legal frameworks—comparative constitutional law, human rights law, or international trade law—and experiential elements including:

- Visits to law firms, international courts, or policy think tanks.
- Moot court workshops simulating cross-border dispute resolution.
- Interactions with legal scholars and practitioners through guest lectures or collaborative projects.

From the student's perspective, the general modules broadened her outlook but lacked the professional depth needed for international legal practice.

A similar concern emerged from an English student, who valued the intercultural exposure but found little connection between management-focused content and her literary studies.

The international educators considered whether these accounts highlighted a need to embed discipline-relevant experiences within SAP to ensure equitable learning outcomes. At the same time, they noted practical complexities. Introducing specialized tracks could compromise financial sustainability, limit cohort diversity, or conflict with equity and accreditation goals. Additional challenges included restricted access to subject-specific faculty at partner universities, insufficient industry linkages in certain fields, and higher costs for smaller cohorts. Marketing discipline-focused tracks could further complicate recruitment and institutional policy alignment.

Another consideration is whether increased specialization might inadvertently dilute SAP's intercultural purpose. Overly narrow tracks risk recreating disciplinary silos that restrict peer learning and dialogue—the very foundations of the program. On the other hand, a balanced model could embed limited discipline-linked exposure within a shared intercultural framework, blending academic relevance with global empathy and collaboration.

The international educators also raised broader concerns—would emphasizing management and law risk privileging resource-rich disciplines over the humanities and social sciences? Addressing such imbalances is essential so that curricular refinement promotes fair recognition and access across academic fields. Also, can a five-week interdisciplinary program realistically provide deep professional alignment?

Rather than striving for full specialization, programs could define clearer learning outcomes that emphasize global exposure while offering selective discipline-linked insights to maintain academic coherence. Integrating limited field-specific components can strengthen professional readiness and deepen intercultural learning.

These debates also prompted reflection on power dynamics in curriculum design, who defines what counts as valuable learning abroad: students, faculty, or institutions? Such dynamics often shape which disciplines receive visibility and resources, particularly in partnerships between Global North and South institutions. Tailoring curricula must therefore involve inclusive consultation to avoid reinforcing systemic hierarchies and ensure all perspectives are represented.

With all of this in mind, the international educators considered whether or not to change the structure of the Study Abroad Program.

Discussion Questions

As you discuss this case, consider:

- How can study abroad programs balance breadth of exposure with discipline-specific depth without compromising inclusivity or manageability?
- What innovative practices could partner universities adopt to diversify curricula and make interdisciplinary programs more relevant for non-STEM disciplines such as law, psychology, and social sciences?
- Does increased specialization risk fragmenting peer learning or weakening the intercultural mission of short-term programs?
- Who determines what constitutes valuable learning abroad—students, faculty, or institutions—and how do these power dynamics influence curriculum priorities?
- How might global North–South disparities affect which disciplines receive emphasis in study abroad design?
- What institutional or funding partnerships could promote equitable, sustainable, discipline-focused models?
- How can student expectations be managed in regard to a multidisciplinary program? How can marketing contribute to these efforts?
- After considering all of these questions, would you make any changes to the structure of the Study Abroad Program? If so, what changes would you make and why?

From Forests to the Future: A Virtual International Exchange on Climate Adaptation and Sustainability

Jun Kajee

Professor, Researcher & Global Schools Advocate

United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, New York City, NY, USA

Email: globalschools@unsdsn.org

Faqrul Islam Chowdhury

Forest Ecologist, Researcher & Assistant Professor

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra (Cerdanyola del Vallès), Catalonia, Spain

Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

Email: FaqrulIslam.Chowdhury@autonoma.cat

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Internationalization and Global Learning; Partnerships; Program Design; Program Assessment; Technology; University/Higher Education

Setting

A cross-national educational partnership linked university classrooms in Catalonia, Spain and Taiwan through a virtual exchange focused on climate change, forest adaptation, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Emerging from a shared commitment to sustainability education, the initiative sought to transform ecological research into an experiential learning opportunity that would empower young people as global citizens.

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In Catalonia, consecutive droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires have placed significant pressure on forests of *Pinus sylvestris* trees, causing die-offs and shifts toward drought-tolerant species. Local ecological research documenting these changes inspired educators to explore how scientific findings might be translated into meaningful learning experiences for students. Half a world away in Taiwan, coastal regions faced erosion and increased typhoon frequency—environmental challenges that mirrored Catalonia’s ecological stress but in very different forms. Educators on both sides recognized a shared opportunity: to help students see that while climate change manifests differently across contexts, its impacts are globally connected.

Case

The virtual exchange project was intentionally designed as a collaborative, inquiry-based learning experience rather than a one-way transmission of information. Its goal was to merge ecological science, intercultural dialogue, and the SDGs into a single educational framework. Facilitators adopted an action-oriented approach, keeping detailed process notes and observations to guide reflection and improve future iterations. The central pedagogical question emerged early on: Could integrating real-world data, intercultural collaboration, and sustainability frameworks encourage deeper learning and student engagement than traditional classroom lessons?

Drawing upon climate research on drought-induced forest mortality in Catalonia, the curriculum emphasized how to interpret ecological data, relate it to local conditions, and connect it to coastal and marine resilience studies in Taiwan. In this design, students were positioned not only as students but as co-researchers exploring how science, community, and sustainability intersect.

Project Implementation

The program launched with a joint videoconference, where students from both regions met virtually for the first time. Educators prepared structured prompts to foster dialogue and ensure equitable participation. Catalan facilitators introduced photo sequences showing landscapes before and after major droughts, while Taiwanese facilitators guided students to share short narratives about typhoon-induced damage in their communities. Storytelling helped students link emotional responses to environmental realities, creating an immediate connection between the two locations.

Initial sessions reflected differing communication norms. Catalan students were inclined toward spontaneous discussion and debate, while Taiwanese students tended to listen for prolonged periods before speaking. To bridge these differences, facilitators introduced small cross-cultural breakout groups of two to four students and increased the use of asynchronous tools such as collaborative whiteboards, map annotation activities, and weekly online journals. These refinements allowed every participant to contribute at their own pace and helped offset the seven-hour time difference between the two regions.

Educators documented that engagement deepened significantly once participants began independent research projects in mixed-national teams. Each team analyzed a shared dataset—forest mortality records from Catalonia and coastal vegetation maps from Taiwan—and reflected on how environmental data can inform

community-level adaptation. Synchronous sessions provided momentum and energy, while asynchronous collaboration fostered sustained, thoughtful analysis.

Intercultural and Societal Dimensions

The exchange revealed nuanced cultural differences in environmental attitudes. Catalan students often focused on land management, water scarcity, and wildfire prevention—issues tied to local rural identity. Taiwanese students emphasized community solidarity, disaster preparedness, and the role of technology in climate adaptation. These divergent perspectives enriched group discussions, showing that sustainable development is shaped not only by environmental context but also by cultural values and social narratives.

Facilitators observed that intercultural understanding grew steadily through recurring dialogue. Early sessions were characterized by hesitation and politeness, but subsequent ones reflected greater relational familiarity. As trust developed, participants began to question assumptions about human–nature relationships and discuss broader ethical dimensions of climate action. One educator reflected that “success was not only in the exchange of knowledge but in the creation of a safe space where different worldviews could coexist and inform each other.”

Assessment of Learning

Assessment of learning was both informal and structured. Educators evaluated reflective journals, collaborative maps, and group presentations to gauge conceptual understanding and intercultural growth. Informal facilitator notes provided additional insight into student participation patterns, communication progress, and the critical thinking demonstrated during discussions.

In post-program reflections, educators recognized the need for a more formal assessment framework for future iterations. They proposed the introduction of pre- and post-program surveys to measure gains in ecological literacy, intercultural competence, and sustainability awareness. Future evaluation methods might also include peer-assessment rubrics or digital portfolios to capture the evolution of students’ collaborative work.

Programmatic Challenges

Despite its success, the virtual exchange faced logistical and pedagogical challenges. Time zone differences complicated synchronous scheduling, and disparities in English proficiency occasionally slowed discussion. Technical issues—such as connectivity interruptions and uneven access to digital tools—further challenged equity of participation. However, these obstacles became opportunities for creative adaptation. Facilitators continuously refined the model, adding asynchronous alternatives, encouraging visual contributions when language barriers arose, and celebrating incremental improvements in communication.

The differing classroom participation norms also required sensitivity and design adjustments rather than correction. As one educator noted, “quietness is not disengagement; it is reflection. Our job was to build structures where every voice could matter.” This relational approach, grounded in empathy and responsiveness, helped foster an inclusive and balanced learning environment.

Implications

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By the end of the semester, educators and students alike appreciated that global environmental learning is not simply about data interpretation but about agency and empathy. Participants concluded that the ultimate educational outcome should be empowerment—the understanding that they can analyze environmental issues and take action locally and collectively.

To strengthen the action-oriented component, facilitators proposed extending the program into a second phase focused on applied projects. Ideas included joint biodiversity monitoring of local species, comparative ecosystem reports on Catalan forests and Taiwanese mangroves, and awareness campaigns linking urban and rural communities. Each proposal embodied the principle of “learning by doing,” uniting students around shared global goals expressed through local action.

This virtual exchange demonstrated that integrating climate science with international education can produce more than factual comprehension—it can cultivate ecological literacy, cultural empathy, and a sense of collective responsibility. Through structured facilitation, intercultural engagement, and reflective assessment, the project connected scientific knowledge with human experience. The case illustrates how educators can align research, dialogue, and sustainability commitments to design transformative learning experiences that prepare students to think critically, collaborate across cultures, and contribute meaningfully to a more resilient planet.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the strengths of this virtual exchange program partnership? How could they build on those strengths?
- In this case, the educators added a research project to the virtual exchange. What are the benefits and limitations of integrating scientific research into intercultural sustainability education in this way?
- In what ways can virtual exchanges deepen understanding of global environmental challenges and local impacts?
- How can educational initiatives foster equity and ethical engagement in climate resilience and biodiversity conservation?
- What intercultural communication challenges might arise in virtual international programs, and how can they be addressed?
- How can technology facilitate global learning, support diverse students, and promote global citizenship?
- Virtual classroom-to-classroom collaborations can exist on a spectrum from simple exchange of information to jointly partnering in a complex project. What are some examples of activities from each end, and the middle, of this spectrum? How can international partners gradually build from a simpler to a more engaged partnership over time?

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