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Vipin Gupta TSSA Fall 2010

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FALL 2010 Teaching Skills Study Award Report

1. NAME OF CONFERENCE: 2010 CIEE Annual Conference,
DATE: November 12, 2010
LOCATION: Philadelphia, PA

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2. Teaching Strategy Studied

I attended sessions pertaining to the use of Web 2.0 and of quality assurance in study abroad courses. These include the challenges of creating immersion in a skype and facebook world, using social media to highlight the real experience, addressing the study in study abroad, and using standards of good practice for education abroad.

3. Impact on / How Applied in Current Teaching

The sessions influenced my pedagogical goals and the assignments for the study abroad classes. Study abroad is often viewed as a romantic engagement with the global, where experiences are based on extraordinary and global, just like a “landscape painting”. Viewer of a landscape painting lives outside the landscape and knows the landscape through a process of intense visualization. The modern technology offers new ways of looking at the landscape in a more intimate and expansive manner. The teaching challenge is how to place our students within the scene and not allow them to simply hover above it. Student gaze needs to be seeded/ scaffolded to foster immersion, and these seeds include (1) materials, (2) pre-departure orientation, (3) power of suggestion, and (4) discussing cultural differences. For instance, students should be allowed to “take ownership”, by telling them about the effort they would need to build connections locally, and to say “yes” to an opportunity to spend time with a local person. Students should be empowered with an opportunity for discovery.

One big challenge is that the millennial students are constantly connected through facebook and skype back home. Through facebook, they want instant updates about life back home, while through skype they want daily conversations back home. They are also able to access all TV shows. It is free and easy, so study abroad is just like being situated back home. Teachers should recognize that the Net will always be part of students’ lives and that is how they make connections. Teach them how to use web 2.0 differently to get most from their global experience. Teach students to use the Net to virtually converse in the host culture, and to navigate the Net culture of the Host nation. Encourage social media connections between the locals and the students – facebook is a

familiar space for them, and they have the courage to make connections with the local. Encourage the use of local language (e.g. search in French google), promote cultural events online, and provide them safe spaces for the face-to-face relationship – since they are addicted to facebook and don't know how to stop. Use facebook for interactions, and not for announcements... such as if students are going to India, ask them what are their impressions of India, and what they would like to do in India. Use facebook to run contests, e.g funny photo contest.

Another interesting feature is that just like students no longer leave their home culture behind when they study abroad, they also don't fully leave their study abroad when they return home. Research shows that 956% of the students stay in touch with program participants, and 72% with host country friends, through social media. 85% use facebook, while 50% use skype and 50% use email to maintain these connections. 83% of students say that the social media has allowed them to integrate study abroad better into their US life. They say "I feel like the relationship that I started while abroad are only a beginning... It didn't end when the program ended." Teachers can use this by organizing facebook reunions and sharing cultural activities on the facebook page.

Additional strategies were learnt about study abroad blogs and youtube. Students should be asked to go beyond the journal, and should be given questions to prompt them to engage with the local culture. They should be encouraged to be culturally sensitive, rather than judging the culture. They should be asked to show the process and to show their struggles – to tell about the challenges and the victories, but also be aware of the audiences and to understand the history behind that. These blogs offer great marketing material, and can be used for predeparture orientation (scenarios on what cultural adjustments will be like). Youtube videos can be used in a similar manner – and should be in a documentary style.

There are two types of study abroad students – well prepared and under prepared. Well prepared students may be (a) highly engaged and performing well, (b) engaged but struggling. Under-prepared students may be (1) disengaged from the environment, or (2) externally focused – running away from the environment. Multi cultural teaching may be seen as either adapting the teaching style or adapting the learner learning style, and this can be a basis of conflict. A more productive way to anchor learning and teaching is to define a tangible project which can be shared with faculty, friends, and future employers, and connect students with local peer mentors to work on this project. Such projects help to move away from sense of entitlement, and student expectations of a particular kind of teaching style in their overseas workshops.