

EXPLORING A STUDY ABROAD OPTION FOR THE ACCOUNTING CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Noting considerable scholarship supporting study abroad as a legitimate means of adding breadth to the curriculum, this exploratory study delineates experiences of a small Midwestern university seeking to implement such a program for accounting students. Developing an international experience deemed as complementary to the accounting curriculum while meeting the 150-hour educational requirement are major objectives of this program. Challenges in meeting these objectives via a program proving cost effective and responsive to student concerns are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

International educational experiences enjoy a fair amount of prominence at many universities by inherently identifying the global community as a significant part of our economic structure and addressing diversity concerns that are at the forefront of many institutional mission statements. In the past, study abroad programs were dominated by students of foreign languages and those curious about certain cultures. More recently, international study programs are attracting students from a wide variety of majors (Andrew & Henze, 2009) including programs in accounting that recognize value from a better understanding of the world in which we do business. Dolby and Rahman (2008) point out that contemporary research interests related to internationalization of higher education began during the Cold War years and are increasing again because of the new economic realities facing modern institutions. Indeed, popularity among U. S. students studying abroad has flourished, growing from a total of 62,300 in 1988 to 262,400 in 2008. Students studying in a business field now make up 20% of that group as opposed to only 11% some 20 years earlier (Aud et al., 2010).

Americans have had a long history of study abroad but, until the late 20th century, such study was predominantly available only to those of a favored wealthy class. Garraty and Adams (1962) contend that, historically, student's goals for studying abroad included expanding ones cultural horizon, increasing international understanding and good will, and experiencing travel

and adventure. While there is nothing wrong with those objectives, modern institutional accountability demands that public support for international education be rooted in academic principles intent on study abroad as opposed to travel as a form of education. Thus, to initiate a successful program that can garner support of administration, faculty, students, and parents, there needs to be a clear assertion that the program is academically sound and lends itself to measurable learning outcomes.

While a majority of study abroad programs rely on third party providers (Niser, 2010) to facilitate the international experience, this pilot study focused on a less popular but affordable study abroad agreement between a small, public, Midwestern university and a small, private, school of management in France. The study is an exploration of how faculty might initiate an optional study abroad component for the accounting curriculum without hindering the students' ability to graduate or qualify for the Uniform Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam in a timely manner. The goal is to document a working knowledge of factors that influence students' capacity to study abroad so as to facilitate a sustainable, cost effective, quality learning encounter.

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION

Undoubtedly, internationalization of business education was given a boost in 1974 when the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) mandated that accredited schools include an international component in their curriculum (Kwok et al., 1994). Interestingly, the term internationalization has not been clearly defined in the literature although most academics claim to know what it means (Fuller et al., 2010). Some authors (Kedia, Harveston, & Bhagat, 2001) indicate that internationalization includes inculcating a global mindset in the student.

A study by Albrecht and Sack (2000) reported that globalization has been one of the three major developments that have dramatically changed the business environment. Global competition has changed the culture and perspective of most companies today and has also

transformed how educational institutions are dealing with that change. Indeed, many, if not most, colleges and schools of business use phrases like “dynamic global environment” in their mission statements that purport to educate students who are ready to assume work responsibilities in such a world. Accounting practitioners and educators are not immune to the changes that these new economic conditions present as former American Accounting Association President, Nancy Bagranoff, (American Accounting Association, 2010) explained:

“Economic interconnectedness provides both challenges and opportunities for accounting educators and researchers. Our largest public accounting firms are international operations with offices, employees and governance around the world. These organizations, similar to multinational corporations, can and do hire from anywhere and everywhere.” (p.3)

Now, academicians must consider how to best prepare graduates for the new global economy. Apparently, some prestigious schools like Yale (Podolyny, 2007) and Wharton (Korn, 2011) have recognized the need for an international experience by implementing study abroad programs in their graduate business curricula. Others, like the University of Minnesota, have addressed the need at the undergraduate level of the business school (Fischer, 2010).

Proponents of international education are common, and research supporting the value of such study is readily available (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). Recommended methods for internationalizing curricula vary, but a host of authors (Kwok et al, 1994; Kedia et al, 2001) advocate international study and travel as a principal component of internationalization. An international educational experience appeals to many Americans as a means of providing unique learning opportunities that are not available through the domestic channels of higher education (Oberholzer, 2007; Chalou and Steglitz, 2003). Taylor and Finley (2010) affirm study abroad as a legitimate method of broadening international and intercultural awareness while acknowledging that there are other means of accomplishing this as well. Others (Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill, 2009) cite the potential of study abroad as adding value to student learning and development while Oberholzer (2007) takes this potential a step further and argues that,

the global skills gained through international experiences are linked to success factors in management. Study abroad students are more apt to apply lessons learned in the classroom to other situations and such experiential learning is critical to the success of graduates in the business disciplines (McKenzie, Lopez & Bowes, 2010).

Although most institutions of higher education do not require any kind of study abroad experience, many now recognize the importance of having a worldview if their graduates are to be competitive in the modern economy (Fugate & Lassk, 2003). For many institutions, developing a student's worldview might mean taking a required course or series of courses within the general education component of the curriculum to facilitate that understanding. Additionally, Business schools are often required to modify their own curriculum in order to prepare students to work in a global environment and to assure learning that meets accreditation standards. However, with regard to accounting programs, one study reported that there has been little progress towards internationalization of the accounting curriculum (Taylor & Finley, 2010). This appears to be the case, despite the fact that professional leadership from both the American Accounting Association (AAA) (2010) and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) (2011) have strongly acknowledged the need for curricular change along this line. Over the years, both academics and practitioners have advised colleges and universities to take aggressive steps at internationalization of their accounting curriculum (Taylor & Finley, 2010).

American students are not globally aware, but rather, have such a global awareness deficit that some authors label them as parochial (Mazon, 2009; Cossolotto, 2009). This global awareness deficit results in a disconnect between what the institution is trying to accomplish regarding internationalization efforts and the individual student's worldview. Deficiency in global awareness may be partially attributed to the geographical isolationism that the United States has historically offered (Mazon, 2009). Exacerbating this situation, accounting students often come from backgrounds that do not help to alleviate this isolationist mentality. According to Fogarty and Markarian (2007), *"Unlike other disciplines, accountancy has thrived as a field*

mostly within the context of public institutions. On balance, the discipline has never been associated with elite private schools” (p. 141). Jacobs (2003) points out that accounting is linked with talented and ambitious students from relatively humble class origins. If this is true, then the so called provincial accounting student might not always find the right fit with potential employers – employers who desire worldly graduates. One may contemplate that the insular background attributed to accounting students results in a perceived lack of qualified graduates by certain employers. In what otherwise might be a good job market for accounting graduates, some job seekers may experience rejections only to find that they do not possess an intangible quality never communicated to them by either accounting faculty or potential employers.

Most accounting educators are well aware of the decades-long debate over how to best ready students for professional practice. With accounting education under scrutiny for many years, some academics are thankful that the accounting profession never went so far as to mandate specific courses or other changes to the curriculum. Considerable flexibility exists regarding the make-up of accounting curriculum because a pervasive theme underlying adoption of the 150-hour educational requirement is the aspiration to have broadly educated graduates who are more inclined to develop into successful accounting practitioners. There is really no expectation that accounting graduates be professionals at the time of entry into the profession, but that they have the requisite knowledge and skills to become professional accountants (Accounting Education Change Commission, 1996).

The often cited Bedford (1986) report supported the notion that all college graduates have a strong, broad general education. This report warned that accountants who remain narrowly educated will find it more difficult to compete in an ever changing and expanding profession. The Accounting Education Change Commission (AECC) (1996) echoed this message stating: *“general education should develop in students the capacity for inquiry, abstract logical thinking, and critical analysis...including international and multicultural knowledge”* (p 3). This statement can be interpreted as a clarion call for accounting education with an international flavor.

Overall, the AECC favored instructional methods that included letting students develop more of their own skills so as to continue learning throughout their lifetime. Promoting education that aligns with these contentions can certainly be accomplished through a variety of means, but nowhere is it more manifest than through a study abroad component in the degree program. Although a study abroad option might be made up of courses that cannot be neatly categorized as liberal arts, most advocates would agree that this type of experience adds breadth to education. Kaufman, Martin, Weaver & Weaver (1992) confirm the notion that a study abroad experience broadens the education by freeing students to develop and form new conceptions that are life changing. Consequently, a number of factors appear to favor study abroad as a means of achieving more breadth in accounting education while empowering the student to adapt and solve ambiguous issues that are likely to be encountered as practicing accountants.

Studying abroad should not imply that internationalization of the accounting curriculum is complete, but perhaps the value of such an experience is to stimulate student interest in preparing for a global marketplace. Worldwide, accounting standards are not uniform but with momentum building for global convergence, standards will likely evolve towards future harmonization. Already, accounting educators are being asked to teach International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) so as to prepare students for related questions on the CPA examination. New graduates are expected to identify and understand differences between Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) based statements versus those prepared in accordance with IFRS (American Accounting Association, 2010). In this respect, accounting educators and students are charged with a unique task unlike other business disciplines. Authors Munter and Reckers (2010) indicate that most schools are ill prepared for the task at hand and note: "much work remains to be done" (p. 198).

While not eliminating the need to work for changes that address IFRS in accounting classes, the time seems right for both faculty and students to consider an international experience. Study abroad in a country that has adopted IFRS would seem appropriate because observation of

accounting standards from such a vantage point could prove to be invaluable for a future accountant practicing in a world without borders.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO STUDYING ABROAD

Persuading students to consider studying abroad is not an easy undertaking because of many real and perceived barriers that stand in the way and impede the actual process. The provincial and pragmatic accounting student might, as Dessoff (2006) notes, consider international study as peripheral and, perhaps, “frivolous” rather than central to their education. The socioeconomic status of many students appears to be a real threat because they have neither the financial freedom, nor the mindset, to act in an independent manner when making decisions. Students coming from a financially challenged familial structure do not have the luxury of giving up a part-time job to take a break from their normal study and work routine. Likewise, there is evidence that, because of other commitments, non-traditional students’ participation in study abroad is minimal (Mazon, 2009) even if they recognize it as having great potential. Mazon also notes that there must be both international “awareness and convergence” in order to facilitate study abroad: *“Convergence is the accumulation of resources, a sense of agency, and answers to real-world concerns that combine to build on students’ awareness, thereby increasing the likelihood that the student will study abroad”* (p.145).

Apparently, the curriculum should cultivate student global awareness and facilitate study abroad via a convergence of factors which, minimizes drawbacks and promotes benefits of such study. An institution that is supportive of a convergence culture appears to be in a much better position to pilot a successful study abroad program.

According to one major university, both faculty members and students believe that study abroad might not work in certain disciplines, for “reasons of quality and timing” (Fischer, 2010, p. 1). One fear is that the student will have to delay graduation, particularly in highly structured, tight curricula such as accounting, engineering, and other technical fields (Andrews

& Henze, 2009). Another drawback is the additional work expected of faculty advisers in mapping study abroad in the degree program, and in dealing with the complexities of course transfers and equivalencies. Thus, many academicians view advising for study abroad as time consuming with few rewards and much potential liability which, suggests a need for an institutional support system that can provide assistance and training for faculty in order to alleviate fears that could stymie the initiative.

A common assertion holds that students who attend private institutions have more financial means than those who attend public institution and are, therefore, more likely to expand their educational pursuits into the international arena. Information provided by the Institute of International Education (2011), supports that claim since top student participation rates in study abroad programs at doctorate, master's, and baccalaureate institutions are found at private colleges and universities. Large public universities contribute significantly to the overall number of students who study abroad, but these institutions are not the leaders in participation rates among undergraduates. Most small public universities have some form of study abroad programs available for students but participation rates are low (Niser, 2010) compared to the small private institutions.

As the marketplace becomes global, the disparity between those students able to acquire the requisite type of education that employers demand is a crucial concern for lower and middle class students. Likewise, the challenge for smaller public institutions that recruit from those socioeconomic classes is to provide reasonable access to a global education if they are to be competitive with their wealthier counterparts. A well developed, cost effective study abroad alternative at these small universities may very well help level the playing field and provide a unique and attractive niche from which to recruit and retain qualified students now and in the future.

Administratively, there are benefits in paying attention to details and in sorting through the many logistical problems that study abroad programs impart. McKenzie et al. (2010) note that

small regional universities are at a disadvantage when dealing with study abroad programs which can lead to a drop in revenues as students are drawn off by other large universities and programs that administer the international experience. A cost effective alternative for the small university might be the use of Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) which, permit the academic units in each institution to start the process of implementing faculty and student exchanges (Fuller et al., 2010). This type of direct exchange agreement also eliminates much of the need for an international faculty because it uses faculty in the host institution to provide a more authentic, cross-cultural experience for the student (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002). Executing a workable MOU will require input from institutional administrators and faculty within the academic discipline so as to create an effective contract that is reliable and fair to both institutions.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

BACKGROUND

Our university is a small (under 5,000 students), public institution in the Midwestern United States. The School of Business has approximately 600 students majoring in various programs with about 130 of those being accounting. The School is in the process of earning accreditation through The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB). Most of our accounting majors wish to qualify for the CPA examination upon completion of their degree and, like many faculty, we are faced with educating a large number of first generation college students who have a limited understanding of what it means to become a practicing professional. Programmatically, we are currently addressing the 150-hour requirement in various ways. First, a 150-credit, five-year Professional Accountancy degree is available to meet the requirement and prepare graduates for the CPA examination. Second, our university also offers a four-year, 120-credit Bachelor of Business Administration degree with an accounting emphasis that meets the minimum examination requirements except for the total number of credit hours. Currently, a majority of our students are choosing to graduate in Business Administration with an accounting emphasis while earning additional credits towards the 150-hour requirement. Although faculty do not consider the Business Administration degree as the

ideal pathway to prepare for a career in professional accounting, its apparent popularity among students can be linked to the flexibility that it affords.

One facet of curriculum modernization at our university has focused on including IFRS topics in the accounting coursework. Students are now afforded exposure to IFRS in intermediate accounting followed by additional emphasis on international topics in a senior seminar course. Depending on the outcome of current harmonization efforts, IFRS coverage can be expanded in the future.

During the course of investigating the integration of IFRS into the curriculum, certain faculty pondered the notion of providing other authentic international experiences for students. Recognizing that the global economy was real rather than perceived, we sensed there might be long-term career advantages for our students who tend to exhibit many of the isolationist traits described by Jacobs (2003). While Taylor and Finley (2011) have reported meaningful learning opportunities for their Master of Accountancy students via a required short duration study abroad program, our students are predominantly in the process of completing their first degree. Implementing a study abroad requirement of any kind at this point in the educational process appears insurmountable given that few of our students have demonstrated any interest in an international experience. For example, for three academic years ending in 2011, only 28 students from our university had studied abroad and none of those were accounting majors. However, this environment is changing with administration appointing a Director of International Studies to lead the way for increased multicultural exchange. Therefore, the timing appeared to be appropriate for exploring a study abroad alternative that could prove to be a positive international academic experience for accounting students.

ASSESSING STUDENT INTEREST IN STUDY ABROAD

As a first order of business, faculty felt it was imperative to determine the extent of interest among accounting students regarding participation in a study abroad experience. Given the backgrounds of many students and the fact that our School has not had much international

experience, we were not very optimistic as to how students might perceive such a program. A survey of intermediate accounting students was thought to provide fairly reliable feedback data because most of these students had committed to accounting as a major and would be around long enough to participate if a study abroad opportunity became reality.

A short survey instrument was developed and administered to the intermediate accounting students in the spring of 2010. Before asking the students to complete the survey, the instructor provided a brief and general overview as to how a semester study abroad program might work. Students were asked to select only one answer to each question; however, several participants chose more than one answer for item number three that addresses concerns of studying abroad. The results of that survey are presented in Table 1, which includes responses from 27 students who completed the survey.

Over 40 percent of students indicated an interest in studying abroad for one semester and 48 percent indicated they would like more information regarding such opportunities. While response rates do not suggest that a majority of students are interested in a study abroad experience, 74 percent of students believed there were advantages to studying abroad. We also noted positive comments and an absence of overall cynicism that could stifle plans to continue our exploration. As expected, there was concern regarding language barriers (19%), cost (22%), and distance from family and friends (32%). None of our students indicated fluency in a language other than English, but several (13) indicated a familiarity with other languages including: Spanish (12); German (2); Italian (2); and French (1).

SUPPORT FROM ADMINISTRATION

Gaining administrative support for an exploratory study abroad program proved to be the easiest part of this undertaking. Initially, the College Dean was apprised of our intentions and we were assured of her support to proceed with the proposal. Although the entire process took approximately one academic year, this timeframe includes obtaining formal approval at the system level from the State Board of Regents.

Over a course of several months, various meetings between accounting faculty and the Director of International Studies proved beneficial. Accounting faculty presented the idea that one semester abroad taking upper division coursework taught in English and including a sampling of accounting, general business, cultural, and language studies might be most beneficial to our students. The Director suggested we consider an agreement with a French school of management which had been recommended to him from another foreign collaborator. We performed due diligence with respect to the prospect in France and found that the school had a good reputation and was also in the process of working towards AACSB accreditation. The student survey was administered and findings (Table 1) were summarized and presented to our College Dean and the Director of International Studies. Approximately three months later, we received notice that our University President had sanctioned moving forward with an MOU for the French school of management. Subsequently, the MOU was signed by both institutional officials and then approved by the Board of Regents. Shortly thereafter, we received notice from France that there would be three students studying at our campus in spring of 2011. The expectation was that we would reciprocate the following year (2011-2012) with a like number of students.

RECRUITING STUDENTS TO STUDY ABROAD

As an exploratory study abroad program, stakeholders at our university were in favor of limiting enrollment so as to help meet reciprocity requirements with the French school of business. A small number of interested accounting students were deemed a viable pilot group to accomplish this goal. However, with such a small pool of students from which to recruit, securing participants has proven to be challenging. Initially, there were seven students who indicated considerable interest in the program and whom attended the informational meetings held for their benefit. Our hope was that three students would follow through and enroll in the program so as to meet the reciprocal arrangement, but even that proved to be overly optimistic as only two accounting students, both at the senior level and in their final semester of study actually participated in the program during the 2011-2012 academic year. In this regard, our experience mirrored that noted by Salisbury (2012) who asserts that interests of students can

waiver and their resolve to participate in study abroad can fade unless they are certain about their intentions.

Under terms of the MOU, students pay regular tuition and certain fees to our University but remit no tuition or fees to the French school. Therefore, the cost of this program is similar to studying at the home institution except for travel and other cost of living differences. Nevertheless, cost is a major consideration for our students and monetary exchange rates during this time period have not been favorable. Additional costs, including air fare, are estimated at \$3,000 for each student during one semester of study. While significantly less than using an outside provider to facilitate the study, the total cost for one semester abroad is approximately \$10,000. One other pitfall worth noting is that while obtaining a passport is a relatively painless process, long-term study of this nature requires that a French Visa be obtained via a personal visit to the Consulate General of France located in Chicago. So, students need to factor in time and money related to this trip when considering our exchange program.

A major concern to both students and faculty is the need for credits earned abroad to transfer and appear on the students' academic transcripts. Many schools abroad, including our host institution in France, use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which provides for some uniformity among schools regarding credit assignment. Our investigation indicated that converting from the ECTS system to U.S. credit hour is quite common, but some variations do exist depending on the conversion factor that is utilized. Most commonly, 30 ECTS credits convert to 18 semester credits; therefore, a reasonable conversion factor to use when transferring the credit is .6. Our Registrar is in agreement with using this factor when converting and mapping the coursework to student transcripts upon receiving evidence of satisfactory completion of academic work from France. We also requested and received acknowledgment from our State Board of Accountancy that the credits would count towards meeting the 150-hour requirement as long as they appeared on the student transcripts from our university.

We recommend that students register and pay for a minimum of 12 semester credit hours which translates into 20 ECTS when studying in France. A lighter than normal academic load is preferable as it allows students to acclimate to a different culture while having some free time for travel. Therefore, unless our students are in need of more than 12 credits to graduate or meet the 150-hour requirement, we suggest this academic load. A sample of the French coursework and how it converts to our credit system appears in Table 2. While there is some flexibility as to what can be taken, the Sample Course Conversion Worksheet is indicative of what an accounting student will study.

All courses taken in France are taught in English, and, except for Business French, the courses are considered to be third and fourth year courses at the business school. Our students are expected to be upper level accounting students and to have completed most of their general education and program requirements before studying abroad. For the most part, the French coursework transfers as elective credit that complements our accounting degree and provides evidence of an authentic international experience.

FINDINGS FROM PILOT STUDY

To facilitate the collection of information from the pilot study participants, a post-study survey form was developed and administered to the two students upon returning from their travels. The intention was to evaluate and compare students' responses for agreement and differences in their perceptions of the program. However, the quantitative information collected was deemed unreliable because of the small number of participants in the study and is not reported here. Comments proved more effective and were solicited via the questionnaires and follow-up interviews with both participants. Participant written and verbal comments were as follows:

Concerns:

The accounting courses were of a lower level than expected, however the other business and marketing courses were good.

I thought the courses [in accounting] were very elementary and are better suited for a sophomore or first semester junior.

With my courses, I felt I did not learn anything new. It is more the cultural aspect of being there.

Classes happen once a week, sometimes even two weeks apart and it is difficult to follow.

Advantages:

The classes require minimal homework, therefore, there was plenty of time to travel and see Europe. This in itself is an educational experience, plus, I have made friends from many different countries and backgrounds

You [faculty] should definitely advise other students to participate in this program.

Overall, this was a great experience that I would recommend to other students.

My overall experience has been fantastic! I would suggest to students coming in the future to arrive a few days before classes begin and to stay longer after classes.

Needs:

Open the study abroad to marketing students because it is a marketing oriented school.

The application process was fairly easy.

The application process is long, but I don't think there is another way to streamline it because these things take time.

I would suggest really advertising the program and making students aware of the program. With more students it would be more enjoyable.

Overall, participant's perceptions of the experience were reported as favorable. However, both students expressed some concern over the lack of rigor in the coursework, particularly noting the "elementary" level of the accounting courses. Nevertheless, attending to detail during the complex planning process appears to have paid off because both students successfully completed their studies and have since graduated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study is an exploration regarding the viability of an optional international experience for accounting majors at a small, Midwestern university. Our School of Business has little history and limited understanding as to orchestrating a study abroad program and so spearheading the effort means dealing with many issues as they are encountered. Our students are developing global awareness by completing coursework, but until now, no effort was made at convergence which, as Mazon (2009) noted, is an important factor if a study abroad program is to succeed. Convergence includes providing answers to students' questions and dismantling barriers that stand in their way. Convergence is proving to be the biggest challenge facing us and it is likely going to take several years to effectively address all of the issues.

Countering what might be prohibitive costs for our students, we chose to implement an exchange model which relies on students paying normal tuition and fees to their home institution. This model works fine assuming both institutions create enough enthusiasm and commitment among students so that reciprocal participation can be accomplished in a timely manner. The notion that our accounting majors alone could fulfill reciprocity expectations has come into doubt during this pilot study and we have begun to propose the idea of studying abroad to faculty in other business disciplines. Thus far, faculty members outside of accounting have been modestly receptive of the idea but have shown little interest in recruiting students for this program. However, in our case at least, sustainability of a study abroad program in France may very well depend on other business student participation. We are hopeful that in the long-term, awareness of the positive experiences by those who do travel abroad will increase and serve to alleviate the problem of low participation.

Participant responses regarding the lack of rigor in some of the courses taken in France give us reason to question whether this particular exchange is a good fit for our upper division accounting students. While the overall experience was reported as very positive by our student participants, we feel it is necessary to investigate further the French school's progress regarding AACSB accreditation and consider whether their institutional goals and academic standards align with ours.

We envision studying abroad as growing and developing into a meaningful alternative for meeting the 150-hour requirement while providing an educational experience that proves to be of value for those about to embark on the world of work. At this time, the program is not intended as a substitute for specific coursework, but to provide a broadening educational experience as intended by the 150-hour requirement and for which international study is best known. Our findings confirm that this study abroad experience does not include content that might substitute for any of our own accounting courses. In that regard, this international experience is considered a small component of internationalizing the accounting curriculum at our institution. However, in addition to adding breadth to a 150-hour accounting education, we believe study abroad represents a type of experiential learning – learning currently touted and endorsed by administration and faculty at our university.

This exploration is a preliminary attempt to seamlessly include international education on our students' academic record while not burdening them with additional time and expense in the acquisition of that education. Careful planning and academic advising will remain as critical factors in meeting those objectives. Certainly, an international experience will mean different things to different participants, but given the backgrounds of many of our students, it is not unreasonable to think that it could be life changing.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

There are limitations to this exploratory study which details the initial experiences in implementing a direct study abroad program at a small public university. First, pilot study

information is inherently impractical to generalize to other populations. Second, the investigation is ongoing and will continue to evolve as information from participants is collected and analyzed. Third, other than the student interest survey information presented in this study, post-travel survey data from participants is unreliable and will remain sparse in the near future because of the limited number of students choosing to participate in this new program.

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Table 1. Study Abroad Survey Results – Intermediate Accounting Students

Survey Item	N	%
1. What is your major?		
a. Professional Accountancy	13	48
b. Business Administration—accounting	12	45
c. Other	2	7
total	27	
2. Given the opportunity, would studying abroad at a university in a foreign country for one semester be of interest to you?		
a. Yes	11	41
b. No	6	22
c. Maybe	10	37
total	27	
3. What is your biggest concern regarding studying abroad?		
a. Language	7	19
b. Cost	8	22
c. Personal Safety	3	8
d. Curriculum/transfer credits	2	5
e. Distance from family/friends	12	32
f. Other	5	14
total	37	
4. If you could take business and accounting courses in English in a foreign country, would that influence how you feel about studying abroad?		
a. Yes	14	52
b. No	5	18
c. Maybe	8	30
total	27	
5. Are you fluent in a language besides English?		
a. Yes – what is the language?	0	0
b. Not fluent, familiar with:	13	48
c. No	14	52
total	27	
6. Personally, do you see any advantages to studying abroad?		
a. Yes	20	74
b. No	1	4
c. Maybe	6	22
total	27	
7. Would you like to have more information regarding opportunities of studying abroad?		
a. Yes	13	48
b. No	7	26
c. Maybe	7	26
total	27	

Table 2. Sample Course Conversion Worksheet

French Course Description	Optional/ Compulsory	ECTS Credits	Conversion Factor	U.S. Semester Credits	U.S. Course Mapped as
Business French	Compulsory	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Bus. Comm.
Business French seminar	Compulsory	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Bus. Comm.
International Accounting	Optional	2	.6	1.2	Topics – Accounting
Cost Control	Optional	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Accounting
Intl Strategic Development	Optional	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Bus. Admin.
Human Resources	Optional	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Bus. Admin.
E-Marketing	Optional	3	.6	1.8	Topics – Bus. Admin.
Total Credits		20		12	

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