



European Study Abroad Program: an Interdisciplinary Approach

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Purposes of the Study Abroad Program The European study abroad program offered to Stevenson University students in Summer 2012 was associated with a three-credit International Marketing course and a one-credit option (OCO) of International Marketing Trends in Fashion. The program was unique in that it was a combination of a general marketing course and a fashion merchandising course. The purpose of the study abroad program was (1) to provide students the opportunities to develop themselves as global citizens by increasing intercultural competence and (2) to facilitate students to learn relevant course knowledge in a global setting. The destinations for the program were Paris, France, Milan, Italy, and Prague, Czech Republic. The total duration of the program was 17 days, from May 11-28, 2012, with stays in each destination of five to six days. A total of 18 students registered for the study abroad program. Among the 18 students, 11 were fashion merchandising students and the eleven fashion merchandising students registered for the OCO in addition to the main course.

Interdisciplinary Objectives The objectives of the three-credit International Marketing course included: (1a) Define international marketing, (1b) Describe the impact of economic, cultural, and political environments on international marketing, (1c) Develop a global marketing strategy, (1d) Recognize ethical dilemmas that confront international marketing managers, (1e) Enhance your communication skills and apply these skills in the assignments, and (1f) Develop the ability to work well in groups and with people of other cultures. Considering the above objectives of the main International Marketing course as the general learning objectives for the study abroad program, three objectives of OCO fashion-focused international marketing were developed in order to better cater to fashion merchandising majors, considering the specific location of the study abroad program. They were as follows: (2a) Identify the fashion retailing business environments in Europe, (2b) Identify unique fashion retailing strategies found in Europe, and (2c) Compare the retailing trends of the U.S. and that of Europe. As Lewis and Niesenbaum (2005) suggested, this interdisciplinary approach may have strategically facilitated and effectively reinforced the student learning process in the short-term study abroad program.

Implementation of Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Program Both the main International Marketing course and the OCO incorporated in-classroom lectures, company visits, and on-the-street observations. Student learning from the above activities were evaluated by submitting assignments and giving presentations. Due to a large number of registered fashion merchandising students, the study abroad program coordination was executed in a way to better cater to fashion merchandising students as well as to satisfy the learning needs of non-fashion merchandising majors. For example, in Paris, all students visited the headquarters of Air France

and the Galeries Lafayette department store. For the general International Marketing course, students were able to use knowledge gained from both company visits, whereas the OCO segment of the course focused more on the discussion of topics related to fashion retailing strategies observed in the Galeries Lafayette department store. In addition, optional excursions such as a Balenciaga exhibition and a Louis Vuitton & Marc Jacobs exhibition provided highly engaging learning experiences and inspiration for the fashion merchandising students. In Milan, the students visited a large department store - la Rinascente, a luxury brand store - Bottega Venetta, and a functional/athletic shoe sole maker - Vibram. In Prague, the brick-and-mortar store tour of vintage-clothes.cz facilitated students learning to understand marketing strategies of small and medium businesses.

In each destination, students were required to complete one or two written assignments for the OCO. For example, one of the assignments given in the OCO class was to compare product assortment, store layout, product displays, and customer service between Galeries Lafayette in Paris and la Rinascente in Milan. By completing this assignment, the students were able to meet the objectives (1c), (1e), and (1f) from general International Marketing course as well as all the OCO objectives (2a), (2b), and (2c). A culminating group project asked the fashion merchandising students to describe the fashion consumer characteristics perceived in each destination, find a niche for a U.S. fashion product/brand, and develop marketing strategies to penetrate into the specific markets. This project allowed the students to think about topics related to all course objectives of International Marketing and those of OCO; (1a) to (1f) and (2a) to (2c). Therefore, the above site/company visits and related assignments facilitated achieving all the objectives of OCO as well as the three-credit International Marketing course. The integration of the two courses created a real-world learning environment into which the fashion merchandising students could assimilate the knowledge gained in both domains.

Conclusion The above-described interdisciplinary approach between marketing and fashion merchandising in a short-term study abroad program was well-received by the students. Students made many positive comments about their learning experience, after the trip. In the following semesters, students who participated in the program, were able to apply the knowledge and experience gained from the study abroad trip, to the relevant topics covered in class in various fashion merchandising classes. Consistent with previous reports on the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs (e.g., Lumkes Jr., Hallett, & Vallade, 2012), this study abroad program contributed to students' experiential learning and cultural and personal development. The interdisciplinary approach was effective in that the fashion merchandising students were able to learn the general principles of international marketing while also applying the knowledge to fashion-specific topics while on-site in Europe.

References

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