

Study Abroad Programs as Means to Connect Culture, Art, and Design

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The European Conference on Arts, Design & Education 2022
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This Presentation examines a study abroad program as a means to promote the intersection of culture, art, and design and to help students across art and design majors to connect the dots between the three concepts. The study abroad program offers students to visit two cities in Germany in a faculty lead program, giving them a cultural and historical overview of relevant sites, artifacts, and design examples, bringing to light the relationships between a shared visual world constructed by visual artists and designers, and the impact to the culture of a society. A study abroad program can be larger than consideration of visiting works of art or design as discrete objects and can seek to examine the networks of culture in which these artifacts and objects play a role. While traveling, the student has been engaged in analyzing social histories and resulting cultural influences significant to cultural monuments and artifacts. Furthermore, oral histories on site, and narratives from natives, offer an interpretation of the *Zeitgeist* and the interconnection to the art and environmental design.

Keywords: Study Abroad, Design Education, Culture and Design, Study Abroad Programs as Means to Connect Culture, Art, and Design

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Introduction

What is study abroad?

Study abroad programs are offered through colleges and are programs anywhere from a week to a full academic year. Those programs provide an opportunity to study in a foreign country where students either attend lectures, engage in research, or follow a faculty led travel program. The numbers of study abroad programs continue to increase, specifically programs that last eight weeks or less (Donnelly-Smith, 2009.) Sometimes a university has an agreement with another university abroad where students can enroll in a given set of courses, or a student can arrange their own course schedule. Universities have often made arrangements to prearrange housing with the host university. Study abroad programs can be faculty led group trips around a country or continent and may have the purpose to learn a language or to immerse in specific topics related to the participants major. These study abroad experiences are typically structured and formal and students stay with their cohort of peers for the cultural experiences and the programs curriculum. The programs are designed as academic experience, students leave their home country to study another countries culture, monuments, artifacts and the like, and, while the primary intent is for students to learn about them in their original setting, the study abroad experiences have been often referred to as tourist experiences (Litvin,2003.) The faculty led programs offer academic credits toward a student's degree plan and usually organize for students' accommodations and provide travel between locales, entry to museums and venues and many other day-to day costs through a program fee. Universities do often partner with program providers who are familiar with the destination and arrange for the travel itinerary, hotels, transportation and the like. Universities face an increase in diversity of their student body, seeking an international education experience (Oguro, 2017). When students on North American campuses get exposed to the incoming international students and curious about learning more of places where those students come from, they may seek for a study abroad program that has been designed to deepen their intercultural learning and engagement.

Who are the participants?

The program I am introducing here is organized out of the College of Visual Arts and Design at the University of North Texas (UNT), and it provides for students in the Design, Art and Art History disciplines, however all students at UNT from all majors can participate. Figure one indicates that about half of the study abroad programs participants are in a cluster of interior design and studio art majors. About one third of the program participants are students in the fashion design and art history program and approximately one quarter are students from various majors across the UNT campus in Denton Texas (Figure 1.)

The visited sites, monuments, and artifacts and the context they play within German culture are one aspect why students are drawn to participate in this study abroad opportunity. In addition, society aspects of live in Germany seem to be attractive to interior design and studio art students who usually represent the largest group in the program, followed by fashion design and art history majors, and a group of students outside of the College of Visual Art and Design from language programs, forensic science, nursing, anthropology, social sciences, and merchandising.

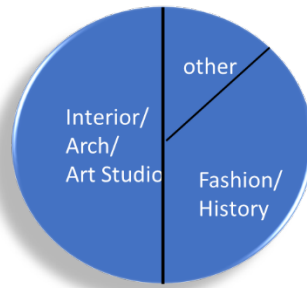


Figure 1 Distribution of study abroad program participant by major

What is the *Program*?

Students get to know each other

Prior to traveling, two to three orientation meetings provide the opportunity for student participants to see each other, get to learn more about the program details, and hear from program alumni about their experience.

The orientation meetings cover required preparations before traveling, offer to find a roommate while traveling, and explain academic requirements, assignments, and expectations. The program cohort typically starts organizing themselves as a group during or right after an orientation meeting using social media apps such as *WhatsApp* or *GroupMe*.

A more in depth “get to know each other” is provided on the day of arrival in Germany. The group of students and the faculty leader meet at an adequate space in the hotel after checking in and are engaged in an exercise called life-mapping.

A life-map (Figure 2) is tracing key episodes, or those of which a student is comfortable sharing with others, from the time one is born to the present day. It represents a visual timeline of key moments. Life mapping is a positive exercise that can help to learn about other people’s ideas and things they value in life, the episodes they experienced and activities they have cherished.

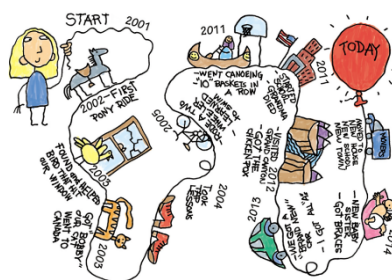


Figure 2 Life map example

Fun Passport

Participating study abroad students receive a *Fun Passport* (Figure 3) when they arrive in Germany. During the trip, the passport will be filled with stickers, associated with travel or sites the program is visiting during the study abroad travel. The stickers are used as an

incentive for students to collect for either engaging in conversations about program sites or for presenting details to the study abroad group about a monument, site, or artifact.



Figure 3 Fun Passport with stickers

New Year's Eve

The participating students are not offered a formal New Year's Eve activity through the study abroad program. It is time they can plan and spend as they wish. The program *Germany, Culture, Art and Design* has offered students to participate in an evening performance that is a one of its kind in Germany and is performed at the Berliner Tempodrom. In the year 2003, the Berliner Tempodrom, by accident, booked the *Deutsches Symphonie Orchester* (The German Symphony Orchestra) and the *Circus Roncalli* during the New Year's Eve. Born out of the necessity to deal with a double booking, the evening combined both performances and turned into a New Year's Eve mega success. Now for two decades, for this one evening, the two meet, perform, and create the magic of beauty, elegance, excitement and enchantment of sound. Most students opt to join the programs faculty leader and spend the beginning of their New Year's Eve celebration in Germany at the Berliner Tempodrome (Figure 4), followed by a group dinner and then joining to watch the fireworks over Berlin. Although a voluntary event, almost all students participate and it brings them together enjoying the arts together, tightening the cohort and their camaraderie.



Figure 4 Berliner Tempodrome New Year's Eve Performance

Promoting and Recruiting

The study abroad program is promoted through the University of North Texas International affairs study abroad office and their website as well as the website of the College of Visual Arts and Design. Students apply through the study abroad portal for a program, and after fulfilling certain criteria, get accepted into a study abroad program.

Recruiting is more complex and requires getting the program information and the dates for info sessions in front of students “just in time.” Recruitment activities seem to be more successful if flyer's (Figure 5), posters and class visits to introduce the program are scheduled within two weeks of scheduled info sessions offering students details about the program.



Figure 5 Program recruitment flyer

Study abroad program itinerary

The study abroad program *Germany, Culture, Art and Design* is visiting the cities of Berlin and Munich in Germany. The overall duration of the program is 16 days and has typically been scheduled between December 27 (arrival in Berlin) and January 11 (departure in Munich)

The program connects students to landmarks, museums with relevant artifacts (historical and contemporary) public places, and sites which have socio-historic relevance and is organized in an itinerary (Figure 6) organized by day-to-day activities.

Berlin:

Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church

Christmas Market Europaplatz

Charlottenburg Palace

German Parliament, Dome of the Reichstag

Brandenburg Gate

Memorial of the murdered Jews in Europe and Place of Information Exhibit

Eastside Gallerie, Berlin Wall

Urbania Gallery

Berlin Wall Memorial

Pergamon Museum

Hamburger Bahnhof Museum of Contemporary Art

Berlin Cathedral

Bauhaus Archive

Jewish Museum

Munich:
 Michaelis Church
 Marienplatz
 Alter Peter and visit of Church tower
 Assam Church
 Wittelsbacher Residenz (Kings City Palace) and Treasury
 Theatiner Church
 Church of our Lady
 Olympic Park and Olympic Tower
 BMW museum
 BMW design center (Welt)
 Castle Neuschwanstein
 Bavarian countryside Mittenwald
 Nymphenburg Palace and Marstall
 Lehnbach Haus, Joseph Beuys, The Blue Rider group
 Information Center of the National Socialist
 Pinakothek

UNIT Faculty Led Program Itinerary	
subject to change	Culture, Art and Design in Germany
Enter Arrival Date:	Friday, December 27, 2021
DAY 1: Monday, December 27, 2021	
LOCATION(s)	Berlin, Germany
Travel type	Arrival at Berlin Tegel Airport and pickup by faculty leader (Studenten Service, 10000 Berlin, Germany)
Meals	
Activities	Verbotener Kunst (Pub, Kunst Wilhelm-Krone, Weinhandlung)
Lodging information	24MUT Hotel Kulturtempo Berlin (36 mainstreet/10000 Berlin 10405) (49 30 266115)
DAY 2: Tuesday, December 28, 2021	
LOCATION(s)	Berlin, Germany
Meals	7:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Activities	14:00 Kunstgewerkschaft Museum (Museum)
Lodging information	24MUT Hotel Kulturtempo Berlin (36 mainstreet/10000 Berlin 10405) (49 30 266115)
DAY 3: Wednesday, December 29, 2021	
LOCATION(s)	Berlin, Germany
Meals	7:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Activities	14:00 Kunstgewerkschaft Museum (Museum)
Lodging information	24MUT Hotel Kulturtempo Berlin (36 mainstreet/10000 Berlin 10405) (49 30 266115)
DAY 4: Thursday, December 30, 2021	
LOCATION(s)	Berlin, Germany
Meals	7:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Meals	10:00, 12:15, 18:00 long Passport photo (3) vaccination card, money, student ID, transportation ticket
Activities	14:00 Kunstgewerkschaft Museum (Museum)
Lodging information	24MUT Hotel Kulturtempo Berlin (36 mainstreet/10000 Berlin 10405) (49 30 266115)

Figure 6 day-by-day itinerary

Academic outcome expectations

The study abroad program has a series of writing and presentation assignments. Students in the course are expected to engage in a critical discourse developing an understanding of diversity, intercultural competence, and a sense of global citizenship. Through traveling in Germany, students can experience an unfamiliar setting that promotes the above-mentioned outcome goals.

Students start with a pre-departure essay in which they critically review their biases and their perception of the country, region, and cities the group will visit, including the known monuments, sites and artifacts of the particular area.

They finish with a final report at the end of the program, which includes a narrative comparing their pre-departure expectations with the lived experiences and observations during their travel, evaluating experiences of inclusivity while examining ethnocentrism.

While traveling, students present prepared lectures and engage in discussions with their peers with a particular focus on how a monument, memorial or artifact represents its time in which it was created and the connecting cultural forces.

Conclusion

Program exit interviews and surveys

What are student surveys suggesting?

The findings of the student surveys after they return from the sojourns are derived from them (N=180) Students for example report that their degree of openness to cultural differences changed (82%), students learned adaptive stress management while exposed to new cultural environments during the trip (56%). Although students participated in the same *Germany: Culture Art and Design* short term study abroad program, personality attributes led to differences in the cultural and personal development of the student travelers.

Excerpts of the post sojourn survey are below.

“I was expecting that we would go from site to site and see the standard things every tourist will see. Far from it. The lectures we received, the conversations and discussions we had, connected the dots for me between the meaning of monuments and the Art we experienced in relationship to German Culture.”

“The study abroad really brought together what I had learned in the classroom and had seen in books and on slides during classroom lectures. Of course, you know that building styles and Art and Design of a certain period relate to each other somehow. But this trip opened my mind to a new dimension, and I understood that a social setting and the resulting culture is driving the context of Art and Design.”

“I was delighted to see the monuments, the artifacts, the public places 3-D, in real and how they fit into an environment that creates a place. I know most of them from courses and textbooks, but understanding through the discussions we had and the stories our professor shared, how they related and developed out of a society, expressing their culture, was a treat I would never had in a classroom setting.”

Over the span of 10 trips with 180 participants:

100% Expressed overall satisfaction of the program.

95% Reported that the content of the program was relevant to their overall college experience and learning.

90% Stated the cost of the program was affordable and represented a value.

References

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