



Designing Study Abroad Pre-Departure Trainings

海外留学出発前の事前研修プログラム

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Abstract

At a time when many universities are trying to clarify their study abroad pre-departure training courses, this paper underscores the importance of considering what is being taught, how it is taught, and the rationale for preparing students for study abroad. The need for appropriate pre-departure training to increase the chance of success in overseas sojourns has been underscored by many authors (Grove, 1989; Johnston, 1993; Pessala, 2012; Kinginger, 2013). The results of an online survey ($n=23$) summarizing how SA pre-departure programs at various universities in Japan are conducted are summarized. This paper concludes by offering recommendations for implementing effective pre-departure training programs.

Keywords: study abroad orientations, socio-pragmatic training, cross-cultural counseling

概要

多くの大学が留学前の事前研修プログラムを明確にしようとするにあたり、本論文はその研修の内容や方法、そして学生自身に準備のための動機づけの重要性を強調している。海外留学の成功率を高めるために適切な事前研修プログラムが必要であることは、多くの学者により述べられてきた(グローブ 1989年、ジョンストン、1993年、ペッサラ、2012年、キンギンガー、2013年)。本論では、日本の複数の大学における出発プログラムの実施方法をオンライン調査($n=23$)した結果をまとめた。本論では最後に、効果的な事前研修プログラムを実施するための推奨事項を提唱して結んでいる。

キーワード : 海外留学オリエンテーション、実践的トレーニング、異文化間カウンセリング

Well-designed pre-departure trainings for study abroad programs offer an opportunity to prepare students for many of the challenges they are likely to face abroad. According to Barber (2014, p. 36) such programs can enhance the chances of cross-cultural and linguistic success during participants' overseas educational endeavors. However, all too often, the focus of pre-departure trainings is limited to matters of logistics and survival language (Fantini, 2004, cited by Ramos, 2013, p. 8).

Most pre-departure study abroad trainings that we have observed have consisted of lectures designed to deliver information efficiently to students rather than interactive exchanges encouraging them to reflect. Indeed, such trainings have a tendency to resemble pre-departure checklists for

packaged tours rather than in-depth and well-structured sessions focusing on ways to make overseas experiences more meaningful in terms of cross-cultural learning, linguistic development, and personal relevance. Although billed as "mandatory", often there is no penalty for missing sessions, and there is frequently little or no follow up to assess a training program's effectiveness. Moreover, many university faculty and staff are unaware of the pre-departure training programs offered by their institutions (and in many cases, the actual study abroad programs themselves). As a result, numerous learning opportunities are being missed.

While most institutions post the contents of their pre-departure training programs on their websites, research documenting the effects of such orientations is limited and inconclusive. However, by examining the existing research, it seems that many university administrators and faculty are beginning to see the need for a more in-depth approach to pre-departure training. More often than not, pre-departure training programs are evaluated on the basis of qualitative, even anecdotal findings rather than quantitative data. Moreover, most universities we are aware of have not yet succeeded in implementing comprehensive pre-departure training curricula on any large scale.

Rogers (2010) describes the impact of a semester-length elective intercultural communications course offered to Kwansei Gakuin students who were set to participate in yearlong study abroad programs at universities in English speaking countries. While the course described was noncompulsory, all study abroad students were required to take some academic English courses, as well as courses providing some background information about their host countries prior to departure. Moreover, Japanese culture classes and general intercultural communications skills classes were also compulsory. These courses are designed to address many of the academic and intercultural challenges participants will likely face. In addition, students are encouraged to take an intercultural communications elective. Hence, students at this institution are getting much more than a perfunctory run through a pre-departure checklist. Indeed, the author notes "course evaluations indicated that most students who took the course felt that they gained valuable knowledge and skills in the course that would be helpful to them when they went abroad as well as in the future after they returned" (p. 270) However, the author admitted that "it is uncertain whether this ability was used during the time they actually had the experience, or whether they simply analyzed and synthesized their experiences partly in response to doing the survey for this research project." (p. 274)

Expanding our scope of inquiry beyond Japan for a moment, this tendency is also noted by Shaheen (2004) who examined the effects of a semester-length pre-departure training course on the intercultural learning of 17 American students preparing to study abroad in France. No statistically significant difference ($r^2=.25$, $p=0.72$) was found between those who participated in the pre-departure training program and a matched control group ($n=20$) in terms of scores on the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, 2008). However, qualitative interviews and informant observations led the author to suggest that some aspects of the pre-departure program may "prompt students to think more purposefully about what they hope to gain from the experience. If they have specific goals for the program, they are more likely to achieve these goals" (p. 166).

Shaheen further endorses the implementation of post-return orientations, which often help students notice the gains they have made. “Several students mentioned in their interview that they had not realized how much they had learned from their time abroad until they talked about it with me” (p. 154). By actively talking about their experiences, Shaheen argues that students gain a chance to unpack, recognize, and ultimately build on what they learned while abroad.

Cox (1996) provides an overview of the needs and benefits of a pre-departure training program of unspecified length for Japanese university students preparing for three-week homestay and language study programs in the United States. She provides a detailed rationale for such a program, then goes on to emphasize the importance of students learning to identify their own goals and motivations for study abroad. Cox also states it is important for students to examine their own culture and consider how it might impact their experiences abroad. Her article includes several explanations of useful activities and tools to employ when instituting a study abroad preparation program.

Method

Instrument

To ascertain how study abroad programs at universities in Japan are often conducted, we designed an online questionnaire survey. This survey was based on previous surveys by the Oakland University International Students and Scholars Office (n.d.) and the Association of International Educators (2015). The original survey consisted of 13 items and an informed consent statement. However, we were constrained to shorten this to 8 items due to web hosting limitations. The revised 8-item survey (and informed consent statement) was alpha-tested by three peer reviewers. After some minor revisions, it was then translated into Japanese by the co-author and subsequently checked by four Japanese peers. To reduce the possibility of translation error, the final version was back-translated into English by one Japanese teacher of English. On July 29, 2015 both the English and Japanese versions of the survey were placed online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LCDNHFJ> and <http://tinyurl.com/zzmddo9>.

Informants and Procedures

In August 2015 approximately fifty survey request letters were emailed to language instructors and administrative staff known by the co-authors who were working at universities in Japan. All but five of these letters were in English. A post-hoc survey cut-off date of September 15, 2015 was set. During the 45 days the survey was online, we received 23 English language responses, representing a 50% response rate. Unfortunately, no Japanese language responses were received. Given the small size of this sample, we decided that an in depth quantitative data analysis would be inappropriate.

Results

Before mentioning the results, we should acknowledge two problematic issues inherent in the survey. First of all, the respondents were entirely native English speakers at Japanese universities. It is quite likely that Japanese English teachers might have different insights or opinions about the questions raised. Indeed, many study abroad policies are set by Japanese administrators, and foreign language instructors who lack fluency in Japanese might not be well informed regarding what those policies are. A second limitation of this study is that the modest sample size makes the results suggestive at best. A more comprehensive sampling might reveal different patterns with respect to the survey items.

With those provisos in mind, let us now consider the responses. A few key points stand out. One is that while most universities do have some sort of pre-departure trainings for their study abroad programs, these trainings don't seem to be a priority. Roughly 40% of respondents (7 out of 17) reported that all pre-departure sessions were optional, and 47% indicated that students who missed session(s) would be asked to learn the material on their own outside of class. A further 35% reported that missing sessions might lower a student's grade. While being asked to learn the material outside of class sounds like an opportunity to develop independent learning skills, it was not clear that there would be any follow up to confirm whether the students had learned the material.

Another striking survey result was the number of outbound study abroad programs available at many universities. Eight out of 22 respondents (more than 30%) reported that their universities have 15 or more study abroad programs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many university professors and administrators (including the authors of this report) don't actually know how many programs are offered by their universities. With such a wide variety of options available, quality control becomes increasingly difficult.

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the pre-departure trainings, 30% of the respondents indicated that this was done via an in house survey, 25% that it was done via word of mouth, and 35% didn't know. To be fair, not knowing whether an evaluation exists is not the same thing as saying the evaluation doesn't exist. However, the fact remains that 35% of respondents don't know how the trainings are evaluated. Moreover, word of mouth assessments can be highly skewed due to social desirability bias. The survey results suggest that many evaluations are largely an afterthought.

Finally, the manner in which information is transmitted to students is largely through lectures. Fewer than 20% of respondents reported that students participated in discussions. The same number of respondents indicated that students took part in roleplays or other simulations. More promising is the fact that 8 out of 21 respondents reported that study abroad alumni gave talks. We believe this is something all pre-departure trainings should be doing. However, in our view the over-reliance on lectures to convey information is problematic.

Discussion

Based on the previous survey results, we would like to conclude this paper with seven specific suggestions to enhance to quality of study abroad programs at the university level. At Toyo University we are attempting to implement the following points for long-term study abroad programs. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to implement many of these points for most short-term study abroad programs.

Recommendation #1: *Don't limit the training to logistics* –

If training programs focus only on travel logistics and safety, it becomes easier for students to see study abroad as a touristic package rather than an educational process. To avoid touristic scenarios, Whalen (2011) suggests students should set and articulate goals for their study abroad experience, and trainings should incorporate culture, communication skills, problem solving, preventing/solving problems with host families or roommates. Safety, culture shock, and overseas university classroom etiquette should also be covered.

Recommendation #2: *Conduct the trainings in the target language* –

Target language acquisition is a primary goal for many study abroad students. Trainings should reflect this by being conducted in the target language. While this will be more challenging to students, it will also improve their motivation and help them see practical language use as an integral part of their experience. Furthermore, it establishes language competence as a priority from the beginning and helps students see that language learning is interwoven throughout the study abroad program. Foreign language use is central to many study abroad experiences, not something that should occur only in certain moments then otherwise packed away.

Recommendation #3: *Include communication strategies* –

Students will need to become more adept at *using* their target language(s). Many Japanese students lack authentic experience using any foreign language(s) and need to learn strategies for negotiating meaning and repairing communication when breakdowns occur. Encouragingly, most of the respondents to our survey indicated that strategic communication skills were a component of their training programs. Beyond giving mere survival language, students should learn strategies and approaches to enhance their ability to communicate in the academic situations they will face. For example, this can include paraphrasing or circumlocuting when they don't know how to express a particular concept in English. It also includes knowing how to confirm meaning and ask for and give

further explanations when needed. These are but some of the core competencies that will aid students' communicative competence, thus enhancing their overall experiences. Pre-departure trainings should help students develop these skills through active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). In L2 contexts, this involves practicing structures and strategies and using them in meaningful activities such as free discussions.

Recommendation #4: Use student near-peer role models –

For students preparing to embark on study abroad, contact with study abroad alumni and/or students from host institutions or destination is far more interesting to participants than talking to teachers. The advice, insights, and stories these peers can share are invaluable in shaping student expectations. Each year at Toyo University's Study Abroad Prep Course (a 7 – 10 day optional non-credit bearing course for future study abroad participants), we organize an international student forum. During that event, current international exchange students and past study abroad participants answer outbound study abroad students' questions and discuss concerns and goals. During this session, we allow students to use whatever language they wish. In addition to a question and answer panel session, we set up multiple discussion stations. Outbound exchange students meet with various study abroad "experts" and have opportunities to ask questions about whatever they want. It is always a highlight of the course.

Recommendation #5: Make the training inclusive –

Trainings should be adjusted according to students' concerns, questions, and goals. Their experiences, anxieties, and suggestions should be regularly elicited as they enrich the program and keep it relevant. While a lot of trainings tend to be the same every year, we believe it is worth seeking input from the students for at least two reasons: 1) they might share ideas for new topics to explore, and 2) they appreciate being part of the planning process. Something as simple as a needs analysis survey that students fill out and trainers debrief helps can help students feel like their needs are being taken into account. The training should not feel like merely a rehash of previous programs, but rather a unique entity that has been created specifically for them.

Recommendation #6: Incorporate task-based learning –

Give students chances to actively research their destination countries and universities, and share their findings with each other. This engages them more than lectures and enables them to adjust their learning to fit their needs. We have found that Japanese university students often lack experience in doing research on English websites. Moreover, there is a lot they don't know about where they are going. Creating web quests similar to those of Nairn (2011) or Hayden (2011) gives them

opportunities to seek out information about the facilities, dormitories, and campus communities they will be soon using. This may not only help familiarize them with venues where they will likely go, but it can also help them become more adept at finding information on other English websites.

Recommendation #7: Make it experiential and reflective –

Pre-departure trainings should capitalize on students' excitement and give them a chance to *experience* content (including the challenging and unpleasant stuff) rather than just ingest it. Trainings should be interactive and full of opportunities for students to share their ideas, ask questions, and engage with the content. A lecture about potential problems with roommates has limited impact; however, a role-playing activity and discussion will likely enhance students' connection with and understanding of the content. At all stages of the training, students should be encouraged to reflect on what they are learning. Incorporating a reflective learning component into the training helps students connect what they learn to their goals and recognize their agency in the experience.

Conclusion

Different institutions are approaching pre-departure orientations in different ways. For many institutions, pre-departure orientations are limited to nuts and bolts of logistics, filling out forms, and walking students through itineraries. The information is delivered primarily through lectures that are nominally mandatory. However, other universities clearly recognize the benefits of expanded orientations and are expanding the length and scope of their orientations to address issues such as intercultural communication, goal setting, and culture shock. Still other schools are offering study abroad prep seminars as credit bearing elective courses. Indeed, there is a broad range of approaches to pre-departure orientations.

In researching this paper, we have become more aware of how all study abroad stakeholders need to communicate more and develop more in-depth pre-departure trainings. The challenge seems to be finding the time and resources to implement a deeper and more expansive pre-departure program content. Our online survey results suggests an informal consensus already exists that we need to be doing more to prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities they will face abroad. Now we just need to do it.

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Appendix A. English Version of the Online Survey Questionnaire

Pre-Departure Study Abroad Training Survey

We are conducting research on study abroad pre-departure training programs in Japan. Could you kindly take a few minutes to complete the following online survey? All responses will remain confidential and be used only for academic research. You are also welcome to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer. Should you have any questions about this research, feel free to contact either of us directly.

Andrew Hockersmith

Tim Newfields

Toyo University International Affairs Office

Toyo University Faculty of Economics

[Note: To reduce the likelihood of spam, the email addresses have been deleted.]

1. How many students are at your institution? under 2,000 2,000-4,999 5,000-9,999 over 10,000
2. How many different study abroad programs currently exist at your institution?
 1-3 programs 4-6 programs 7-10 programs 11-15 programs over 15 programs
3. For a typical semester-length (or year-length) study abroad program at your university, how many pre-departure training sessions are held?
 Currently none 1-3 sessions 4-6 sessions 7-9 sessions over 10 sessions: _____
4. If students miss some/all of those pre-departure training sessions, what repercussion(s) will usually occur?
 Nothing: all pre-departure sessions are optional.
 This might lower the student's overall grade for their study abroad course.
 That student will be asked to learn the material out of class.
 That student will be asked to study abroad in a different program.
5. Which of the following topics are typically covered in a typical pre-departure program for semester-length (or year-length) study abroad at your university? (Select all that apply)
 basic health and safety issues
 homestay communication tips
 cultural and historical information about the host country
 basic language survival tips
 information about culture shock and stages of cross-cultural adjustment
 advice about dealing with racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice
 practical information about money and transportation
 suggested sight-seeing spots
 an expected code of conduct while studying abroad
 information about what to do in emergencies
 advice about friendships
 Other: _____
6. Does your university distribute a handbook for students who have decided to study abroad?
 No Yes (If yes, how many pages is that book? _____ pages)

7. How are your pre-departure training programs usually conducted? (Check all that apply.)

- students receive lectures about relevant topics
- students receive a written handbook
- students are referred to a university study abroad website.
- open discussions are held on thematic topics
- experiential role-plays and simulations are conducted
- talks by previous year program participants are given
- I'm not actually sure.
- Other: _____

8. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your pre-departure training programs?

- by informal word of mouth
- through an in house survey
- Other: _____

If you would like to receive a copy of the academic paper that comes out of this research, kindly email Andy (andy@toyo.jp) or Tim (timothy@toyo.jp) your email address. We will then mail a copy of that paper to you in .PDF format at the end of this year. Please be assured that your personal information will be kept confidential.

Appendix B. Japanese Version of the Online Survey Questionnaire

海外留学事前研修に関する調査

私たちは、日本の大学における留学事前研修プログラムに関する研究を行っています。

お手数ですが、このオンライン・アンケートに、ご回答いただけますでしょうか。すべての解答は、研究のためにのみ使用し、他の事には使いません。また、差し支えのある質問は空欄のままにして頂いて構いません。ご質問があれば、下記のEmailのいずれかにご連絡下さい。

Andrew Hockensmith

東洋大学国際教育センター

Tim Newfields

東洋大学経済学部

[オンライン版では、電子メールの授所は削除しました]

1. 貴校の学生数を教えてください。 2千人弱 2千~5千人 5千~1万人 1万人以上
2. 現在、貴校では、海外留学プログラム（長期、短期）がいくつありますか？
 1~3種類 4~6種類 7~10種類 11~15種類 15種類以上
3. 長期海外留学プログラムの出発前研修は、どのくらい回数、行われますか？
 全くない 1~3回 4~6回 7~9回 10回以上 不明
4. もし学生が出発前研修を受けなかった場合、どのようなペナルティーを科していますか。
 何も科さない：すべての出発前研修は任意参加です。

- 留学コースにおける、学生の成績を下げる可能性があります。
- 研修外で独自に学ばせる。
- 別のプログラムへ移行させる。
- 不明
- その他（詳しくお教えてください。） _____

5. 海外長期留学プログラムの出発前研修は、どのような内容で実施されていますか。
下記から該当するものをすべて選択してください。

- 基本的な健康と安全の問題
- ホームステイ・コミュニケーションのヒント
- ホスト国についての文化や歴史的背景
- 基本的な言語のサバイバル・ヒント
- カルチャー・ショックと異文化適応の段階の情報
- 人種や民族、宗教的な偏見への対処についてのアドバイス
- お金や交通機関についての実用的な助言
- 観光スポットの提案
- 海外留学中の行動規範
- 緊急時の対応について
- 友だち作りのためのアドバイス
- その他: _____

6. 貴校では、留学する学生にハンドブックを配布していますか。

- いいえ はい (はいの場合、その本のページ数を教えてください _____ ページ)

7. 海外留学出発前研修は、通常どのように行われていますか。(Check all that apply.)

- 留学に関するガイダンスを行う。
- 学生同士で、留学をテーマにディスカッションをさせる。
- 学生にハンドブックを渡す。
- シュミレーションロールプレイを行う。
- 学生にウェブサイトを見るよう指示する。
- 昨年留学した学生の体験を聞く。
- 不明

8. 留学出発前研修プログラムの効果について、どのような方法で評価され、何を参考にしますか。

- 口コミを通じて 学内のアンケートを通じて その他

この調査結果を必要な方は、お名前と電子メールアドレスをアンディーさんティムさんご記入ください。
調査結果は、年度末に PDF 形式で送らせていただきます。全ての情報はこの調査のみに、使わせていただきます。