Expanding Horizons: Study Abroad's Impact on Sport Management Students

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Few institutions of higher education would deny the importance of broadening their students’ outlook and perspective. One of the most applicable methods of achieving this goal has been creating study abroad opportunities, where students spend time learning in a different culture and country. According to Lee, Pang, Wong, & Chan, “Education institutions are strongly encouraged to provide opportunities for students to participate in exchange programs to broaden their perspective” (2007, p. 877). Sport management is no different, and many programs in the field are creating or continuing to offer study abroad options to their students. While anecdotally successful, these opportunities need to be assessed from a broader perspective to ensure they are meeting the needs of their students and the industry.

Many believe that placing students in a new culture or learning environment will inherently change them for the better. Research indicates that many study abroad courses do result in positive outcomes for students. Students grow personally in terms of self-confidence, independence, and other forms of personal growth (Black & Duhon, 2006; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Statham, 2015; Thompson, Boone, & Deeny, 2000; Zorn, 1996). They also grow professionally in areas such as intellectual development, knowledge and skill acquisition, and an increased ability to work in diverse situations (Dalton & Crawford, 2014; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Lee et al., 2007; Penman & Ellis, 2004; Thompson et al., 2000; Zorn, 1996). Researchers also report increases in cross cultural tolerance and empathy (Black & Duhon, 2006), cultural diversity (Lee et al., 2007), appreciation and awareness of other cultures (Penman & Ellis, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), and the ability to accept and adapt to cultural differences (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). Overall, transformative learning appears to be taking place through studying abroad (Dalton & Crawford, 2014; Smith, McAuliffe, & Ripillard, 2014).

While we know that many sport management programs offer sport-related study abroad opportunities, little has been written specific to our field. Those who have directly studied sport-related abroad opportunities have reported positive results. Cunningham, Bopp and Sagas (2010) noted that friendships and relationships with more diverse groups of individual result from these opportunities, while others add that factors including an expanded worldview, appreciation of other cultures, professional development and personal transformation result (Appleby & Faure, 2015; Choi, Kim, & Park, 2013). Choi et al. (2013) cited a broadened international perspective of sport as the most important benefit of sport-related study abroad opportunities. Meanwhile, in surveying alumni of one sport management program, LeCrom, Greenhalgh, and Dwyer (2015) determined that those who studied abroad scored higher in terms of cultural understanding than those who did not.

Given the growing global landscape of sport, study abroad opportunities are as important as ever. However, there is limited literature on the current experiences of sport management students as they study abroad. In continuing to evaluate experiences of sport-related study abroad opportunities, the current study sought to identify whether a short-term sport-related study abroad increases global mindedness in students, as well as whether a variety of other factors can predict changes in global mindedness. Global mindedness is defined as “a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the global community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members” (Hett, 1993, p. 3).

This study enlisted a pre-test, post-test design, utilizing Hett’s (1993) Global Mindedness Scale as its instrument. This 30-item instrument assesses global mindedness collectively, and can also be broken down into five factors including responsibility, cultural pluralism, efficacy, global centrism, and interconnectedness. Students from four sport management programs located on the east coast of the United States were included as subjects. All four programs participate in annual short-term (between 10-14 day) study abroad trips to Western Europe, visiting between one and three countries on each trip. Trips take place in the spring or summer semesters. Over three years, students participating in these trips were asked to complete an online survey approximately one month prior to the study.
abroad course, and approximately one month after returning from the trip. Follow up requests were sent approximately one week after the initial survey to those who had not completed the survey.

Collectively, 166 useable surveys were collected, 96 pre-test responses and 70 post-test responses. In analyzing results, an independent samples t-test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference between global mindedness scores (pre-/post-). A MANOVA also allowed analysis across each separate factor (responsibility, cultural pluralism, efficacy, global centrism, interconnectedness), from pre-study abroad to post-study abroad. While in every instance the mean global mindedness scores increased from pre- to post-, none were significantly different, indicating that short-term study abroad opportunities did not impact global mindedness.

Additionally, a linear regression analysis was run in attempting to determine whether any other factors significantly predicted a change in global mindedness. Change in global mindedness (the outcome variable) was calculated by matching every student who completed both a pre- and post-test (n=52), and subtracting the pre-test global mindedness score from the post-test score. Factors included in the regression analysis were gender, ethnicity, age, year in school, number of times abroad, and experience living abroad. Results showed that none of these additional factors predicted a change in global mindedness.

Overall, global mindedness does not appear to be impacted by short-term study abroad opportunities in the field of sport management. This is consistent with prior researchers who have found that short-term study abroad courses have limited impact on students (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Zarnick, 2010). Anecdotally, students from all four schools included in this study highly valued the experience abroad, however, the short- and long-terms impacts are still somewhat unknown. Perhaps studying more direct impacts, such as personal and professional growth (Black & Duhon, 2006; Dalton & Crawford, 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Penman & Ellis, 2004; Statham, 2015; Zorn, 1996), would provide different results than the more abstract idea of global mindedness. Additionally, inherent in the design of this study is the self-selection bias, which may have impacted results. All students included in this study self-selected into a study-abroad program, and there is a strong possibility that students choosing to study abroad are more global minded than those who chose not to. Taking this into consideration would require a comparison of students who studied abroad to those who did not, which is a future direction of this research.

Overall, much can be learned from this study and its results, especially for faculty organizing or considering instituting a study abroad course. During the presentation, authors will discuss opportunities to expand study abroad trips to increase impact by possibly providing additional off-script experiences where students can engage with the locals (i.e., service learning, home stays). Additionally, many other factors should be considered moving forward in terms of the impact of studying abroad, including motives for travel, undergraduate major, and career aspirations.

References:


