

Developing a Short-term, Faculty-led Sports Medicine Study Abroad Experience

Lisa S. Jutte, PhD, ATC

Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

Context: While sports medicine study abroad opportunities have recently increased, the literature regarding their development is non-existent in athletic training education literature and very limited in general education literature.

Objective: The purpose of this manuscript is to draw upon my experience to describe the essential design elements that must be considered when planning and executing a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program.

Background: Faculty-led sports medicine study abroad experiences have become more common in the last 10 years. And while a number of these educational opportunities have been offered specifically to athletic training students, there is little literature devoted to their creation.

Description: I will describe how a short-term faculty-led study abroad program was developed, some of its essential elements, and other pertinent information gleaned during the experience.

Clinical Advantage(s): Faculty-led sports medicine study abroad programs can provide athletic training students with a unique academic opportunity for a multicultural experience without disrupting their academic progress with a semester abroad.

Conclusion: Developing a field study involves more than creating an itinerary and a budget. Short-term study abroad opportunities can provide an avenue for multicultural education; however, educational best practices need to be developed and shared.

Key Words: Australia, international experiences, multicultural education

Dr. Jutte is currently an associate professor at Xavier University and teaches in the athletic training education program. Please address all correspondence to Lisa Jutte, PhD, ATC, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Parkway Cincinnati, Ohio, 45207. juttel@xavier.edu

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According to Thomas L. Friedman,¹ globalization is “flattening” the world. The flattening of our world has impacted health care providers, including athletic trainers, by increasing our interactions with patients from different cultural backgrounds. In 2003, Geisler² proposed that multicultural education, an education which prepares students to function in a pluralistic society by developing critical thinking skills so that individuals can appreciate situations from others’ perspectives, be part of athletic training education. Multicultural education helps students become more aware of diversity, which is one of the first steps towards becoming a culturally competent health care provider who understands how cultural differences play a role in patient care.³ In the 5th edition of the National Athletic Trainers’ Association’s Educational Competencies, cultural competence is listed as a foundational behavior of professional practice.⁴ Hence, it is imperative that athletic training students appreciate and understand differences due to culture, race, social class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

Colleges and universities are also acknowledging the importance of multicultural education by requiring diversity education. Diversity education facilitates students’ knowledge of other cultures, and also helps develop their own cultural identities. Because study abroad is one such avenue for students to gain a multicultural education, colleges and universities are increasing opportunities⁵ available to their students.

Historically, study abroad required college students to leave their home institution for an entire semester or longer. In the last 10 years, many colleges and universities have developed short-term, usually shorter than 8 weeks, faculty-led study abroad opportunities.⁶ Short-term study abroad programs are advantageous for students in demanding academic programs, like athletic training, where program requirements make it difficult to study abroad for an entire semester.⁶ In addition, faculty members usually have the academic freedom to tailor short-term study abroad program towards a specific topic. However many faculty members do not have the administrative expertise needed to conduct such programs.⁷

There are several opportunities for athletic training students to participate in short-term study abroad programs today.⁸ There is some evidence that study abroad enhances nursing students’ cultural competency.⁹⁻¹¹ As athletic training educators, we should consider using study abroad experiences to enhance our students’ cultural awareness and competency. Because short-term study abroad programs specific to athletic training are relatively new, there is little literature regarding best practices.¹²⁻¹⁴

In the fall of 2007, I began developing a faculty-led study abroad program to Australia for 18 athletic training and exercise science students to depart in May 2009. Therefore, the purpose of this manuscript is to draw upon my experience to describe the essential design elements that must be considered when planning and executing a short-term faculty-led study abroad program.

Developing the Idea

The idea to develop a sports medicine study abroad program

originated from a Ball State University (BSU) workshop on how faculty members could create a field study. At BSU, the term “field study” is used to describe a short-term faculty-led study abroad experience, for which students are typically abroad for 3 to 5 weeks. Created by individual faculty members, these programs can be as narrowly or broadly focused as the faculty member desires. In addition, the length of time abroad, when and where they are offered, academic credit offered, and other elements are all determined by the BSU faculty member. A field study would allow athletic training students to study abroad for academic credit with a program emphasis related to their discipline, all without disrupting their academic plan and clinical experiences.

In 2007, only two athletic training study abroad experiences were publicized,^{15,16} and only the program developed by the Collegiate Sports Medicine Foundation (<http://www.csmfoundation.org/index.html>) solicited students from any academic institution. Their program was 1 week long, and did not offer academic credit at that time. Today, there are several study abroad opportunities available with an emphasis on sports medicine, and most allow students from any academic institution to participate and receive academic credit.⁸

The first step in creating a program was discussing the idea with the University’s Director of Study Abroad Programs who offered several ideas to consider. At that time a determination was made that students were willing to spend about \$5,000 for a 3 week field study. In 2007, the University already had several affiliation agreements with foreign academic institutions and established relationships with other institutions. Using existing relationships would facilitate the development of the field study course. After considering these existing connections, the typical BSU student profile (most from the Midwest, and many first generation college students), and an unofficial poll of athletic training and exercise science students, the most feasible field study location was determined to be Australia. The previously established relationships in Australia with the Lake Ainsworth Sports and Recreational Centre and Southern Cross University, coupled with the minimal language barrier and easily obtained visas would potentially reduce the challenges associated with large group travel and program logistics. Once the destination was selected, identifying the field experience’s specific purpose was possible; it was to facilitate students’ appreciation of sports medicine from a more global perspective (Table 1) by exposing them to Australian health care providers, classic Australian sports, and the Australian medical system, where alternative medicine is more widely accepted and reimbursement is through socialized medicine.

The next step in the process was to research sports medicine in Australia and further explore the existing BSU relationships. In Australia, sports medicine services are provided by physiotherapists (abbreviated physio’s; <http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/index.php>), sports trainers (<http://sma.org.au/sports-trainers/>), and exercise physiologists. Additional information regarding what athletic training and exercise sciences students might find interesting in Australia was solicited from a recent BSU athletic training education program graduate who had studied abroad for a semester at the BSU Australia Center, Lennox Head, New South Wales. With her feedback in mind,

Table 1. Course Objectives

Course Objectives:

The objective of this course is for students to gain a more global view of sports medicine, focusing on an Australian perspective.

1. The student will understand the health professions of individuals who comprise the Australian Sports Medicine team.
2. The student will better appreciate alternative and complementary medicine as it relates to sports medicine.
3. The students will gain a better understanding of native Australian sports.
4. The student will gain a better understanding of Australian culture.

the Australian Institute of Sport, Sydney Olympic Park, Southern Cross University, and several Australian physiotherapy schools were contacted regarding potential tours, on-site programming, and possible student-to-student email interactions.

The next step involved recruiting the University's local travel agent to determine transportation costs, both traveling to and within Australia, and to provide information on popular cultural attractions. While she also shared experience-based practical advice regarding traveling with a group of college students, most importantly, she obtained the requisite visas.

To determine course content and explore logistics, I applied for and received an internal BSU grant to finance a scouting trip to Australia to meet contacts and visit both potential academic and lodging sites. In July 2008, I traveled to Australia for 2 weeks, visiting Sydney, New South Wales; Canberra, Australian Capital Territory; and Lennox Head, New South Wales. While traveling, I recorded the cost, access to, and feasibility of using public transportation. I also attempted to make new contacts who exemplified Australian sports medicine. For example, after inviting a local physiotherapist in Lennox Head, New South Wales to present to my students regarding surfing injuries, she provided connections to both a local cricket coach who would teach us the game and to an exercise physiologist who would speak on surfing physiology. As a result of knowledge gained during this exploratory trip, the proposed itinerary was revised.

The next step in the process, after returning to BSU, was to develop the field study program and budget. The budget included all travel expenses (including round trip airfare from Indianapolis, IN and all travel within Australia), per diem meal money, speaker honorariums, group entrance fees, and BSU off-campus tuition and fees for six credit hours. Based on a minimum enrollment of 10 students, the total cost, including the director's expenses, was divided evenly among the students. Since the maximum carrying capacity for the field experience was 18 students, the potential additional income provided a cushion in the budget for emergencies and/or major, unfavorable changes in currency exchange rates. Any extra funds that remained at the conclusion of the trip would be returned to students per University policy.

Four criteria were used to design the general program schedule: 1) education, 2) cost, 3) time management, and 4) down time (Figure 1). As an educational endeavor, providing a well rounded Australian sports medicine experience was essential. And while minimizing cost and time lost from travel was also important, students needed time to explore the country for themselves and groups needed a break from one another about every 7 days.⁹

The final, more detailed itinerary was included in the course syllabus and shared with students, parents, and the University before departure.

After the program was approved by University officials and course credit was assigned, program advertisement began. BSU allows non-BSU students to pay the same off-campus tuition rate for study abroad, so every athletic training program director listed on the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education website was contacted via email to share an informational flyer with their students. Approximately 10 weeks prior to departure, a mandatory informational meeting was held. This presented its own challenges, as the 18 students represented 10 different institutions from 8 different states. While BSU students were required to physically attend the meeting, non-BSU students attended virtually by using Media Site (Sonicfoundry, Madison, Wisconsin) video capturing software that synced live video with PowerPoint streamed to the internet. Non-BSU students were able to submit questions via email during the presentation. The presentation was recorded and posted on Blackboard (Version 9, Washington, DC), so all students could review the trip information at their leisure.

Blackboard was also used to facilitate pre-trip communication between students and the director. All students enrolled in the field study were invited to join a Sports Medicine Field Study Community to share all necessary pre-trip information, mandatory travel documents (Table 2), and pre-trip class assignments.

Students were required to complete assignments prior to, during, and after the trip. Pre-trip assignments included submission of all necessary travel documents, completing the readings, and taking the reading quizzes. Required readings' topics ranged from Australian culture, relevant lectures, and experiences students would have in Australia, such as surf physiology and surf injuries. During the trip, students were expected to attend all scheduled events and lectures and to keep a daily journal. As an attempt to enhance multicultural education, students were asked to answer 4 questions as part of their daily journal entry (Table 3). Students were also responsible for maintaining the field study blog to keep state-side family and friends informed of our daily whereabouts (<http://www.bsusmfaustralia2009.blogspot.com/>). Each day a different student was assigned to post a summary of the day's activities on the blog. After returning to the states, students had 4 weeks to electronically submit their journals and a group paper on a sports medicine-related topic, where they compared and contrasted practice differences between the United States and Australia.

Figure 1. Course Schedule

May 2009						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
10 Leave for Australia	11 Will lose day crossing international date line	12 Arrive in Australia & Travel to Lennox Head Stay in Lennox Head	13 1:00 pm Australian Flora Walk 7:00 pm Exercise Physiologists	14 9:00 am Introduction to Sports Medicine in Australia 2:00 pm Surf Injuries	15 9:00 am Surf Lessons-MojoSurf 2:00 pm Surf Physiology	16 Free Day
17 Free Morning 1:00 pm Cricket Lesson	18 9:00 am Alternative Medicine Lecture Picnic Lunch Afternoon-Bushwalk	19 Acupuncture lecture Free Afternoon	20 Leave for Canberra AIS 1/2 lecture Stay in Canberra	21 AIS full day of programming	22 AIS full day of programming	23 Morning Canberra tour 8:00 pm Movie- <i>Murderball</i>
24 Free Morning 2:00 pm Rugby	25 10:00 am Leave for Sydney Stay in Sydney	26 9-11:30 am Olympic Park Tour	27 9-11 am NSWIS Physician Lecture Group Dinner	28 Tango Zoo	29 4:00 am departure for airport Return to USA	30

Table 2. Required Travel Documents

Required Travel Documents	Description of Document
Emergency Contact Information	Contains contact information for the emergency contact person
Health Evaluation	Verification from a physician that the student is in good health for foreign travel.
Liability Release Agreement	
International Study Identification Application	
Student Participation Conduct & Responsibility Agreement	Students agree to a level of conduct, and if not they may be sent back to the USA at their own cost.
Verification of Health and Accident Policies	Verification the student has health insurance.
Optional Documents	
Financial Aid – Trip Cost Memo	Instructs the financial aid office of the total cost of the trip, including the tuition and travel costs.
Passport Application Instructions	Application for a US passport if needed.
Power of Attorney	Recommended that students traveling in a foreign country have an individual in the USA who has a power of attorney if needed.
Financial Aid Authorization	Students using financial aid need to give permission to use financial aid monies to pay their BSU bills
Travel Agent – Info Access Authorization	Travel agent needs permission to release travel information to anyone other than the student, including parents, and fellow students.

Table 3. Daily Journal Questions

Daily Journal Questions

1. Summarize what you learned today.
2. What is your opinion on what you learned or did today? Like it, dislike it, neutral?
3. How would you incorporate what you learned into your future profession? Or your life?
4. Compare and contrast how things are done in the US.

Beyond Budgets and Travel Plans

Safety

Promoting safety is always important. Faculty instructed students to travel in groups of two or more at all times. At no time was *anyone* to go *any place* by themselves. Each student also received a small 2 x 3 inch laminated card that contained contact information and phone numbers that was to be carried with them at all times to provide a means of reconnection should they become separated. To maintain real-time communications with the US, the faculty director carried an American cell phone with international roaming capabilities. Prior to departure, a detailed itinerary, including the contact information for each accommodation, as well as important Australian contacts who would know the group's whereabouts in case of emergency, was shared with students, parents, and the university. Faculty gathered and carried relevant emergency care information for each city we visited, including the location of the closest level one trauma hospital. In addition, the faculty director kept copies of all passports, emergency contact information, and relevant medical information and a first aid kit that included a thermometer and some basic over-the-counter medication.

Financial Aid

Students who qualified for financial aid were able to use it for study abroad programs because academic credit was associated with the experience. However, the total amount of aid for which a student is eligible for during the academic year does not change regardless of the addition of a study abroad program. Because only 1 academic institution may request student aid on behalf of a student, the non-BSU students' original academic institutions had to work with BSU to transfer financial aid monies to BSU through a special consortia agreement. Most financial aid offices can facilitate this for students upon request.

Interactions between Students from Different Institutions

Students came from 11 different institutions, including BSU, which created an interesting dynamic. Frequently, during free time, students would compare and contrast their educational experiences in their athletic training education programs. For example, they would discuss how much patient care they were able to provide during their clinical experiences and the different types of clinical experiences available at their institution. As an educator, these similarities and differences were intriguing.

Enhancing Cultural Competency

While initial data from the nursing field indicates study abroad

may enhance components of cultural competency^{9,18} as well as cultural competency itself,^{10,11} cultural competency has only recently been assessed in athletic trainers.¹⁷ Therefore, the exact impact study abroad has on athletic training cultural competency is unknown. Although research supports the notion that study abroad increases cultural competency,^{9-11,18} the generalizability of this data is limited due to its observational, rather than experimental nature and very small sample sizes.^{11,18,19} Therefore, best practices have not been established and additional research is warranted.

Clinical Advantages

Short-term programs, with an emphasis on sports medicine, can provide our athletic training students with an opportunity to study abroad with minimal impact on their academic progress. Both data from nursing literature and my personal experience support the notion that study abroad has the potential to enhance students' cultural competency, which is paramount in our "flattening" world.

Developing a field study is more involved than creating an itinerary and a budget; however, these experiences can be very educational for both students and faculty members. As athletic training study abroad programs become more refined, additional emphasis should be placed on assessing their influence on cultural competency and developing and sharing best practices.

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