Longitudinal Impacts of a Faculty Abroad Program: 1994-2007

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Abstract
When surveyed, faculty generally believe that study abroad is desirable or essential, that it is important to work with people from different cultural backgrounds, it helps people to function effectively in another culture within their profession, and enhances knowledge of current international issues and affairs (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008; Towsic, n.d.). Sending faculty to programs abroad can therefore enhance academic potential (Özturgut, 2007). The 10-day Faculty Abroad Seminar (FAS) sponsored through the Office of Mexican and Latin American Programs at Texas A&M University was developed to contribute to the internationalization of faculty by directly exposing them to the culture, history, government, business, and language of Mexico. The main objective was for faculty participants to incorporate applicable global experiences into their teaching and research programs. The purpose of this study was to determine the longitudinal impacts of the FAS on participants from 1994–2007 in terms of teaching and research collaboration and personal fulfillment. As faculty participants reflected about their teaching and research impacts, a higher percentage of respondents had teaching impacts compared with research impacts (74 percent and 64 percent, respectively). In describing personal impacts participants’ comments supported the belief that the Faculty Abroad Seminar changed them, personally, and professionally.

Keywords: Faculty Abroad, International Experience, Mexico
Introduction

The premise of this manuscript and subsequent research is this: if we want to internationalize the university, we have to internationalize the faculty. Agricultural and extension educators have a vested interest in internationalization and thus need to provide leadership and direction on how to mobilize faculty through this process (Stohl, 2007).

Sandgren, Ellig, Hovde, Krejci, and Rice (1999) note that effective education happens when participants interact face-to-face with people in the culture they are trying to fully experience. Furthermore, “evidence suggests much can be gained professionally and personally from participation in international research projects” (Harder, Wingenbach, & Rosser, 2007, p. 159). In his study of professors engaged in international scholarship, Viers (2003) noted that scholars interviewed identified several themes relating to faculty involvement in international scholarship including strong study abroad and exchange programs. Many of the opportunities like exchange programs and professional development seminars abroad, have been argued as needed programs for higher education faculty (Harder, Wingenbach, & Rosser, 2007). Lucas (1996) argued that by providing faculty with international opportunities “the institution confirms that international education is important” (p. 29).

The Council on International Educational Exchange, a non-governmental education organization, has been conducting student international exchange opportunities since 1947 and began offering about 200 International Faculty Development Seminars in 1990 in over 40 countries (CIEE, p. 6). “CIEE International Faculty Development Seminars are short-term, concentrated educational experiences designed to explore fascinations, challenge preconceptions, and open eyes to a wide variety of issues shaping the world today” (CIEE, 2009, p. 5). CIEE also noted that the programs are meant to help faculty “increase their international awareness and transform their campus and curricula” (CIEE, 2009, p. 6).

“Internationalization of U.S. campuses is not only recruiting and retaining international students, but also providing opportunities for current faculty members to improve their understanding of the world” (Özturgut, 2007, p. 47). Hand, Ricketts, and Bruening (2007) noted that faculty involvement even in undergraduate study abroad programming has an impact on both the faculty and their students. CIEE (2009) argued that institutional benefits of faculty abroad programs include: internationalization of the curricula, research opportunities for faculty and students, student increase in international knowledge through faculty interaction, and creating communication and links with international institutions.

Abroad experiences have been shown to impact beliefs and values (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008). Beliefs are “judgments of the credibility of conceptualization” (McLeod, 1991, p. 7). A belief about the ability to integrate global topics into teaching and research is impacted both by affect and cognition. When surveyed, faculty generally believe that study abroad is desirable or essential, that it is important to work with people from different cultural backgrounds, it helps people to function effectively in another culture within their profession, and enhances knowledge of current international issues and affairs (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008; Towsic, N.D.). Sending faculty to programs abroad can therefore enhance academic potential (Özturgut, 2007).

“Faculty exchanges contribute directly to preparing faculty to face an ever changing world. They expand their world view, develop multicultural teaching approaches, and help to arrange other international experiences for colleagues, students, and others on campus” (Lucas, 1996, p. 35).
Faculty abroad program outcomes include increasing global components in teaching and research (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008; Sandgren, Ellig, Hovde, Krejci, & Rice, 1999). “New methodologies, modes of thought, hypotheses, different environments, and varied theories make a sojourning faculty member more aware and more mentally prepared for teaching and research” (Lucas, 1996, p. 38). In his study of international faculty experience perceptions, Lucas (1996) added that several faculty noted international experiences allowed them to use more international classroom examples and to express a need for more internationally focused courses in their university’s curricula. Razzano (1994) added that faculty “teaching and research changed for the better because they brought new perspectives and techniques to their work” (p. 166).

Teamwork grew out of the interaction between the participants and produced alternative views to addressing research (Harder, Wingenbach & Rosser, 2007). Razzano (1994) found faculty stated their international experiences allowed them to be information sources to their colleagues by: “influencing others to become involved in international scholarship, by serving as resource persons, and by working to improve professional relationships” (p. 173). Faculty and educators also reported that faculty abroad seminars allowed them to build networks with other international and home country faculty, find new resources to expand international exchange opportunities, and spark new research and publishing opportunities (CIEE, 2009).

Overall, participants in an international exchange program “gain new technical skills as well as a cross cultural experience through their program participation” (Jones & Dos Santos, 2008, p. 278). Lucas (1996) argued “immersion in another culture . . . elevates a faculty member’s sensitivity, tolerance, and empathy for the problems of others beyond the students of the classroom” (p. 37).

Razzano (1994) added faculty noted “tolerance, patience, empathy and respect for cultural diversity” resulted from their international experiences as well (p. 159).

Goodwin and Nacht (1991) surveyed U.S. faculty about participation in international programs. Some key barriers found were policies in regard to promotion/tenure and two career households. Many U.S. institutions do not recognize or reward international work in promotion and tenure decisions at the assistant professor rank. Viers (2003) noted three constraints of international travel emerged from faculty interviewed in his study: role limitations, personal and family roles, and institutional barriers. Faculty members interviewed by Lucas (1996) “expressed a desire for some type of travel funds to be made available, along with additional information concerning opportunities and openings for them to access more international travel” (p. 98).

Faculty members with young children are limited in their ability to study, teach or research abroad. “With so much emphasis on the production of published research, young faculty may be discouraged from experiences which would, ultimately, further the internationalization of the curriculum” (Bull, 1996, p. 29). Stohl (2007) argued:

Junior faculty members are particularly vulnerable and are often encouraged to attend to publishing in their disciplinary journals and taking care of their departmental responsibilities. They often are sent the message that they do not have the luxury of the extra time that is often required to begin an international collaboration. (p. 368)

Without a desire or belief that international experiences are valuable to career enhancement and will not interfere with family, participation in programs such as these are limited (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008). Another barrier can be
language proficiency. Without some basic language skill, interpretation of culture, interaction with colleagues and overall anxiety regarding travel are impacted (Dooley, Dooley & Carranza, 2008). Faculty rank, family responsibilities, and language skills were constructs of interest for this study.

The Faculty Abroad Seminar (FAS) sponsored through the Office of Mexican and Latin American Programs at Texas A&M University was developed to contribute to the internationalization of faculty by directly exposing them to the culture, history, government, business, and language of Mexico. The main objective was for faculty participants to incorporate applicable global experiences into their teaching and research programs. The seminar promotes internationalization through direct immersion with Mexican universities and organizations. Faculty members apply to participate in a 10-day networking and culturally-rich experience. More than 135 faculty members have participated in this program (Dooley, Dooley, & Carranza, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings for this study are related to Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model (1984). Kolb’s model is based upon a four-stage learning cycle: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The premise is that experiential learning is “the process that links education, work, and personal development” (Kolb, 1984, p. 4). This can be further expanded with the inclusion of the CRASP model of action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1997, p. 2). This model includes five stages:

a) Critical (and self critical) collaborative enquiry by
b) Reflective practitioners being
c) Accountable and making the results of their enquiry public,
d) Self-evaluating their practice and engaged in
e) Participative problem-solving and continuing professional development.

The CRASP theory “integrates educational theory and teaching practice through action research” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1997, p. 2). For this study, the context was higher education, the initial recipients were university faculty, with a potential impact on undergraduate students through internationalization of the curriculum to improve ability to work in a global society. Higher education professional development theory is based upon constant improvement of the teaching process using action research as a tool to provide evidence of this improvement. Participation in a faculty abroad program provides professional development in all four stages of the experiential learning cycle and engagement through the CRASP five stages.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the longitudinal impacts of the FAS on participants from 1994–2007. Objectives and data collection were based upon (a) faculty characteristics, (b) teaching impacts, (c) research impacts, and (d) personal impacts (including awards and recognitions).

Methods

Qualitative research can be defined in general terms as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter...Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3). It uses data that are the participant’s and researcher’s firsthand experiences (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The approach “involves a return to the experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the
basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

This study used a longitudinal survey to determine program impacts over time. This required reflection and recall for those having participated years ago, which could result in affective and cognitive loss over time. Maturation as a function of the passage of time and other events could have an interaction effect (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Even though every participant attended the Faculty Abroad experience in Mexico, itineraries were not identical and group dynamics impacted the setting. Therefore, readers should not generalize the findings beyond the context and conditions of this study.

The researchers used a census of all faculty members who participated in the Faculty Abroad Seminar from 1994–2007. Archival documents (N=135) were used to compare survey findings to records from the Office of Mexican and Latin American programs to determine trends and triangulate data. Over this 13-year period, 19 faculty members were either deceased, had left the university, or retired and had no contact information. Thirty-five surveys were submitted from a useable population of 121, for a response rate of 29 percent. Longitudinal studies by their nature often result in increased mortality of subjects.

The Web-based impact survey included four open-ended questions. The participants were sent an e-mail with the link to the survey soliciting their participation in December 2007. A follow-up reminder was sent after the winter break. Some attrition of respondents could be due to the timing of the survey. Responses were not identifiable directly to the participants and were given a number for an audit trail.

Statements from the Web-based survey were analyzed using open-coding and frequency counts to calculate percentages. “Content analysis is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1999, p. 405). Content analysis allows the researcher to reduce data and identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). Content analysis requires deciphering skills and pattern recognition to ensure that variations can be “rigidly and consistently applied so that other researchers or readers, looking at the same messages, would obtain the same or comparable results” (Berg, 2001, p. 241). The open coding technique (Strauss, 1987) involves carefully reading the document to determine the concepts and categories. The primary researcher was a former participant of the program and thus had the heuristic ability to vicariously relate to the other participants.

Results

The literature review for this study guided the design of the online survey questions. Constructs centered on (a) faculty personal characteristics (point in career, family responsibilities and previous exposure to a foreign language and/or culture), (b) teaching impacts, (c) research impacts, and (d) personal impacts of participation in the Faculty Abroad Seminar (FAS).

Program planners collected participant profiles and evaluation data over the span of the program (N=135). For the first construct, these archival records were used to determine personal characteristics. Figure one represents FAS point in career (early, mid, or late) based upon the archival records.

According to program records most participants (88 out of 135) were in early career when they participated in the program. It is important to note that the intent of the program was to recruit junior faculty to increase potential longevity at the university, internationalizing the curriculum, and an international research agenda. However, this programmatic emphasis is incongruent with Goodwin and Nacht (2001) who suggest that early career faculty
might have greater demands for tenure and potentially more family conflicts (younger children) that would decrease participation. The first survey question also probed participants on potential barriers to participation. Three participants (4, 12, 35) mentioned family responsibilities being a hindrance for participation with responses like “difficult time of year with school ending” and a “burden to be away with small children,” but this was not a major barrier to participation for most.

![Figure 1. FAS participants’ point in career archival record (N=135).](image)

In regard to language skills (Figure 2) a quarter of participants (34 of 135) had little or no Spanish language proficiency. A third of participants (45 out of 135) were advanced or fluent. Many participants (56 out of 135) did not provide information regarding this question. Basic Spanish was included in the orientation prior to the seminar and planners matched participants with Spanish speakers for translation during collaborative meetings. Respondents indicated “I had no Spanish knowledge, but that did not affect my stay in Mexico” (19) and “I speak halting Spanish, but I traversed Mexico City alone without difficulty and without harassment” (25). Another noted “When I visited Mexico I was in my mid career. It gave me [a] chance to polish my Spanish and collaborate with several colleagues” (21). Language skill was not a major barrier to participation.
With the intent of the program being to focus on faculty with little international experience, it could be expected that more non-Spanish speakers would participate. Although the program is designed to provide novel international experiences for faculty, many participants represented various regions of the world and already had exposure to various cultures. A tenured professor of agricultural education elaborated “I had had previous professional work and academic experiences in several other Spanish-speaking countries” (14). Thus interacting in a culture different from their own was not a novel experience for most faculty members.

The second survey question asked participants to describe and provide examples of teaching impacts as a result of the program. Seventy-four percent indicated an impact on teaching. Examples include incorporating field trips (2, 9, 26), providing more international topics in courses and presentations (4, 6, 11, 14, 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, 28, 31, 33, 35), leading study abroad (6, 7, 11, 25), incorporating case studies (8, 35), designing a trans-national degree program (11), increasing sensitivity to international students (19), and enhancing cross cultural exchanges (22). A representative quote on teaching impacts stated “It prompted me to lead study abroad semesters in Italy and it certainly increased the global aspects of all my courses” (6).

The third survey question asked participants to describe examples of research impacts. Several participants indicated grant writing and funding opportunities (3, 5, 6, 14, 24, 26, 29, 32, 33, 34) while others provided research impacts on authored manuscripts (6, 10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 23, 32) such as creative writings, books and book chapters, and research articles. Other responses included hosting Mexican professors (9), incorporating agricultural statistics into research (14), collaborating with scientists (16, 17, 24, 28, 32, 35), presenting research (15, 21, 24, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35), and providing research exchange programs for graduate students (22, 23, 35). Sixty-four percent provided examples of impacts, while 36 percent indicated no impact on research. One respondent noted “The FAS helped me interview industry experts and analysts in the sector, which helped in gaining insight on the industry and obtaining data” (12). Another elaborated “It was instrumental in helping build research collaborations with colleagues in Mexico” (17).
The fourth survey question asked participants to describe personal impacts as a result of the program. Most (63 percent) found the FAS to be a culturally-enriching experience. Many (29 percent) felt that they made friends in Mexico and at the host institution, and some participants wanted to seek ways to fund projects with Mexican colleagues (14%).

When I was young I traveled to Mexico regularly (mainly to border towns and to the resort areas) so I thought I knew Mexico rather well. Little did I know I really did not KNOW Mexico! My greatest learning curve I experienced while on the FAS was the history and culture of Mexico. I was deeply moved and forever changed by knowing the influence of the Mexican history. (4)

Another expressed
This was a transforming experience on two levels. First, it increased my respect for the Mexican heritage and helped me see the full picture in demographic and economic ways. Second, I had such a positive experience that I continue to seek ways to work with Mexican scientists even now. (5)

Using content analysis to sort for other impacts, the researchers searched for awards and recognitions that resulted from participation. These unsolicited comments were: Senior Fulbright Scholar/Senior Specialist (5), Alcoa International Scholars Award (6), Faculty Research Abroad (24), TAMU Student Research Symposium — undergraduates won best poster award in 2007 (24), Director of International Studies Degree program (6), and International Excellence Award (35).

Some respondents offered suggestions for program improvement. Participant 28 felt that follow-up meetings should be coordinated to bring participants together with university administration to facilitate collaborative opportunities. Another suggested that the itinerary include more flexibility to pursue their personal research contacts (12). Although Texas A&M University has the infrastructure for this program to be hosted in Mexico, one participant wanted to see expansion of the program to other countries (11).

Conclusions, Recommendations, Educational Importance, and Implications
Faculty participants were asked to reflect on the impact the FAS had personally, as well as on teaching and research. As a result, several themes emerged from faculty reflections. In describing current university positions, most participants noted that they were tenure-track assistant professors. Often tenure track (but not yet tenured) faculty are not encouraged to participate in international work. Furthermore, 25 percent of participants responded that they could not communicate in Spanish. This finding is congruent with research from Razzano (1994) who noted that language proficiency varies widely between faculty with several unable to converse effectively in another language. Although language proficiency was not a barrier to participation in the seminar, it is implied that the program would benefit faculty who do not have international experience the most.

In describing personal impacts participants’ comments supported the belief that the Faculty Abroad Seminar changed them, personally, and professionally. Although not a major barrier to participation in this study, research supported personal and job status limitations of junior faculty.
Often tenure track (but not yet tenured) faculty are not encouraged to participate in international work, and participants noted this limitation to participation in a faculty abroad seminar. Razzano (1994) added these constraints are voiced more by junior faculty. A few participants of this study identified family responsibilities being a hindrance for participation with responses like “difficult time of year with school ending” and a “burden to be away with small children.” Although, career and personal limitations may occur, this should not deter faculty from participating in similar seminar programs. Universities, colleges, and departments should provide information and resources (financial, linguistic, educational, and personal) for junior faculty to incorporate faculty abroad seminar participation into their scholastic endeavors.

As faculty participants reflected about their teaching, research, and personal impacts, a majority of respondents perceived more impacts in their teaching. Faculty noted incorporating case studies and more international topics into their curriculum as a result of the faculty abroad experience in Mexico. Several researchers found similar results (CIEE, 2009; Hand, Ricketts, & Bruening, 2007; Lucas, 1996; Razzano, 1994). It has been found that faculty use their international experiences to expand their curriculum through incorporating their own stories and experiences into their lessons; this allowed faculty to make “their lessons become more vivid and less abstract for their students” (Razzano, 1994, p. 179). Like participants in the Mexico Texas A&M Faculty Abroad Seminar, Lucas (1996) identified several faculty who included international stories, case studies, and pictures to enhance their teaching. As a result, educators and faculty will be able to internationalize the curriculum in their respective colleges through personal experience. It is anticipated that these enhancements will encourage students to pursue study abroad or engage in international/culturally inquisitive scholarship and enrichment.

Respondents’ research impacts were supported by previous studies (CIEE, 2009; Hand, Ricketts, & Bruening, 2007; Razzano, 1994). Hand, Ricketts, and Bruening (2007) found that faculty participation in faculty abroad programs “helped them to develop professionally, encouraging further participation in international research and similar faculty exchange programs” (p. 151). Razzano’s (1994) research further supported study findings by noting that the friendships made during faculty abroad programs encouraged faculty to engage in collaborative research and other professional activities. Participants in the Mexico Faculty Abroad Seminar identified grant writing and funding opportunities; creative and research writing and publishing opportunities; collaborating with scientists; presenting research; and providing research exchange programs for graduate students as research impacts. Sixty-four percent provided examples of impacts. Faculty research impacts are an integral part of higher education faculty development.

Most faculty found the seminar to be a culturally-enriching experience and many felt they made friends. These findings were congruent with Lucas (1996) who noted that faculty found extended family, personal growth and renewal from their international experiences. These new friendships can further productive teaching and research in each country as faculty continue to interact professionally and personally. The faculty abroad experience allowed for concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

Improvements can be made to the program to enhance professional and personal impacts. Respondents’ suggestions should be considered for program improvement including organizing follow-up meetings for faculty and administration to discuss and facilitate collaboration opportunities, adding more flexibility to the
faculty abroad programs, and expanding the program to other countries. Future studies should look at other faculty abroad programs from universities around the United States and the world to determine how these programs are structured and benefit faculty. Furthermore, future research should examine how faculty abroad programs can help internationalize curriculum. Additionally, students enrolled in courses taught by faculty who have attended faculty abroad seminars should be surveyed to garner their perceptions of how the curriculum has been internationalized. In order to improve faculty abroad programs, these and other considerations must be explored.

References


