

An Effective Consortial Model for Study Abroad: A History of the College Consortium for International Studies

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The new millennium coincides with a vigorous interest in globalization, particularly as global activities impact international commerce. One part of this interest is manifested in the demand that more U.S. students gain international educational experiences, particularly by going abroad. Since study abroad has long been promoted for the contributions it makes to students' personal, academic and career goals, these current commercial concerns are not inconsistent with some of the values traditionally associated with education abroad.

It is the contemporary emphasis on increasing participation coupled with the mounting financial constraints faced by study abroad providers, both public and private, profit and non-profit, that makes education abroad a more complex and potentially expensive issue today than it has been in the past. One response, thus, to the pressures for internationalization in the educational community has been a renewed emphasis on the need for forms of cooperation that would allow the sharing of costs, as well as of benefits. While such arrangements have a long history, one finds that ideas such as "linkages," inter-institutional cooperation," "partnerships," "partnering," "alliances," "councils," "secretariats," "coordinating committees" and "consortia" are becoming increasingly prominent in discussions about expanding international education.

As professionals explore ways to provide effective and efficient means of delivering the expansion of education abroad, it is instructive to examine past cooperative efforts. This article will use the example of the College Consortium for International Studies (CCIS) to demonstrate how cooperation can be innovative, cost-effective, participatory and successful. The beneficial aspects of sharing capital and human resources will be illustrated.

CCIS began nearly 30 years ago as the Tri-State Consortium (1973). The three inaugural colleges were SUNY Rockland Community College (NY), Mercer Community College (NJ) and Harrisburg Area Community College (PA). In 1975, this Consortium became the College Consortium for International Studies as it is known today.

The motivation for forming the Consortium had

less to do with now popular concerns like "global competition," than did they with issues of access to education abroad in the early 1970's. They were "populist" in spirit, if not in the strict political sense of "meeting the needs of the common people and advocating more equitable distribution of wealth and power." The Consortium's founders were aware that most existing study abroad programs did not provide opportunities for two year college students, nor for students from many regional and/or smaller four year institutions. The available programs were largely limited to students of means who were primarily from prominent private colleges. The participants often majored in European languages. Cost factors discouraged students of lower and middle income backgrounds, as did lack of linguistic preparation and specialization in certain academic disciplines.

The Consortium's approach was profoundly innovative as seen from the perspective of today's global realities, and it was one of the earliest attempts to broaden the base of study abroad participation. The CCIS example illustrates how an organizational approach can transcend a single institution's hesitation to engage in study abroad programming.

With hindsight, it is useful to note it was only in the early 1970's that a national voice for the promotion of study abroad, the Section on U.S. Students Abroad, was given recognition by the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA). It was also during that time that several major state universities began the development of university-wide (or system-wide) activities that would initiate the process of facilitating study abroad beyond traditional subjects like the study of foreign languages. And while study abroad in some form or another has occurred at least since the time of Herodotus (fifth century B.C.), its more "populist" aspect surfaced in the United States with activities like those started by the College Consortium for International Studies.

The Consortium continued to increase membership first in two year and then in two and four year colleges and universities though the 1970's and into the 1980's when, in 1982, it was incorporated as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

The goals were clearly articulated. It was to:

- 1) Coordinate international/intercultural programs for students in participating colleges;
- 2) Coordinate and disseminate information concerning international courses, programs and activities; and
- 3) Promote ease of transfer of international courses and credits among participating institutions.

Early study abroad programs were first offered in England, Israel and Sweden, and currently 83 CCIS-approved programs are administrated by 19 member institutions in some 30 countries around the world. The programs are arranged by the CCIS sponsoring member in cooperation with host institutions abroad. The latter may be language institutes and private or public colleges and universities. Faculty is provided by the host institution and students are usually housed with local families. Consistent with the early goals of CCIS, subject matter may be taught in English with direct matriculation possible and with the provision for the study of local languages. Currently these languages include: Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, French, Gaelic, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Japanese, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. All programs are approved by the Consortium's Academic Programs Committee and its Board of Directors. The sponsorship and administration of each program remains with the CCIS member institution.

The founders of the Consortium were not only concerned with the paucity of programs available to their students, but also with the lack of international educational opportunities open to their faculty and administrators. Thus, in the early 1980's they began CCIS Professional Development Seminars organized by member institutions. The seminars were to provide faculty and staff with "condensed" study abroad experiences. The seminar context might be of an introductory nature to a particular country or cultural area, or it might be specific to an academic discipline or to a contemporary political, economic or social issue. In 1984, for example, Professional Development Seminars were held in Belgium, India and Sweden. CCIS continues the tradition of sponsoring seminars, and during 2001 seminars were offered in Ghana, Israel and Russia.

The organization that began with three community colleges nearly three decades ago has expanded to become a partnership of approximately 130 U.S. colleges and universities with 50 associated members abroad. Membership is almost evenly balanced among two and four year institutions, and the blend

includes rural and urban, large and small, public and private campuses. A wide range of higher educational institutions in the United States is represented. Members continue to offer a variety of study abroad programs which include foreign language study and summer, semester and academic year options. Professional Development Seminars remain a focus and have recently been enhanced with the introduction of a "featured" seminar which provides grants for cost-sharing between CCIS and seminar participants. The Consortium provides a modest, but growing, scholarship fund for students from member institutions, and awards are available for professional program site visitation.

The continued growth and vitality of CCIS demonstrates cooperative efforts can broaden and expand participation in study abroad. Consortia are able to provide an extensive range of programs and a range of program fees by drawing from a large and diverse applicant pool. In addition, sharing costs, benefits and governance yields a sense of "ownership" that often results in greater institutional involvement and ultimately in greater student participation.

Consortia can be innovative and proactive in that they can capture and channel the energy that comes from a shared philosophy that education abroad is a viable and necessary component of higher education for U.S. students, regardless of academic major, prior knowledge of foreign languages, income level or institutional affiliation.