Teaching Abroad: Creating Global Citizens and Global Teachers

Denise M. Horn
Northeastern University

Author Note

Denise M. Horn, International Affairs and Political Science, Northeastern University.

Correspondence regarding this article should addressed to Denise M. Horn, Assistant Professor of International Affairs and Political Science, Northeastern University, 201 RP, 360 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115-5000. Phone: (617) 373-7880. E-mail: d.horn@neu.edu

Abstract

This article discusses international study programs in light of faculty development. Based upon ten years of experience working with students abroad, I offer some insights on the difficulties and rewards for faculty who lead programs overseas. I point to reasons for the growth in study abroad programs, as well as the opportunities these afford for both faculty and students.

Keywords: Study Abroad; Global Civil Society

The theoretical model of "global civil society" has sparked an increasingly rich literature across many disciplines, including international relations, political theory, foreign policy, and gender studies. Despite the proliferation of the model in policy making, the concept often remains vague for many undergraduate students. Moving beyond the classroom to active engagement in global civil society should be an essential part of students' education. One strategy for achieving this outcome is to promote localized understandings of global issues through focused, hands-on international programs that increase students' awareness of their place within global society—as citizens, consumers, (potential) activists, and future leaders.

As a professor of international affairs, I have been a natural advocate for global engagement and remain convinced that international education increases a student's capacity for empathy and encourages moral growth, while opening doors for future career opportunities. For this *eJournal of Public Affairs* issue on experiential education, I was asked to reflect on what teaching abroad means for me as a faculty member—how it affects my work as a scholar and my own personal growth, as well as what it means for students. I'll begin by offering some context for the demand for international education and then offer some reflections on my own experiences.

Global Civil Society and Higher Education

Recent years have seen the dramatic increase of civic education on a global scale (Institute of International Education, 2014). Higher education administrators have come to view international education as both a measure of prestige and a viable source of income for colleges and universities. Faculty who work closely with students indicate that international experiences improve students' critical thinking skills, engender a more informed approach to international issues, and increase their self-confidence. The students themselves experience life in a different setting, report positive "revelations" about themselves and the world around them, and thrill at the opportunity for further experiences (Horn & Gabriele, 2007). Indeed, international education appears to have positive and fruitful effects on all sides.

There are numerous reasons for the rise in international education, including increasing global competition for jobs, improved global mobility, and access to funds. Underlying these reasons, however, is a more fundamental

assumption, that international education—as imagined within the Western liberal tradition—seeks to create students who view themselves as citizens of a broader, more cosmopolitan community. This assumption was compounded by the rise of "Generation Next" in the United States, a decidedly more left-leaning cohort who view increased immigration and multiculturalism as a positive direction for the United States (Horn & Gabriele, 2007).[1] The demands of this college population have led to the growth of study-abroad programs across the board and have not abated with the rise of younger Millennials.

Consequently, colleges and universities worldwide have moved quickly to serve today's more technologically savvy and mobile generation with increasingly specialized and flexible international programs, including universities abroad and distance learning via the Internet (Horn & Gabriele, 2007). For example, the International Affairs program of my home university, Northeastern University, spearheaded the development of short-term faculty-led programs abroad, each with a distinct regional and research focus. The variety of trips reflects faculty research interests as well as students' demands for less "traditional" study-abroad options.

There is also a movement among educators to adapt a more culturally sensitive approach to education whereby cultural and racial differences are embraced rather than erased. The underlying philosophy of this movement is that students who are more culturally aware will be better citizens in that they will understand the dynamic nature of politics but also respect the needs of others. The model of "culturally responsive teaching" is characterized as "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory" (Gay, 2000; Horn & Gabriele, 2007). Though this model was developed in response to the diverse nature of American grade-school classrooms, it is widely applicable to higher education, particularly teaching global civil society in an international and multicultural setting. I have applied this model to

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[1] "Generation Next" represented 18- to 25-year-olds born between 1981 and 1988. A 2007 Pew study found that 67% of Gen Nexters believe that immigration strengthens American society, 89% support interracial dating, and 48% identified themselves as Democrats in the 2004 presidential elections. Further, the study indicated that Gen Nexters may be more politically engaged than the preceding generation (Gen X). See Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2007). *How young people view their lives, futures and politics: A portrait of "Generation Next."* Washington, DC: Author.

my own programs, which teach these skills in the context of social entrepreneurship.

Teaching global citizenship is rooted in the movement toward transnationalism and transnational activism, such as that identified by Tarrow (2005) and Keck and Sikkink (1998). The idea of "global civil society" has been adapted by international relations theorists from theories of civil society within the state, in which civil society represents the realm of contentious politics, uncontrolled by the state and separate from the private sphere (in the Gramscian tradition), or a means of consensus building in order to facilitate democratic governance (as in the liberal tradition).[2] The growth of transnational non-governmental organizations and networks gave rise to the concept of "global civil society," in which these networks allow for collective needs to be expressed and offer innovative solutions to problems (Mundy & Murphy, 2001). The transposition of civil society onto the global level is problematic, of course, given the lack of global governance structures and the continued importance of state sovereignty. However, given the increasing need for international institutions and global governance structures to moderate the global economy, as Mundy and Murphy (2001) note, the potential emergence of global civil society—and the potential for this site of contention—should not be overlooked.

International Education and Citizen Students

Over the past 15 years, the number of U.S.-based students choosing to study abroad has more than doubled: In the 2013-14 academic year, 208,408 students from U.S. institutions studied abroad, compared to 130,000 students in 1998-99 (Institute of International Education, 2014). While large numbers of U.S.-based students continue to study abroad in "traditional" study programs such as the United Kingdom and European sites, nontraditional destinations have witnessed a remarkable increase in the past few years, with growing numbers of students studying abroad in South Africa, Costa Rica, South Korea, Peru, and Thailand (Institute of International Education, 2014). There is clearly a demand for greater access to these "nontraditional" programs—at my home institution, for

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[2] See, for example: Hall, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Civil society: Theory, history, comparison*. Cambridge: Blackwell.; Arato, A., & Cohen, J. (1992). *Civil society and political theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.; Clark, A. M., Freidman, E. J., & Hochsteltler, K. (1998). The sovereign limits of global civil society: A comparison of NGO participation in the UN World Conference on the Environment, Human Rights, and Women. *World Politics*, *51*(1), 1-35.

example, the International Affairs program sponsored five short-term faculty-led programs in 2006. Since then, the University offers dozens of programs each summer, ranging across most disciplines and across most geographic regions. The increase in programs has been driven by demand as well as faculty interest: When introduced to the concept of short-term faculty-led programs, International Affairs had about 50 majors; it now represents the largest major in the College of Social Science and Humanities, with over 700 students, most of whom report that the requirement to study abroad makes the major more attractive. More importantly, however, students from across the University now seek to participate in international experiences, and I believe this speaks generally to a more global-centered attitude among students.

Teaching Abroad

There is considerable evidence as to *why* study abroad has increased, but I would like to turn our attention to the impact these programs have not only on students but on the faculty who lead them. In addition to some insights on this practice, I would like to offer some words of advice. Over the course of the past decade, I have led students in study-abroad experiences in a variety of countries, including South Africa, Thailand, the Dominican Republic, India, and Indonesia. The students and I have engaged with a variety of communities—urban areas, rural villages, universities and high schools, NGO networks, and businesses. During these opportunities, I have had my fair share of revelations, research opportunities, and crises. Needless to say, my graduate training never quite prepared me for leading students abroad, but my work has been greatly enriched by doing so.

In designing my programs (and borrowing from others who have designed similar programs, including my colleagues at Northeastern[3]), I have shaped a list of learning objectives for students and have identified the elements that should be in place to meet those objectives. These include skill building in social entrepreneurship, effective field research, public speaking, advocacy, understanding social business models and media, and displaying cross-cultural

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[3] See, for example, Cohen, D., de la Vega, R., & Watson, G. (Eds.). (2001). *Advocacy for social justice: Global action and reflection guide.* Oxford: Oxfam Advocacy Institute.
I have worked closely with colleagues who have designed similar programs at Northeastern: Dr. Lori Gardinier, director of the Human Services Program, and Professor Dennis Shaughnessy, director of the Social Enterprise Institute.

competencies. I also have personal objectives: What do I want to learn? How can I incorporate this experience into my own research? How will I share this experience with students in a meaningful way? Here I will outline a few major points regarding working with students abroad and how this relates to my objectives for students and myself.

First, the goals of the program itself must be clear, and programming should reflect these goals. Too often, study-abroad programs are alternatively referred to as "trips," which implies a lack of seriousness or substance. Study programs should be exactly that—a way for students to study something in-depth and with real consideration. While I certainly find value in "cultural immersion" experiences (and include them in all of my programs), those experiences often tend to fall into the tourist category and encourage a sense of separation between the students and their counterparts on the ground. Instead, I design my programs so that students are working hand-in-hand with their local peers—that is, the cultural immersion component occurs naturally, not on a tour bus. However, the basis of my program—teaching the skills necessary to build social enterprises—is only part of the learning experience. While I want each group to build a project that is realistic and sustainable, I am perhaps more interested in a student's personal growth because without that the skills mean very little.

For instance, during one of my programs in Indonesia, I was faced with a student who displayed such severe narcissism that he quickly became a destructive force within the group itself. He was able to discuss the literature assigned and to perform reasonably well in the field, but he so alienated his group members (both the U.S. students and the Indonesian students) that his work was rather useless. Dealing with his behavior and conducting multiple interventions took up much of my training team's time, and in the end I think he learned very little. Here was a failure on several levels—a failure to help him achieve the skills offered by the program and to help him grow emotionally.

It is, however, much more common for me to witness individual students blossom under the pressures of the program. During a workshop, one young Balinese woman suddenly burst into tears. When asked why, she told the class that she had never been told that her opinion on a topic mattered. From that point on, she went from being shy and quiet to being one of the most respected leaders of the group. Another young woman, who had been a student of mine for several years and was about to graduate, decided at that end of our program in Bali that

she would not return to the U.S.; instead, she stayed on to work with a local NGO. She had discovered her passion and continues to work in Bali. I could offer dozens of examples like these, but suffice it to say that facing one's self in a completely alien environment, where others challenge you in unexpected ways is vital to personal and intellectual growth.

This brings me to my second point: When you are leading students abroad, you are more than the professor. You should now be prepared to be a parent figure, a counselor, a disciplinarian, a guide, a mediator of conflict, and a first responder. You will spend far too much time reminding grown people that they should be drinking water and wearing sunscreen because sunstroke can happen quickly in Southeast Asia. You will nurse students back from nausea and "Delhi-Belly." You will talk them through emotional break-ups, homesickness, and perhaps more serious issues. You will give stern lectures on public drinking, dressing inappropriately, and cultural sensitivity. There will be tears. Over the years, I have learned that these responsibilities can exact a heavy emotional toll; thus I have found ways, when appropriate, to protect myself while caregiving. These include scheduled private time, establishing clear boundaries, and encouraging reflection within the group that is focused on individual responsibility rather than blame for one's discomfort.

Guiding these programs has also improved my own intercultural skills. I collaborate closely with universities in our host countries, and in working alongside faculty members in each institution, I have encountered cultural differences that now inform my own teaching both at home and abroad. In India and Southeast Asia, for instance, the level of respect shown toward teachers and professors is much more formal than in the U.S. Students in Thailand would attempt to keep their heads below mine, even if I was sitting on the floor. Students in India would not question a lesson, even as I pushed them to do so. My students in Indonesia were also less likely to openly contradict me, even when, again, I was asking them to do so. While this is not surprising in the cultural context, in teaching social entrepreneurship and social activism, I am, in a sense, cultivating critical, creative thought and perhaps a certain sense of rebellion. I have had to learn how to do this in ways that are culturally sensitive but that still achieve my aims. Teaching while barefoot in Thailand or India, for example, was novel at first but has become part of my toolkit for crossing cultural divides.

Operating against social norms, however, can work against the goals of such programs. For instance, in India I worked closely with a foundation whose mission was to cultivate social entrepreneurs, so my program was closely aligned with theirs. Although all the students involved were committed to social change, gender norms of behavior proved to be real stumbling blocks: My Indian female students were far from passive, but even the most outspoken among them found it difficult to question male authority when working in groups or engaging in field work. On the other hand, our U.S.-based female students, in trying to remain polite to their male peers, found themselves frustrated by a lack of respect they seldom encountered at home. For my part, while I could command a certain level of regard as a professor, gender discrimination has also thwarted my work: In Brazil, for example, a male professor with whom I worked would not address problems to me directly but through my male teaching assistants. In Indonesia, I could expect to wait for male professors to speak first and to be interrupted during my own lectures.

While I have experienced similar behavior in the U.S., negotiating these obstacles abroad takes a different kind of cultural finesse—and has refined my own thinking about gender norms in the research I conduct.

This brings me to my final point: While international education is definitely an important component in students' education, it should not be overlooked as a necessity for professors as well. Even if teachers are "experts" on a particular country, they have a great deal to learn through seeing that place through the eyes of their students. For example, one of the exercises we assign early in my Bali program requires that each student group spend a day locating and interviewing leaders of local NGOs and social businesses in Singaraja, where we are based. The local students often know nothing about their community (most come from villages outside the city to attend university), and, of course, the U.S.-based students know little about the city and do not speak the language. But they always complete the interview assignments. The class learns about the varieties of social enterprises at work in the community, and I gain access to an important survey of organizations for my own research. Students learn vital interview skills, and I learn about the intricate webs of kinship and community relationships in the area.

There are, of course, the ineffable effects—perhaps the most profound results of international education that have little to do with what happens in the

classroom. I hope to put these personal experiences into a larger context for my students, but in the end it is what they take home and make of their own experiences that matters. For myself, I know that I have been deeply influenced by the students I have taught and the relationships we have fostered.

This brings us, then, to the original question: Do these types of international education experiences lead students to believe that they are "global citizens"? Do students see themselves as part of a larger global community? Do they believe they have an impact on their world? These are difficult effects to measure, and perhaps the questions themselves are misleading. I think a more apt approach is to measure what they learned about another community or society and ask, "Do you find common ground here?" The differences may be obvious, but what are the similarities? What do people share? In this regard, we are asking students to think about political engagement in terms of empathy rather than simply as a mechanism to achieve individual needs. For the teacher's part, sharing these experiences with students increases our own sense of empathy—we gain first-hand insights into their process of growth. For myself, I know this has had enormous benefits for both my teaching and my research.

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Author Biography

Denise M. Horn is an Assistant Professor of International Affairs and Political Science at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. She is the author of *Democratic Governance and Social Entrepreneurship: Civic Participation and the Future of Democracy* (Routledge 2013) and *Women, Civil Society and the Geopolitics of Democratization* (Routledge 2010). Dr. Horn is an International Relations scholar, whose work explores the relationship of civil society development to democratic growth, focusing on women's transnational activism and trends in global development strategies, such as social entrepreneurship. She was the director of Northeastern University's Global Corps Practicum, which facilitates workshops in social entrepreneurship in Thailand, Indonesia and India. Dr. Horn is a 2014 Fulbright Senior Scholar, where she conducted seminars in Democratization and Human Rights at Universitas Andalas, in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. In September 2015, Dr. Horn will begin an appointment at Simmons College in Boston.