

Study Abroad Pre-Course Classes Internationalize Campuses

In a recent poll taken by the United States senate, 87% of students in the United States between the ages of 18 and 24 could not locate Iraq on a world map, 83% could not find Afghanistan, 58% couldn't find Japan, and 11% couldn't even place the United States. The US senate believes that study abroad programs help people from the United States to be more informed about the world and to develop the cultural awareness necessary to avoid offending individuals from other countries (Hubbs). It is easy to see that students here in the United States know very little about the geography of other countries, let alone unique cultural aspects. There are many benefits of study abroad, but some people still believe that study abroad is too expensive and not worth the possible safety hazards. However, the benefits of study abroad must be considered as well. I believe that study abroad is a great opportunity and students should participate in pre-courses offered here at the University of Findlay to become better prepared for their study abroad experiences to come. These classes will not only internationalize the individual but will help internationalize the campus as a whole.

Offering a pre-course class for students will help prepare students for their travels ahead. By being more prepared, many of the downfalls of study abroad will be easier for students to overcome. Although I believe that study abroad is a great opportunity for students to travel the world and learn cultures of other countries first hand, others may not agree with me. Even with a "crash course", or a pre-course for students to learn important aspects of the life they're about to experience in a short period of time, one of the main reasons that students do not even consider study abroad is because it is too expensive. Susan Fitzgerald, assistant dean and director of international programs at Fairfield University, said "It's never less expensive to travel abroad" (Belchere). There are many more expenses of living in the city compared to living in a dorm. Fitzgerald goes on to say that students spend between \$5,000 and \$8,000 in personal expenses. Fitzgerald believes that "It's too expensive" and the cost of living in another country is much more than tuition while not studying abroad (Belchere). Not only does

cost effect the numbers of study abroad students, but academically students may fall behind. At Fairfield University, students say that they are stressed out with sports and academics to even consider study abroad. Students might have to take summer courses in order to graduate on time. Some majors may be tougher than others. Alyssa Ryley, a nursing major of Fairfield University says, "It's actually not good (studying abroad) for nursing majors because it causes us to fall behind" (Belchere). With the actual study abroad putting students behind, there is not enough time in schedules for a pre-course class before the trip as well. Although these are things that must be considered before studying abroad, attention must be brought to the positive side of study abroad.

As previously stated, a pre-course class is more of a crash course that provides a lot of information in a short period of time, in this case, one semester. Although the class will be fast paced, it ensures that students traveling abroad will have the background information they need to make the right decisions, and know how to react once in another country. Either by taking language or culture classes over a period of time, or being involved in a pre-course class, students will have a strong foundation of knowledge when traveling to completely different culture. With all of the excellent preparation that comes out of taking pre-course classes, it is worthwhile to find time in student's schedules so that they will be ready for their life-changing trip ahead.

Students who choose to study abroad may not know all of the hardships that they will face once inside of a different country. Taking pre-course classes would help establish a base of knowledge for these students. Here at the University of Findlay, JAPN 499 (Study/Internship in Japan) is offered for students who are planning to study abroad in Japan. This course, as well as other Japanese language and culture classes, is available for students to better their abilities so that they are ready to travel abroad. But students who have a busy schedule may only take JAPN 499 and not worry about the other intro classes. It is completely up to the students on how much they want to prepare themselves before

traveling to another country. Students traveling to countries other than Japan could benefit from a pre—course class, such as JAPN499, as well. This way, the University of Findlay (UF) would be more diverse and be preparing more students for their study abroad experience. This could also increase the numbers of students traveling abroad if there was more variety of pre-course classes specifying different countries. But as of today, UF only offers Japanese pre-course classes. Dr. Hiro Kawamura is the instructor of this class and believes that classes such as his are very important for students traveling abroad. By taking these Japanese introduction courses students will be able to learn the language and culture of Japan. With basic language and culture knowledge, students will be able to interact with people of Japan in a way that will better their experience. At Chatham University, students learn this basic background information before embarking on their life changing journey.

Students who partake in pre-course classes are more prepared to study abroad. Since 1992, Chatham University has made a pre-course mandatory before students are allowed to study abroad. This pre-course is a one-credit, fourteen-week academic class that includes readings, projects and a final exam to be completed in the semester before studying abroad (Lenz). This course prepares students mentally for their trip ahead as well as academically so that they will know the culture and language beforehand. Learning the cultural differences before entering a new country is a great benefit for students so that they will know what they are getting into before landing. For example, once students from Chatham arrived in Central America, they were ready for their adventures without having the constant miscommunication and confusion with locals. Communication and being socially prepared is one of the most important tools of success in another country. Dr. Kawamura explains this in detail.

In an interview with Dr. Hiro Kawamura, I learned that students are socially prepared for traveling to a different country by learning the language in way that connects to culture. Dr. Kawamura believes that students who lack basic language and social skills will not have good experiences when in

Japan. A pre-course class would introduce these appropriate social skills to the student while in a different country. This way, Japanese people will be more ready to accept students from a different background if the students present themselves in a way that acknowledges to the people that they are there for studying, and not just glorified tourists. Pre-course classes would teach students language skills to a point where students are confident in themselves so that they can reach out to people of Japan. Preparing students beforehand, by a pre-course class, would enable them to interact more with the people of Japan. This way, students will learn more, and overall have a great memory of their study abroad trip. Interacting with people just through language seems easy enough. But add in the culture of the natives, and it gets more complicated. Dr. Kawamura showed me how Japanese culture can apprehend simple statements offensively. When I was asked how I would respond to the compliment of “Your Japanese is very good”, I said I would reply “Thank you”. This seems acceptable in American culture, but to a native of Japan, this would be considered bragging. If a Japanese student was told that their English is very good, they would most likely reply being modest saying “no, it could be better”. Simple statements such as this can build stereotypes of Americans traveling to Japan. To avoid such situations, Dr. Kawamura works with students in the pre-course class to help them understand what is socially acceptable in Japan. Students must work together using every option available to learn the language in a way that connects to the culture. This way, students will be able to interact and be more involved once inside another country. To help being more interactive, conversation partners are offered where two people of different background communicate back and forth gaining information about one another’s culture. Projects are also done by students in Dr. Kawamura’s class that will be presented at end of the month “parties”, or presentations, where not only students in the class are invited to, but also the campus and community as a whole. As you can see, students participating in this pre-course class are not only preparing themselves for their study abroad experience, but also their peers, faculty members, and people of the community.

Pre-course classes, as well as studying abroad, internationalize students on an individual basis. However, these courses also involve more than just the students in the class. Other students and community members can be internationalized by interacting with the students and learning what knowledge they have. For example, Dr. Kawamura's monthly presentations reach out beyond the student into the community of Findlay. Students can present their projects at these parties to the community and other students on campus. These parties are open invitations so anyone can come participate and learn from other students what knowledge they have gained on Japan. By presenting their information, students in the pre-course class are internationalizing the campus bit by bit. But students in this class can reach out to others on campus more than just by presenting projects. Conversation partners are set up within the community and campus so that American students wanting to travel to Japan are paired up with a Japanese student, or community member, to converse with. Dr. Kawamura encourages students to be as social as possible and use the language and culture of Japan in their everyday life. By doing so, students are sharing their knowledge with the others, ultimately internationalizing campus. Pre-course classes reach out beyond students in the class. These classes provide the basis of internationalization, for not just the individual, but for the campus as a whole.

Pre-course classes offer so many opportunities to students and campuses. These classes prepare students in a way to maximize their experience in a new country. Students at Chatham University who study abroad participate in a semester long course that provides information about the country they are traveling to so that they will have a safe and educational journey. Dr. Kawamura presents a pre-course at Findlay University in a different way. Students are prepared for their trip by learning the language and culture so they will be confident when interacting with natives and get the most out of the country. Not only do these classes internationalize the student by better preparing them, but they also internationalize the campus. Student presentations and community involvement allows the sharing of different cultural backgrounds, internationalizing the student body. In conclusion,

pre-course classes should be offered for study abroad students so that the campus can be more internationalized.