

Internationalizing the Faculty by Way of an International Spring Break Tour

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Abstract

In today's interdependent global economy, the internationalization of the faculty is a dire necessity. As the intellectual and driving force of academic institutions, a cadre of faculty, or indeed the entire faculty, must participate in the internationalization paradigm shift. A well-designed International Spring Tour provides first-hand, experiential learning to faculty and student participants and offers an ingenious method that helps to internationalize the college, curriculum, faculty, and students. Unlike traditional exchange programs, the International Spring Tour lasts for 2 weeks and takes place during spring break. This, in turn, causes little disruption in the responsibilities and lifestyles of faculty participants, while helping to promote the process of internationalization induced by the college, corporations, and accrediting bodies.

As American multinational corporations, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations increase their presence in the global arena, academic institutions will play an increasingly important role in preparing graduates to compete in an international environment. Without a doubt, today's complex, global economy demands training-the-trainers, who in turn, introduce international subjects to many academic constituents, namely students. Since students rely on faculty as their primary source of information (Webb, Mayer, Pioche & Allen, 1999), academic institutions must focus on initiatives that facilitate and expedite the internationalization process. In view of this,

the former president of Duke, Nannerl Keohane, stated:

If we as a nation are going to become better prepared to deal with an increasingly interdependent world, then the front line has to be in our colleges and universities where we prepare students to become leaders in global enterprises, to serve in the Foreign Service, to be leaders of their communities who are sensitive to international issues (NAFSA Association of International Educators, 2004, p.29).

Although the internationalization debate has existed for many years in the academic arena, what remains debatable is how much international infusion is needed in existing courses, how internationalization initiatives should be enhanced, and how many faculty members should spend time overseas (Kwok & Arpan, 2002). Currently, there is a proliferation of short-term study tours taking place during summer, winter, and spring breaks and these are growing in importance at many institutions.

However, regardless of the proliferation and type of short-term foreign study tours, academic institutions are grappling with issues related to credibility, timing, duration, and structure. These issues are especially critical with short-term study abroad tours, which require more of a hard sell to colleges and accrediting bodies than do long-term, traditional study abroad tours.

In this article I describe and provide data on the Morehouse College International Spring Tour Model (see Figure 1). As a participant and faculty mentor for International Spring Tours to China, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Australia, South

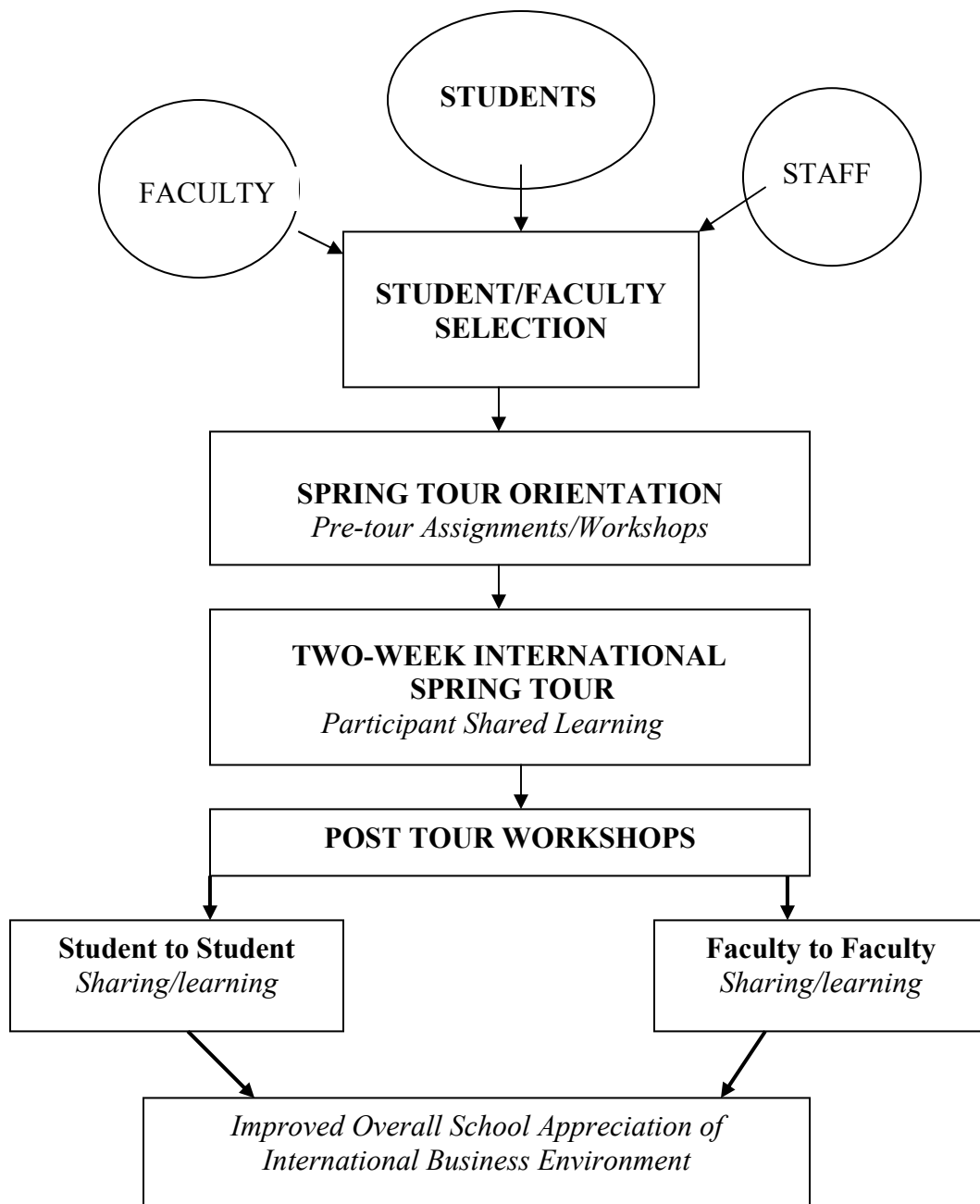


Figure 1. Overview to the Morehouse College International Spring Tour

Africa, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Greece, and Morocco, I collected data on the experience.

Program Design

Since its inception in 1984 (Perry, 2000), the International Spring Tour at Morehouse College (Atlanta, Georgia) has provided opportunities for faculty and students to travel abroad. During spring break, approximately 25 students (90% business majors, 10% other disciplines), 5 faculty mentors and the Director of Career Counseling and Placement, participate in the program. Corporate sponsors underwrite the entire cost of the trip (“Preparing Future Business Leaders Today,” 1997, p. 96).

Faculty Selection

Faculty participants for an International Spring Tour should be chosen based on their infusion of internationalization into relevant courses, participation in internationalizing the college and curriculum, and involvement in student development. At Morehouse College, faculty are selected based on the relevance of their courses to internationalization, commitment to internationalizing the college and curriculum, involvement in student mentoring, and willingness to travel internationally. Typically, professors of international business, leadership and professional development, finance, accounting, management, and the Director of Career Counseling and Placement travel annually. There is also a rotating slot for a professor from another functional area related to business.

Student Selection

In promoting the program to students, announcements are posted in September encouraging students to submit their application. Interested students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0, have the character of a diplomat of the college and country, obtain two faculty recommendations, and write a 10-page research paper on the host country’s political, economic, and cultural practices. The research topic, typically developed by the participating professor of international business, is a critical part of the application process. The paper and recommendations are submitted to the Director of Career Counseling and Placement before the Thanksgiving break in November. Examples of research topics include “China’s Role in the World Trade Organization” (2001), and “Ten Years and Counting: The Effect of NAFTA on the Economy of Canada and Mexico” (2004).

After the faculty participants and Director of Career Counseling and Placement assess the students’ research papers, character, and recommendations, students are notified in December regarding their status. Selected students are advised to obtain passports, visas if necessary, and spending cash during the Christmas break and be prepared to attend mandatory weekly workshops beginning in January.

Pre-Departure Workshops

In January, students begin attending pre-departure workshops with the Director of Career Counseling and Placement and faculty participants. During the workshops, the faculty and students share information from their research about the host countries’ economy, political structure, and culture, and is briefed on professionalism, decorum,

and etiquette. Additional information related to the host countries' culture is disseminated from Culture Grams; an annual report that covers the history, religion, languages, greetings, gestures, holidays, etc. of many countries. To further bolster the academic perspective, students have to write a 5-page critique from Edward T. Hall's (1960) classic, "The Silent Language in Overseas Business," and be prepared to incorporate the silent language of time, space, agreement, friendship and material possessions into their diaries while in the host countries.

At the pre-departure workshops, students also prepare and rehearse a 20-min, memorized presentation about the history of Morehouse College and its relationship with respective corporate sponsors, which will be presented in the host countries.

Host Country Site Visits

Once in the host country, pre-arranged workshops with corporate sponsors such as Citibank, Chase Bank, A.T. Kearney, Deloitte and Touche, Disney, Cargill, British Petroleum, and Ralston Purina take place. At the workshops, the group learns about challenges and opportunities facing corporate executives (local and expatriates) from the host country's perspective. Issues related to banking practices, product and promotional adaptation, consumer behavior, and management styles are often discussed. After learning about the companies' activities, the students deliver the 20-minute presentation about Morehouse College to corporate executives. During the presentation, some students personalize the script by incorporating their internships and/or offers provided by many of the corporate sponsors.

In addition to meeting with executives from multinational corporations,

the entourage visits academic institutions, such as the University of Beijing and Institute of European Studies (Paris), governmental agencies such as the Federal Reserve Bank of South Africa, and cultural sites such as the Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Vatican, Acropolis, and Great Wall of China. Students and faculty are also encouraged to shop at the "local" markets, restaurants, cafes, clubs, and attend social and sporting events.

Culminating Workshop

While still in the host country, at the end of the trip, professors of international business and leadership and professional development lead a culminating workshop, between students and faculty, based on Hall's silent language of time, space, agreement, friendship, and material possessions. By keeping a diary, and structuring the culminating workshop into the itinerary, professors and students share personal observations, colorful anecdotes and cross-cultural experiences found in the host country. The closing workshop helps address, and possibly cast off, some of the ethnocentrism and jingoism exhibited by students, professors, and corporate executives and adds synergy and academic credibility to the tour. In fact, the cumulating workshop assists faculty in infusing first-hand experiences into their future lectures and research.

Home College Workshops

Upon return to the college, faculty-to-faculty seminars are conducted at departmental and college-wide meetings by the tour faculty. These galvanizing seminars help promote a holistic approach to internationalization and foster the value of infusing an international perspective into the college, curriculum, faculty, and students. In

addition, the seminars help encourage other faculty to participate in the International Spring Tour, attend international conferences, seek foreign exchange programs, such as Fulbright Scholarships, and look for ways to internationalize their courses.

Student-to-student workshops are conducted in the international business class, leadership and professional development class, and at other venues aimed at prospective study-abroad students and the college-wide student body. Through dialogues and panel discussions, led by returning students, other students gain insight about the importance of academic travel from their peers. These insightful workshops help spread the importance of internationalization into the larger student body and aid in stirring student interest in the International Spring Tour, study-abroad programs, international internships, and international jobs. One International Spring Tour participant, who worked in London with J.P. Morgan stated, "The fact that I had this experience caused me to seek out an international career" (Perry, 2000, p. 7).

Conclusion

Developing and implementing an International Spring Tour, as an experiential, professional development, educational initiative, helps train-the-trainers to better teach the international dimension of their respective courses. A short-term International Spring Tour is extremely beneficial to faculty members, irrespective of discipline, who lack an international background but seek experience that will help them internationalize their courses. At Morehouse College, even though the International Spring Tour faculty are from the business department, returning faculty are better adept at integrating culture, history, geography, foreign languages, art,

aesthetics, religion, economics, politics, and law into their lectures and research. Moreover, regardless of discipline, a well-designed International Spring Tour enhances the connection between liberal arts and various academic disciplines: a cornerstone of liberal arts institutions.

Relying solely on the development and implementation of an International Spring Tour is no panacea nor will it solve the daunting internationalization challenges most schools face. According to Aranda and Golen (1991):

The development of truly effective international programs does not lend itself to a single approach or a simple solution. Programs will continue to be dependent on a combination of competent faculty, as well as internationally oriented leadership from the administration, and interaction with and support from the international business community (p. 4).

Even though foreign exchange programs have traditionally been the major method of internationalizing the faculty (Shooshtari & Fleming, 1990), their longer duration, disruption of one's lifestyle and responsibilities, and a nebulous tenure and reward system, have caused many faculty to be indifferent to foreign exchange programs. Moreover, the events of September 11th, along with travel warnings issued by the U.S. Department of State, have caused some colleges and universities to declare a moratorium on extended academic travel for faculty and students. For example, March 2004 was the first International Spring Tour to resume after Morehouse College lifted a post-September 11th travel moratorium.

Teaching students, with first-hand, international experiences, is essential if the United States is going to continue to prepare students who can compete in and cooperate with a global community. Moreover,

awareness of global issues must be taught to students by progressive professors and fostered by institutions of higher learning. As former Duke president, Nannerl Keohane stated:

Our country would be much improvised if we allowed ourselves to fall back into isolationism and xenophobia. It will be particularly important for us in the years ahead to have students who can speak a variety of languages and know the cultures of many different countries in order for our nation to take its place as one of the leading countries in building a stronger ...and more peaceful world” (NAFSA Association of International Educators, 2004, p.29).

A creative International Spring Tour is one of many academic experiences that can help shed some of the ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and jingoism exhibited by professors and students. As the intellectual and driving force of academic institutions, faculty must be encouraged to participate in a variety of internationalization initiatives, such as academic travel, and be rewarded accordingly. Training-the-trainers, with first-hand, international experiences is essential if the United States is going to remain a competitive leader in global business and a diplomatic leader in international relations.

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