Cultural Connections in Senegal: Outcomes of Study Abroad Course

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Cultural Connections in Senegal: Outcomes of a Study Abroad Course

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WMU – Academic Leadership Academy 2016-2017

Purpose of Research Project

The purpose of this study was to examine the intercultural competence, critical thinking, and global engagement of students participating in the Cultural Connections in Senegal Study Abroad Course, offered during summer I.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences in the students’ cultural responsiveness as measures by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) administered before and after the course?
2. What themes emerge from the students’ journal entries that relate to cultural responsive knowledge, skills, and attitudes and global engagement?
3. When journal entries are compared, are the themes that emerge from their journal entries during the sixth week of the course more culturally responsive than the themes that emerge from journal entries during the third week of the course.

Description of Study Abroad

The Cultural Connections in Senegal Study Abroad course focuses on the effects of globalization on systems such as educational, health, linguistic, cultural, food, transportation, housing and ecological systems. One of the goals is to produce culturally responsive, globally engaged citizens able to apply what they learn in the course to their current field of study, and to begin to develop strategies for solving shared problems in the U. S.

• 24 hour Pre-departure Seminar
  – Culture and important aspects of the host country
  – French language lessons
  – Introduction to research methods, data collection and analysis
  – Development of an annotated bibliography

• Field Study and Research
  – Language Lessons in Wolof (Local Lingua Franca)
  – Excursions related to course and student research topics
  – Lab Sites focusing on education, disabilities, and globalization

• Outcomes of the course since 2012
  – 53 students
  – 18 honors theses
  – 2 Voted best honors thesis of the year
  – 53 Capstone Projects
  – 4 National and State Presentations
  – 1 Publication

Methodology

• Received HSIRB approval on 12 May 2017
• Students completed the IDI during the first week of the course, and then again three weeks after returning from Senegal
• IDI data and quantitative profiles were completed by Mr. Chris Sligh, Director of the Office of Student Engagement, and a qualified administrator of the IDI
• Students were instructed to write reflective statements in their journals 3 days per week over a 7 week period
• A content analysis was applied to the journals by co-principal investigators
• Recurring themes were identified

Results of Journal Analysis*

Themes Emerging from Journals

Examples

• Anxieties about a new experience
  – "I work on overwhelming amount of people, languages and activities doing an end project."

• Acceptance into the Host Family
  – "We’ve been very close and have enjoyed so much about the people in Senegal so far."

• Role of Religion in the Country
  – "The belief that in Senegal and other African countries is very important to people and their culture."

• Decision to return to Senegal
  – "Special people, good people and great people."

• The effects of Globalization
  – "The struggle to live in the U.S. and not accept that every thing is the same."

• American Exceptionalism
  – "The world doesn’t have all of the answers."

• Storage: hopefully & worry
  – "And everything is new, but there is no language in Michigan."

• Future directions
  – "I’m learning a lot about Senegal."

• Ability to return to Senegal
  – "I’m hoping for good news, but not sure."

• Communication
  – "Talking people and the biggest shocks on the trip.

Results of IDI Analysis

Resolution & Next Steps

Cultural Disengagement

Resolved
Unresolved
Resolved
Unresolved

Resolved disengagement – how well a person identifies with their own cultural identity

Unresolved disengagement – how well a person becomes disconnected from their own cultural identity

Intercultural Development Continuum

Monocultural Mindset

Polarization
Minimization
Acceptance
Adaptation
Multicultural Mindset

This group moved from Polarization into Minimization.

Polarization – “a judgmental orientation that views cultural differences in terms of “us” and “them.”

Minimization – “An orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.”

Partners

• Haenicke Institute for Global Education – Supports study abroad course
• Office of Student Engagement – Administered the Intercultural Development Inventory (pre and post course)
• Office of the Vice President of Research – HSIRB Citi training for students and faculty
• Approval of proposal for student research abroad

Summary & Next Steps

- These data validate the importance of our course and demonstrate how it connects with Objectives and Priority strategies of the Gold Standard 2020 such as:
- Co-Curricular learning opportunities
- Promote greats involvement of undergraduate students in research and creative activities
- Increase feasibility of broad based participation in study abroad programs
- Create mutually beneficial partnerships that impact scientific, economic, and social problems, attentive to local and global needs
- We will conduct a replication study with a higher number of students

Contact Information

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Describes the study abroad course

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