‘They just don’t want to go!’ How can Business Schools encourage outgoing student mobility?

Or

Mobility, what mobility? How can Business Schools encourage outgoing student mobility?

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‘Ready, steady, go! How can Business Schools encourage outgoing student mobility?

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Have you recently been a internationalisation or mobility committee or working group tasked with encouraging students’ outgoing mobility and, having used every available incentive, concluded that ‘they just don’t want to go’?

This blog post builds on the results of study which explored the impact of students’ mobility on cross-cultural adaptation in order to produce a set of recommendations for Business Schools who wish to enhance their students’ outgoing, international mobility.

In an increasingly globalised higher education, with universities aiming to encourage student mobility (both inwards and outwards) through exchange and study abroad programmes (Sweeney, 2012), there is a need to examine the benefits of the mobility, especially the complex cross-cultural learning involved. This can help promote the benefits of the mobility to the students and enable the development of targeted pre- and post- mobility support in order to ensure it enhances student experience and benefits all stakeholders involved.

A study in the Business School and Design School adapted a new and innovative approach to exploring the impact of mobility on students' cross-cultural adaptation, using students’ owned multi-media records of experiences of outgoing mobility. The study informs the discussion on encouraging student outgoing mobility and the design of student mobility programmes.

The study began in spring 2013 and focused on the learning experiences of students on a 6 month exchange with a partner institution in China. Specifically, it examined students’ evolving perceptions of their own culture of learning and that of the host, as they go through the experience of study abroad.

Using creative interventions, including cultural probes such as photos, videos (Gaver et al 2004) - a design-led approach to understanding others, stressing empathy and engagement using evocative tasks to elicit inspirational responses, as well as reflective journals (captured as blogs or videos) the project was not only student-driven but it enabled a first hand capture the key experiences in outgoing student mobility.
A rich picture of students’ interaction with the new academic environment emerged with two striking findings. The first, striking finding from the project was the richness captured by the students through a self-selected lens of a video or a blog, and the second key finding was that students’ experience of the new academic culture is complex and evolving over time, making them explore their own culture of learning, and therefore becoming more mature and focused learners.

We were struck by how much the students enjoyed and embraced the innovative ways and recording their experience using social media. This shows us that students interact with the new environment in creative ways and this can be a powerful promotion tool for those considering outgoing mobility as part of their studies.

Based on the outcomes of the project a number of recommendations can be offered to help effectively promote outgoing mobility to students in the Business Schools. Pre- and post-mobility intercultural skills training is recommended to first prepare the students for the experience and then to ensure the insights and experiences serve as a platform for consolidating students’ intercultural skills – a much sought after employability skill. Pre-mobility intercultural skills training and workshop how to capture experiences. Guidelines for systematic, pre-mobility, intercultural skills development are suggested to ensure maximum benefits from study abroad.

Incentivise students through creative and student driven assessments based on mobility experience, perhaps being able to explore as a theme for dissertation.

For education providers wishing to increase student mobility, it seems necessary to ensure an effective preparation for students involved, including raising students’ awareness of their own culture of learning and preparing students for the intercultural encounters prior to engaging in student mobility. This can be achieved by asking the returning exchange students to present a short video/slideshow describing their experiences studying and living on exchange to prospective exchange students. Another way institutions can prepare students would be through a buddy up scheme with returning exchange students. Finally, students should be equipped with sound independent study skills.

Additionally, as motivating students to take part in increased mobility often relates to how they perceive long term benefits from mobility (Brooks and Waters 2011), it is recommended to maximise capturing learning from study abroad experience through a number of mechanisms including getting students to record the experience of developing intercultural awareness and using it to enhance assessments from study abroad and enhance CV; sharing the experience online with other students and visiting exchange students when they are abroad. Student assessment and moderation of marks on students return is an area which needs to be given attention, and this can be addressed as well as celebrating diversity in group work by breaking up clusters of students from the same university and integrating them in to a broader international student cohort (see Foster and Anderson, 2015)
References


