

## **A Short-Term Study Abroad Program for School Counseling Students**

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### **Abstract**

Well planned, short-term study abroad programs can benefit school counseling students through exposure to new and different cultural experiences. Students gain knowledge and skills that will help them serve the diverse cultural groups found in public school settings. The objective of the short-term study abroad program described in this article was to assist students in gaining additional cultural experiences that lead to expanded cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

*Keywords:* study abroad, school counseling, culture, cultural immersion

## **A Short-Term Study Abroad Program for School Counseling Students**

While there are many different types of short-term study abroad experiences for undergraduate students, few such experiences are available for graduate students. Short-term study abroad programs are programs that students participate in for less than eight weeks. In the 2008-2009 academic year, approximately 31,000 graduate students received academic credit for any type of study abroad experience (Open Door, 2010); over fifty percent of the students participating in study abroad experiences were involved in short-term programs. However, a far larger number of foreign students attended U.S. institutions of higher education during the same time. Fewer U.S. study abroad programs have specific designs for counseling graduate students and even less directed specifically for school counseling students.

## **Benefits of Short-Term Study Abroad**

There are many potential benefits gained from short-term study abroad programs for undergraduate students. However, little research explores the benefits of study abroad for graduate students. Sutton and Rubin (2004) published results from the Glossari Study that compared undergraduate study abroad students with undergraduate students who chose not to participate in study abroad programs. The results of this study indicated that a higher percentage of study abroad students graduated in four years as compared to similar students who did not participate in study abroad, have higher cumulative grade point averages, and have a more in-depth knowledge level of functional cultural practices. Lewis and Niesenaum (2005) indicated that study abroad programs could change the worldview of participating students. Increased intercultural awareness, personal growth, and increased academic performance have also been associated with study abroad programs (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004).

Study abroad also assists students in meeting multicultural competencies established by the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD). In particular, the competencies specify that multiculturally competent counselors seek out educational, consultative, and training experiences to improve their understanding and effectiveness in working with culturally different populations (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 1). In addition, the Ethical Standards of the American Counseling Association (ACA) indicate that counselor education programs should include experiences and activities that train students to gain awareness, knowledge, and skills in the competencies of multicultural practices (ACA, 2011, p.16). Study abroad is an educational experience that allows students to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own and provides the opportunity to increase their cultural knowledge, skills, and competence.

## **Changing Face of School Counseling**

In 2007, there were 105,519 school counselors providing services to approximately 49,000,000 students in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Similar to teachers, the majority of school counselors are White (Packer-Williams, Jay, & Evans, 2010). By 2050,

nearly 60% of all school age children will be students of color (Packer- Williams et. al 2010). School counselors need to understand diversity and how diversity shapes students' home, school, local and global community functioning (Yeh & Arora, 2003). As the demographic compositions of public schools continue to change, so does the need for school counseling students to expand their global experiences in order to increase their understanding of a diverse student population. As suggested by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs [CACREP] (CACREP, 2009), the curricula of school counseling programs need to provide students with experiences that facilitate exploration of social and cultural diversity issues relevant to school counseling. The short-term study abroad program is one means to meet this standard for learning.

### **Program Components**

The authors developed the short-term study abroad program to provide masters level school counseling students with the opportunity to broaden their cultural experiences through a ten-day initiative that took place during the students' spring break. The program aimed to provide students with a cultural experience that fostered learning about and participation in the educational system in Britain while enhancing their exposure to a culture that is similar in language yet very different from their own. The students go abroad during spring break to avoid disruption of class schedules. While students did not receive course credit for the experience, students could log hours for practicum during the time spent in the British Schools and involved in certain activities. The instructor selected London as the main site for the program because of the instructor's knowledge of the city and the working partnership already established with a rural middle school. While in London, faculty and students shared an apartment and learned to use public transportation to travel in and outside of the city adding to students' understanding of the British urban culture.

The program had two components: broad cultural experiences and educational related experiences. Cultural experiences took place throughout the City of London and in nearby cities. The instructor selected these experiences to immerse students in diverse environments over the ten-day period.

### **Cultural Experiences**

Students explored diverse elements of British culture. Museum visits gave students information useful in individual, group or classroom counseling. Traveling to different cities in the area forced students to develop logistical plans including timetables for the tube (subway), buses, and trains, currency transactions, and to develop objectives for the trip. These same types of skills transfer to creating a calendar for the year or for putting together a classroom guidance curriculum. Visiting cathedrals provided time for students to reflect upon the impact of religion and spirituality in cultural development. The trips to the ethnic markets were planned so that students would encounter different cultures at each market. Cultural interactions at the markets included engaging in conversations with individuals, sampling foods from other cultures and viewing different styles of living. The Holocaust Exhibit and speaker gave students a glimpse of what it was like for Jewish people living in Germany during WWI. Students also learned about the consequences that many holocaust survivors have experienced because of being a survivor such as issues related to guilt and trust. These experiences enveloped students in the British culture increasing their cultural understanding while increasing knowledge and skills that are transferrable to working with students in schools.

### **Educational Experiences**

During the ten-day program, school counseling students observed students and conducted classroom guidance for two days in a rural community school about an hour outside of London. The school served middle school students. Prior to going to the school, the school counseling students planned two classroom guidance activities that they would conduct for the British children. Teachers were consulted to determine what type of guidance lessons would best meet the needs of their students. Schools in England do not typically have school counselors; therefore, the school counseling students also had to provide information to each class about the role of the school counselor in the United States. Each day was set up so that each school counseling student was paired with a public school student. The first half of the day was spent observing in classrooms and gaining information about the educational

system in Britain by talking with students and classroom teachers. The second half of the day was spent conducting classroom guidance activities in four different classes. The school counseling students conducted the classroom guidance activities in pairs.

Conducting the classroom guidance lessons was vital to meeting the educational objectives for the study abroad program. These lessons allowed school counseling students to practice skills and to provide information for their British students. The guidance activities were developed so that school counseling students and the British students could share and enhance each other's cultural knowledge. For example, school counseling students were able to conduct a cultural guidance lesson that increased the knowledge of the British culture for middle school students who were preparing for an exchange program with the community school that was visited in Britain. The school counseling students provided first-hand knowledge about the culture and school lessening the anxiety the middle school students were experiencing.

### Sample Itinerary

Table one provides a sample itinerary for the short-term study abroad program in London. The itinerary provides a balance between academic and social pursuits. Students had many opportunities to engage in academic activities but there was also ample free time for students to pursue other activities and explore the City of London and other sights. Counselor educators can change the itinerary to meet the needs of the students and faculty participating in the study abroad program.

### Table 1 Sample Itinerary

Day 1	Depart for London (~8 hours)
Day 2	Arrive London: (Customs, purchase currency and train tickets, travel cards, and food cards; Sights of London. Start time: 7:30 a.m.; End time: 9:00 p.m.)
Day 3	Portobello Road Market, Borough Market, Shepard's Bush Market, Brixton Market. Start time: 9:00 a.m.; End time: 5:00 p.m.

Day 4 Cambridge, England: Kings College and Trinity College. Start time: 9:30 a.m.; End time: 4:00 p.m.

Day 5 Salisbury, England: Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge. Start time 8:00 am; End time: 5:00 p.m.

Day 6 XXX Community School: Observation and Classroom Guidance. Start time: 5:30 a.m.; End time: 6:00 p.m.

Day 7 XXX Community School: Observation and Classroom Guidance. Start time: 5:30 a.m.; End time 6:00 p.m.

Day 8 Imperial War Museum (Holocaust Exhibit); Jewish Cultural Center for Holocaust Survivor Talk. Start time: 9:00 a.m.; End time: 3:30 p.m.

Day 9 Museums: National Gallery, British Museum, Tate. Theater: *Wicked*. Start time: 9:30 a.m.; End time: 10:00 p.m.

Day 10 Free day

Day 11 Free day

Day 12 Return to United Stated (~9 hours)

### Implications for the Profession

Study abroad is one opportunity for counselor educators to align their counselor education program with state and national standards and for students to gain valuable cultural experiences. Cultural competence and use of data are emphasized in the standards for school counselor programs established by the University System Board of Regents (BOR) and the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Study abroad allowed school counseling students to immerse themselves in another culture increasing their understanding of cultural differences and viewpoints. Instructors can evaluate students' ability to use data as part of a study abroad program. For example, pre and post tests were given as part of the guidance lessons permitting students and faculty to examine the data to determine

how the British students were impacted by the lessons and for the students to evaluate their own performance in this setting. The study also asked teachers and students to evaluate the school counseling students to provide feedback about their classroom effectiveness.

School counseling students engaged in study abroad are able to step into an environment that allows them to practice the cultural skills they already possess and gain additional knowledge and skills. Counseling students who study abroad can use the knowledge and skills gained to interact with multicultural students. The evaluations given by the British teachers and students provided school counseling students with information about how their effectiveness from individuals with a different worldview adds to the learning process.

### Conclusion

Changes in our global community necessitate that school counseling students participate in diverse cultural experiences that increase their understanding of multicultural students. The program described in this article provided an avenue for school counseling students to expand their cultural horizons and to apply the benefits of cultural exchange to their professional competence. The program offered school counseling students the opportunity to become engaged in a different cultures at multiple levels and assisted them in gaining skills and knowledge that they can use when working with individual students, counseling groups, and conducting classroom guidance in the future.

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