

# **Providing Study Abroad Students with a More Immersive Experiential Learning Environment**

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## **Background**

Study abroad experiences appear to be increasing in popularity as a means of “internationalizing” the business curriculum (Shooshtari & Manuel, 2014). The authors believe that these types of experiences are very valuable in a world which is becoming more and more interconnected, and in which most businesses will have at least a minimal international footprint. Many business schools even face a mandate through their accrediting agency to provide international business knowledge within their curriculum (Le, Raven, & Chen, 2013).

## **Research Situation/Question**

While one of the major concepts which study abroad programs are pinned to is experiential learning, many of the planned activities revolve around classroom activities or business visits (Duke, 2000; Shooshtari & Manuel, 2014; Gordon, Patterson, & Cherry, 2014). While these activities are valuable, they are not especially experiential in nature. According to Rosier et al (2016), experiential learning involves active and purposeful processes contextualized in direct or simulated ‘real world’ activities in which students have the opportunity to construct and regulate their own personal and professional learning (Rosier et al, 2016).

The question is: How can we get students to learn experientially in the foreign culture in small enough groups that the individual student is likely to be involved in the interface with the culture and the decision process? While it is not usual to answer the research question immediately after asking it, we have chosen to do so here. The authors, over time, have come to the conclusion that a Scavenger Hunt is an excellent tool for immersing students in an experiential learning situation. The remainder of this paper is devoted to an examination of what we have learned over time to make scavenger hunts a more effective tool for experiential learning in study abroad programs.

The very fact that students are functioning in another culture provides them with a good measure of experiential learning. They have to read signs in another language, find restrooms, figure out menus at restaurants, and sometimes communicate with people from the “foreign” culture; all too often even these kinds of experiential activities lose some of their punch as they are often done in larger groups, and are facilitated by faculty leaders or tour guides. Individual students tend to be insulated from cultural interaction and experience in many situations. The authors have seen this many times, both with student groups and tourist groups alike.

We applaud everyone who ventures outside of their native culture. It takes a bit of courage to do so. Many choose not to travel just because of the discomfort that comes with the experience. It is that very discomfort, however, that results in learning, and increased comfort in the long run. Our observation is that far too many travelers remain largely in their own “cultural bubble,” sheltering themselves as much as possible from the foreign culture. We once had a group of young men who discovered an Irish Pub where they could watch American sports programs, order hamburgers and beer, and speak English with the publican and staff. There was just one problem: All of this was taking place in the heart of Rome!

## **Involving Students in Ongoing Experiential Learning**

The authors have led a number of study abroad experiences for university students over the years. We hit upon the scavenger hunt independently. When we decided to share our experiences with scavenger hunts with fellow educators, we were heartened to discover that the recent study abroad literature does make some mention of scavenger hunts as a means of involving students in the study abroad process (Duke, 2000; Koernig, 2007; Doyle, Helms, & Westrup, 2008; Wesp & Baumann, 2012)

We found that the literature describes the use of scavenger hunts in one of two ways: As a pre departure means of involving students in the gathering of information, cultural or otherwise, in preparation for the actual experience (Koernig, 2007). The other use was as a one-time experience during the trip, usually lasting a morning or an afternoon, and often involving the traveling group as a whole (Wesp & Baumann, 2012). While those are good uses of a scavenger hunt, in our opinion they are not optimal, as the problem of an on-going experiential learning process on a personal level is not as likely to be achieved.

A study abroad leader/educator is faced with a number of issues when trying to answer our previous question: How can we get students to learn experientially in the culture in small enough groups that the individual student is likely to be involved in the interface with the culture and the decision process? We have to admit, that for us, some of the issues did not become apparent until after the fact, so that the development of our use of the scavenger hunt was a progressive process, not just a single eureka moment.

### **A Few of our Objectives**

What we believe leads to a better experiential learning process during a study abroad experience.

- Getting students to talk with local people when possible
- Getting students to use the public transportation system
- Getting students to walk the streets and experience the place
- Getting students to try different foods

### **The Issues**

Delineation of the major issues was a voyage of discovery for us. Many are readily apparent to a group leader/educator, some are not. Even those which may be more apparent may have some subtle aspects which are not as immediately apparent. The issues as we now see them, in no particular order of importance:

- Structuring the scavenger hunt in a way that it is an on-going activity.
- Motivating students to participate in the scavenger hunt.
- Grading the scavenger hunt activity.
- Keeping the experience intimate enough that individual learning can take place.

### **Structuring the Scavenger Hunt**

The answer to the structure issue appears to be obvious; make the scavenger hunt a multi-day activity. We have found, however that this is much more easily done when the entire trip is structured so as to provide at least three days in most of the cities where we will be sleeping. Students can't participate in a meaningful activity in a given city when they only have a few hours. There is not incubation time, no time to gain some level of orientation and comfort in the place which they are tasked to explore. This also makes for a better environment all around.

Our objective is to get away from the "If It's Tuesday, It Must Be Belgium" mentality (1969). A whirlwind tour allows people to see, but not really experience, anyplace they may be. We don't want our students to remember a blur, but to relish, and have learned from, various experiences...we feel that that requires time in situ.

*Note: we are not entering the debate as to whether a longer study abroad experience is more valuable than a shorter experience. While we do not have scientific support, we suspect that the structure of the experience, allowing sufficient incubation time in a place, may be the most important factor if significant learning is to be achieved.*

### **Motivating Students**

As any educator understands, motivating students is not as easy as it looks to state legislators. Grading of the scavenger hunt helps. It might seem that grading would be motivation enough. We have found, however, that while grading helps, that motivation and grading need to be considered separately.

A recurring theme when we talk with students sometime after the study abroad experience is over is "The

scavenger hunt is great, don't stop doing it!" "The scavenger hunt makes us get out and do things." While both of these are manufactured quotes, they are the essence of student feelings. We are especially heartened when we talk with students who have also been on a study abroad experience with other faculty leaders that they tend to point out that the scavenger hunt is something that sets our trips off from the others in a positive way.

So, beyond grading, how do you motivate students to participate?

- Make it fun.
- Make it achievable, but not too easy.
- Regularly remind students that there is always something for them to do.
- Break the task into two or more scavenger hunts where it makes sense to do so.

### **Make it Fun**

Many scavenger hunt destinations depend on some knowledge of history, literature, etc. All things that today's students (perhaps it has always been so) are woefully weak in. So, you need to tell students why a place or object is important, or get them to research it on their own, and include something about it in their report at the end of the study abroad experience. Most recently we have found it useful to make the scavenger hunt instructions available to students prior to departure. The best students do a fair amount of research so they understand what they are looking for, have a good idea where it might be, and can hit the ground running.



Of course, some of the items require no further explanation. For example, one of the items on our Paris scavenger hunt is the last remaining vespasienne (traditional outdoor pissoir) in Paris. There were about 1,230 in the 1930's, 400 in the 1960's, but alas, just one today! Even the women on the trip find this curiosity to be interesting.

Some are self-rewarding, such as looking through the keyhole at the Villa del Priorato di Malta in Rome. The view itself is a little surprising and is a reward for finding, and getting to the keyhole, much less figuring out how to take a picture of what you see through the keyhole. Finding the library of the University of Vienna is surprisingly hard for some students, but has resulted in quite a few conversations between our students and students from that university.

### **Make it Achievable**

Making the searches achievable but challenging rubs up against the grading area for motivating students. Students who find the more difficult places/objects are rewarded with higher grades. (See our example scavenger hunt.) When we arrive in a new city, we usually conduct a neighborhood walk to familiarize the students with the area close to where we are staying. We point out restaurants, bus/tram/subway/rail stops, historical places nearby, café's, and even McDonalds. Low and behold, we walk right past several of the easiest to find scavenger hunt destinations as well. We usually point out one or two, and explain to students that it is their responsibility to know the list and be on the lookout whenever they are out and about. Some will require special journeys, such as finding Jim Morrison's grave in Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris or the world's longest colonnade path at the end of a bus route at Santuario di Madonna di San Luca in Bologna, Italy.

We have found that a mixture of easy and more difficult objects keeps students in the game and also provides a natural means for grading the outcomes. Many of the locations we and our students will pass by every day, some are within a block or two of where we pass, and some require a bit more looking, and perhaps even a special trip to get there.

All are achievable, with the expenditure of a little effort, and we try to make the locations meaningful. While the internet is a boon for students today, most still have to figure out how to get to a place and often have to ask locals for help. We have only one location which a student has never found: The place where Henri IV was

assassinated. I can assure you, however, that the plaque is in plain sight, quite near Les Halles.

### **Remind Students Regularly**

Regular reminders serve two purposes. Let's face it, some people get homesick, especially when confronted by a new cultural experience. They often retreat to their sleeping room, sometimes withdraw, and sometimes feel physically sick. Activity is one way to help to prevent or alleviate home sickness. The other benefit, of course, is that there is nearly always something for students to do rather than lay about.

### **Break the Task into Two or more Scavenger Hunts**

We began with just one, all-encompassing, scavenger hunt for an entire study abroad experience. Students who started off slowly and didn't locate too many destinations before we moved to a new city could become demoralized, as there was no way for them to recoup their early neglect of the project. By breaking the task into two or three sections, each graded separately, students could get a fresh start, resulting in increased motivation if they got off to a slow start. This is really a judgement call on the part of the trip leaders as to how to break up the tasks.

### **Grading the Scavenger Hunt**

We believe that there is great intrinsic value to the scavenger hunt in terms of experiential learning and cultural immersion, but find that many students need more of an extrinsic reason to at least get started. Based on verbal student feedback, some start because it is required, and graded, but by the end, many are participating because it has become meaningful and fun.

Our grading rubric has evolved with experience, but is based on several tenets:

- To earn a grade of C should be easy, utilizing easily found locations.
- Progressively more difficult locations need to be found to achieve higher grade levels.
- In many cases student's need not find every location in a category to work on a higher grade level.
- Difficulty generally has two determinants
  - o Distance/time that must be devoted
  - o Difficulty in locating once there

### **Difficulty**

One of our locations in Paris is the site where Marie Antoinette was beheaded. We found that about half of our students were going to the wrong place. For some reason they went to the Bastille...or, should we say, its former location, or the place where she spent her last night. This wasn't bad, as they frequently had contact with local people to get back on the right track, but it did cause the task to be a little more difficult than we anticipated. So, difficulty isn't always as apparent as it may seem to be.

We categorize each of the scavenger hunt destinations based on difficulty of attainment.

### **List Length**

The number of destinations in each category also should be tailored to the length of time that students have in a given location. Five days in Rome or Paris gives people more time to hunt. Two or three days in Bologna or Vienna dictates that the list should be shorter.

Another consideration has to be other activities. We simply have more scheduled activities in some locations than others. Using Bologna, Italy as a base is terrific. It allows a day trip to Florence, where we usually visit a leather factory for part of the day. An entire day is taken in Bologna with a trip to a Parmesan cheese facility in the morning and perhaps a Balsamic vinegar cellar or other business visit in the afternoon. Obviously, even though we may be based in Bologna for several days, we also have many time consuming activities which indicate the need for shorter lists.

## Grading Rubric

Table One contains an example of a grading rubric for our scavenger hunts.

**Table One: Scavenger Hunt Grading Rubric**

Complete Category	Grade
C	75%
C & at least ½ of B	80%
C & B	85%
C, B & at least ¼ of A	90%
C, B and at least ½ of A	95%
C,B & A	100%

We want to put higher grades within reach, but make them a challenge at the same time. By not requiring full completion of some of the more difficult categories, we also recognize the difficulty/time commitment to complete some of those tasks. We fully understand that the rubric isn't perfect. It evolves, even during the grading process as we sometimes end up switching a destination from one category to another. A full student handout, including list of tasks, may be found at the end of this paper.

In addition to the Grading Rubric, students are required to create a Powepoint presentation for each scavenger hunt. They must show each item on the scavenger hunt list, in order, as this greatly facilitates grading of the project by the instructors. If they did not find a particular destination they indicate that in their presentation. For each place they did go to they must show a photo of themselves at that place, and a brief write-up of what that place is all about...why it is important. We also ask that they provide any anecdotal comments about their journey.

### Allow Individual Learning to Take Place

We have discovered that individual experiential learning doesn't tend to take place in a herd, unless you are the leader of the herd. We have made the mistake of allowing any size group of students to work together on the scavenger hunt. The result is that the leaders experienced what we were hoping for, and most students just followed along. This was not an optimal outcome from our standpoint.

We don't want individual students wandering by themselves, either. While the danger of physical harm is considerably lower in Europe, it is not nonexistent. At the risk of sounding sexist, we are particularly concerned for our female students, although male bravado can also lead to undesirable situations.

What we have found is that groups of three work very well. We are not unhappy if two people want to team up either. We have also found that allowing people to shift the people they are working with can be a good idea. Finding partners for one task or destination that may differ from their exploration group for some other tasks. We realize that the group of three or two is impossible to inforce. We explain why we want students to do this...more intimate contact with the environment. A group of three is just more likely to be consultative in their decision making than a leader emerging to lead the group. At the very least, the followers in a group of three are likely to better understand the decision process of the leader. Ultimately, you have to trust the students to follow the rules.

### Proof

A photo of the individual at the place specified. We don't care if the entire group is in the photo, or each individual. It is a dead giveaway when eight people are in the photo that the rules were broken. These photos become a part of the Powerpoint that students turn in for each of the scavenger hunt projects.

## Example Student Handouts

### Paris

Complete Category	Grade
C	75%
C & at least ½ of B	80%
C & B	85%
C, B & at least ¼ of A	90%
C, B and at least ½ of A	95%
C,B & A	100%

### Scavenger Hunt Grading Rubric

The objective is to find, and *provide proof of finding. (usually a photo with you included in the photo...* items from the following list. Grades will be assigned as per the above Rubric. You may find these items alone, by chance, or with other class members. Working together is fine, but the group you are working with must not exceed three people. You may participate in more than one group throughout the process if you wish. YOU must be present to have your picture taken. There may be occasions when you find an item when we are together as a large group. That is OK.

#### Paris Scavenger Hunt Category C

1. Stand on the Meridian of Paris marked by an Arago medallion
2. Stand on the point from which all distances from Paris are measured
3. Find a pyramid
4. Get a picture from the roof of La Samaritaine
5. **Find at least four instances** of pixel art tile mosaics on buildings
6. Find a statue of St. Denis, holding his own head in his hands

#### Paris Scavenger Hunt Category B

7. Stand on the Meridian of Paris marked by a copper line in a church
8. Find the Red Mill
9. Stand next to a gargoyle
10. Find the Hotel George Cinq
11. Find the top of the Arch de Triumph
12. Find an art deco “original” Metro entrance
13. Find the Two Chinamen Café
14. Find Julien Aurouze and Co. and get a picture of you with the rats
15. Stand where Hitler Stood (See photo below)

#### Paris Scavenger Hunt Category A

16. Stand where Henri IV was assassinated
17. Find the place where Marie Antoinette lost her head (Not pedestrian friendly, be careful!)
18. Stand in front of a very big clock in an old railroad station which is now a museum
19. Find Jim Morrison’s grave
20. Find the last remaining pissoir (vespasienne) in Paris
21. Find the “passer through walls”

### A Combined City Handout (Rome, Bologna and Vienna)

[Each of the cities is considered to be a separate hunt, but the students received a single handout.]

Complete Category In Each City	Grade
C	75%
C & at least 5 of 10 in B	80%
C & B	85%
C, B & at least 2 of A	90%
C, B and at least 4 of A	95%
C,B & A	100%

### **Scavenger Hunt Grading Rubric**

The objective is to find, and provide *proof of finding, (usually a photo with you included in the photo...* items from the following list. Grades will be assigned as per the above Rubric. You may find these items alone, by chance, or with other class members. Working together is fine, but the group you are working with must not exceed three people. You may participate in more than one group throughout the process if you wish. YOU must be present to have your picture taken. There may be occasions when you find an item when we are together as a large group. That is OK.

#### **Rome Scavenger Hunt Group C**

1. SPQR
2. Throw a coin in the fountain that will assure your return to Roma
3. An elephant
4. A Bernini fountain
5. Find people dressed in clothing said to have been designed by Michelangelo

#### **Rome Scavenger Hunt Group B**

6. Find, and use, a drinking fountain in Campo di Fiori
7. A shop which sells clothing for nuns
8. Find the statue of Giordano Bruno. Who is he?
9. Find a flood marker.

#### **Rome Scavenger Hunt Group A**

10. Find a pyramid
11. Find Shelly's grave
12. Place your hand in the mouth of truth

#### **Bologna Scavenger Hunt Group C**

13. Le Due Torri
14. Piazza Maggiore
15. Fontana del Nettuno
16. Night walker restaurant

#### **Bologna Scavenger Hunt Group B**

17. Buffana
18. Old Fishmongers Street
19. Galleria Cavour

#### **Bologna Scavenger Hunt Group A**

20. Teatro Anatomico

21. Università di Bologna (Take a stroll and find a University sign with crest)

**Wien: Group C**

22. Gloriette

23. Doorway at Zum Figlmüller

24. Straßenbahnlinie 5 (The vehicle with you in the picture)

**Wien: Group B**

25. Drinking a coffee or other beverage at one of the following:

a. Café Central

b. Café Sperl

c. Café Hawelka

d. Café Griensteidl

26. The orgel at die Weinorgel

**Wien: Group A**

27. Mozarthaus

28. The house where Beethoven died

29. You with some bones in St. Stephens Catacombs

**Conclusion**

Our purpose is to share our developmental experience conceptualizing, designing and using scavenger hunts in study abroad settings to provide students with a very practical way to learn experientially in a foreign culture. In practice we have found that scavenger hunts accomplish the goals we set out earlier in this paper, to further immerse students in the study abroad experience.

- Getting students to talk with local people when possible
- Getting students to use the public transportation system, without the aid of the group leader
- Getting students to walk the streets and experience the place
- Getting students to try different foods

Our students frequently report a revolution in their thinking about public transportation, since they have had the opportunity to use such systems. Some are shocked that we don't have such a system in the U.S.

Especially when Italy is a part of our journey, student's views about Italian food are often altered irrevocably. "Why don't we have Italian food this good?" At the same time, some of the same students lament that they miss the food from home, or even miss the "Italian" food, usually pizza with thick crusts and gobs of cheese, that they are used to at home.

Our feedback from students also indicates, albeit in a qualitative way, that they learned quite a lot from the activities and deepened their understanding of the places they visited and the people they came into contact with. We cannot imagine planning a study abroad experience in the future which does not include a scavenger hunt.

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**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:** As business becomes increasingly globalized, it is vital that new business grads enter the workforce with a global viewpoint. It is through study abroad that many of the key insights and travel skills can be developed by students. We describe how students, completing a Scavenger Hunt, can be motivated to improve their travel and interpersonal skills while exploring new foreign cities on their own. Sharing our experience, couched in the recent relevant literature, we provide educators and researchers our practical tips and examples, providing a “how-to” guide for creating their own scavenger hunts. Given this basis, the scavenger hunt can be modified to meet specific course or topic related needs. Viewing practitioners as future employers, we present an additional means by which they might wish to screen their future employees travel skills, appreciation of cultural differences, and their ability to “hit the ground running” when travel abroad is required of them.

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