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Why global travel is essential for business professionals

Posted on January 26, 2016 by Kay Palan

HCoB Dean Blog International finally often meet with students and alumni and hear about their academic and professional experiences abroad. As they return from their travels, I am impressed by their increased engagement and development—they readily share experiences and have a new understanding of the world and of themselves. I also travel throughout the world meeting with potential educational partners and continue to learn just how important these global travel experiences are to both students and professionals.

It is hard to overstate the importance of study abroad for business students, and yet the Institute of International Education reports that only 10 percent of students study abroad. Still, when students return from their international experiences, I witness a new maturity and engagement in their courses and in the community. And, it isn't just the exposure to new cultures and international business courses that promote these changes. They develop the transferable skills that employers cite as essential when evaluating new talent.

It is equally difficult to overstate the importance of global understanding for business professionals. The U.S. Travel Association reports that "for every dollar invested in business travel, businesses benefit from an average of \$9.50 in increased revenue and \$2.90 in new profits." Professionals who travel for work not only benefit their careers and their companies' bottom line, but they often face similar challenges as students and develop similar skills.

Knowing all of this, our global business center and our faculty develop relationships with universities across the world to find the programs that provide a solid business education with unique experiences. We put our money behind it, providing scholarships to assist any student who wants to travel.

While students who participate in semester- or year-long study abroad programs reap the greatest benefits, those who can only manage a short course—say two or three weeks—still have significant experiences that impact their lives, increase their ability to adapt in the workplace, help them relate to others and give them a global perspective.

Just listening to students and professionals describe their international experiences, you realize how they have developed and grown in many areas, specifically:

Confidence: Managing the logistics of living or working develops problem solving skills and requires flexibility and the ability to remain calm. Students, required to solve problems on their own and in a new environment, quickly learn to communicate even when language barriers exist, negotiate complex public transportation systems and make important decisions. While professionals working abroad may have different support for their travel for work, the need to solve problems quickly and communicate remains the same.

Independence: Removed from families and friends, students in particular learn about themselves and develop a sense of independence that will help them in the world of work. This independence and experiencing something completely new helps develop an important skill for succeeding in business—the ability to solve problems.

Cultural appreciation: Spending time in another country not only exposes students to the local culture, but also lets them see their own culture through someone else's perspective, increasing their understanding of the world and improving their ability to work in teams and across boundaries.

Increased interest in global events. Having traveled throughout new regions of the world, students return to WMU with a renewed interest in the events that shape those parts of the world they have explored as well as others. This interest allows students to understand the implications of global events.

Global Engagement is one of Western Michigan University's three strategic pillars, and I am proud of the work of our faculty and staff in helping students and future professionals become globally engaged, something every business professional should consider. Preparing students, our future business leaders, for a career that will no doubt be influenced by global decisions is one of the best ways we can prepare them for success.