Creating a Student-Focused Study Abroad Experience: Looking Forward in Programming Design

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Does allowing students the opportunity to develop an area of interest and plan their own itinerary increase effectiveness and achieve expectations of a study abroad program? This question was examined while planning an Australian study abroad program for undergraduate students at Iowa State University.

Students were provided the opportunity to identify and research areas of personal interest that would reflect upon their coursework and future aspirations. Program leaders provided relevant information and resources for student analysis, collected during an initial site visit to the partnering universities in Australia. The students used the information to identify educational and social aspects for incorporation into the program design.

This was accomplished during a pre-trip course formulated with three main goals in mind:

1. To integrate an active learning environment as opposed to the predominant traditional study abroad course format.
2. Provide team building and group activities forming a relationship between the students and program leaders.
3. To allow students the opportunity to take responsibility in the research and planning of the study abroad experience.

The poster’s purpose would center upon the planning of the program, active learning environment and overall assessment by the participants. The poster will provide a visual representation of the study abroad experience and programming design.

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| (1) Integrate an active learning environment into the pre-class trip as opposed to the predominant traditional course format | (1) An improvement in overall course and trip quality as well as quality of teaching and learning.  
(2) When given the opportunity, students will create their own useable knowledge path | (1) Change in approach from transmission to dialogue/communication to enhance trip preparation and communication ability |
| (2) Focus on student self development in academic as well as interpersonal in preparation for international travel. | (1) Using leadership and small group development students were able to create their knowledge in their area of interest as well as basic areas of Australian agriculture.  
(2) Student academic motivation increased as a result of knowledge ownership.  
(3) Leadership, in student area of interest, exceeded instructor expectations. | (1) Students who take responsibility for their knowledge are well prepared to interact with constituents as well as industry experts.  
(2) Practical application of new mental structures in pre-class trip provided for a academically positive environment.  
(3) Students exhibit ability to interact, analyze, and interpret information in a confident manner. |
| (3) Use of pre-trip course to strengthen participant communication, identify grouping patterns, conduct needs assessment for determining trip itinerary. | (1) Student ability to converse in a knowledgeable fashion, interact within the group as well as with Australian student buddies was strengthened. | (1) Social interaction with the students was enhanced which led to significant interaction and discussion. |