

PROMOTING CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION



Nearly 5,000 students from the University of Michigan participate in an education abroad experience each year. The challenge of administering programs for so many students is heightened because education abroad operations at the large public research university are decentralized.

"We do not have one single education abroad office on our campus," says Amy Conger, Assistant Vice Provost & Director of Global Engagement at the University of Michigan. "Rather, our schools and colleges run their own operations to best meet the needs of their disciplines and students." This can lead to wide variabilities in programs, from different application timelines to diverse methods for unpacking the study abroad experience when students return to campus.

To help ensure that all its programs are top-notch, the University of Michigan focuses on cross-campus collaboration among stakeholders in various departments. For instance, several colleagues teamed up to develop shared content for pre-departure programming, including online tools, student handbooks and a collection of case studies. "Individual offices didn't have to start from scratch in creating their pre-departure orientations," says Conger. "The materials are simply branded the University of Michigan and can be customized for different programs and disciplines."



TO RUN SUCCESSFUL
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COMMUNICATION
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Dartmouth College faces a similar challenge. Nearly all of its study abroad opportunities are faculty-led programs created by departments. The Frank J. Guarini Institute for International Education, which oversees academic off-campus programs at the private liberal arts college, stresses cross-campus collaboration among the institute, departments that sponsor programs and administrative offices that support students and faculty when they travel abroad.

"So much of supporting these programs involves interaction with a wide variety of offices across campus, from undergraduate deans and the legal department to the registrar and residential life," says John Tansey, Executive Director of the Frank J. Guarini Institute for International Education. "To be effective in delivering programs and supporting students and faculty involved with them, it's key to have strong relationships across all those areas."



FIVE TIPS FOR FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Conger and Tansey offer several suggestions for breaking down interdepartmental silos to help strengthen your study abroad programs. It begins, they say, by acknowledging that different stakeholders across campus have important information, skills and experience to contribute. Once you've identified potential partners, then you can tap into their know-how in the following ways:

1.

Create a cross-campus group of visionaries. The University of Michigan's Council on Global Engagement (CGE) grew from a Study Abroad Council convened in 2008 to increase student participation in education abroad. Appointed by deans, CGE members include faculty and professional staff from academic departments, the registrar's office, financial aid, risk management, university health services and other vital areas. They meet monthly "to look at policies and problem-solve in a room where all perspectives are represented," says Conger. "It's a way to constantly remind folks of the expertise that exists across campus."

2.

Hold workshops for stakeholders. Tansey's staff at Dartmouth partners with the college's Center for Advancement of Learning to familiarize faculty with key topics in the field of education abroad and how to successfully lead programs. During orientation workshops, professors who will lead study abroad programs meet with key campus personnel to discuss a range of issues: What happens if a student is injured and needs hospitalization? How should faculty handle disciplinary issues?

3.

Operate a shared infrastructure for education abroad. The University of Michigan relies on Terra Dotta's global education software. The Global Engagement Team maintains the system and provides staff to configure it so individual departments don't have to purchase and run their own application management systems. "By using a shared system, we introduce common language around programs and provide single search points for students who want to find opportunities," says Conger.



4.

Fund collaborative efforts. The University of Michigan offers grants to faculty and staff to build collaborative resources for study abroad. The pre-departure materials mentioned earlier were funded by a grant. Another grant-winning project was developed by a group of faculty, the School of Social Work and Counseling and Psychological Services, who created an interactive, online tool to promote resilient travel. "We have students who experience difficulty while traveling overseas, ranging from mild homesickness to more serious culture shock," says Conger. "This tool walks students through different scenarios, helps them self-identify if they need support and connects them to resources."

5.

Encourage informal connections. Not all cross-campus collaboration needs to be formalized. Some of Dartmouth's best efforts at teamwork are organic, informal ones. For example, Guarini Institute staff meet regularly with faculty and staff across campus, including the schools of business or medicine, to informally talk through topics or simply get to know one another better. And, quips Tansey, his office always keeps a full bowl of chocolate on the counter to lure visitors to stop by again.



"Universities need to be cognizant of the need to develop and maintain relationships among different departments," says Tansey. "There are a lot of very interesting, committed people across campus. By the very nature of what we do, we're well-positioned to work with a diverse group of people both on and off campus. Cross-campus collaboration not only helps the institution carry out study abroad programs, but it's a lot of fun interacting with an amazing cross section of people!"



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