

QUANTUM ASSOCIATES CONSULTING

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Highland Park, IL 60035

October 2, 2022

Ms. Laura Wallace  
Vice President of Operations  
North Plains Community College  
1374 E 51<sup>st</sup> Street  
Cleveland, OH 44103

Subject: Quantum Associates research on study abroad programs for Northern Plains  
Community College

Dear Ms. Wallace,

The document attached is “The Benefits, Drawbacks, and Considerations of a Study Abroad Program at Northern Plains Community College: A Recommendation Report.” We completed the desired research on the benefits and drawbacks of a study abroad experience as explained in the meeting on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The research conducted revealed three key areas about study abroad programs, the student benefits, the student drawbacks, and important program considerations. The main findings of this study show that there are strong benefits for students who participate in study abroad opportunities. There are also three important concerns, in-classroom anxiety, risky student behavior, and sexual violence. Regardless, good study abroad programs result in positive experiences for students. Good programs usually encourage the student’s intercultural identity and provides opportunities that help employability.

I recommended three courses of action for your program. First, create a preparatory course for students before they study abroad. Second, ensure that your program curriculum is focused on opportunities that boost employability and nurture intercultural identity. Third, focus resources on supporting the students that are currently in the program instead of trying to recruit as many students as possible.

I enjoyed working with your college on this research project and look forward to working with you on any follow-up projects. If you have any other questions about this report, you can contact me at [afbrown@qac.org](mailto:afbrown@qac.org) or at 450-327-1369.

Sincerely,

Ashleigh Brown  
Consultant

**The Benefits, Drawbacks, and Considerations of a Study Abroad  
Program at Northern Plains Community College: A  
Recommendation Report**

Prepared for: Ms. Laura Wallace  
Vice President of Operations  
Northern Plains Community College

Prepared by: Ashleigh Brown, Consultant

October 2, 2022

**Quantum Associates Consulting  
459 Lambert Tree Road  
Highland Park, IL 60035**

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## **Executive Summary**

Northern Plains Community College wants to investigate if it would be feasible for the college to create a study abroad program and require all their students to participate in this program. Laura Wallace, the vice president of operations for Northern Plains Community College, has asked Quantum Associates Consulting to research and write a report on the benefits and the drawbacks of a study abroad experience.

Currently, the college does not have their own study abroad program. They do partner with other colleges to give their students these opportunities, but they want to start providing these opportunities directly. They also want to determine if it is feasible to require all students to partake in these opportunities.

I researched study abroad programs and their impacts on college students. From that research, I determined that there are three key areas in the research: the benefits students receive from study abroad programs, the possible drawbacks from these programs, and factors that must be considered when creating a good study abroad program. I based the report on these three key areas.

The main finding is that study abroad programs are beneficial to students overall. The experiences these trips provide is good for developing student self-agency and improving their overall mood. However, there are drawbacks like classroom anxiety to consider. Study abroad students may also encounter or partake in risky alcoholic and sexual behaviors. There is also a risk of sexual violence. The benefits and drawbacks of a study abroad program also depends on the study abroad experiences available. Students prefer opportunities that will boost their employability. Studies also show that students with a sense of intercultural identity had a better experience with these opportunities while abroad.

The main conclusion of this study is that there are a lot of good benefits for college students who participate in study abroad trips. These benefits should be pursued and would be very valuable to the student. However, these benefits could be damaged by factors outside of the college's control. Regardless, the chances of a good experience can be improved if the study abroad program makes employability and intercultural identity the core goals of their program.

This study recommends three courses of action. First, the college should create a preparatory course for students interested in study abroad programs. This could help them develop healthy coping mechanisms so they can thrive in classroom settings and resist the urge to engage in risky behavior. Second, the college should create a study abroad program that focuses on student employability and on developing intercultural identities. Third, the college should focus more on ensuring that the students they send abroad are prepared for and supported during their study abroad experience rather than focusing on recruiting as many students as possible. Thus, the college should create a study abroad program, and this program should prioritize the quality of the program rather than focusing on the quantity of students in the program.

## Introduction

I have developed this report to help Northern Plains Community College investigate the benefits and the drawbacks of a study abroad program. Laura Wallace, the vice president of operations at this college, is particularly interested in the feasibility of having all students participate in these programs.

The college currently partners with other colleges to provide this experience, but they want to start providing this experience themselves. This has become a priority to the college because an increasing number of students are partaking in study abroad programs. Northern Plains' students have also complained about the limited availability of these partnership programs. Thus, the college has deemed it important to the student experience to offer these programs themselves.

Quantum Associates Consulting was hired to investigate the benefits and the drawbacks of offering a study abroad program. My research on study abroad experiences revealed three key areas of discussion.

- How the student will benefit from the experience
- How the student could be negatively impacted by the experience
- Important considerations for creating a good study abroad program

While there were many details discovered during my research process, the key benefit was improved self-agency and improved mood. There were also some concerns, including increased student anxiety and an increased likelihood of risky sexual and alcoholic behaviors. There is also a risk of sexual violence. It is also clear that when creating a study abroad curriculum, the program should prioritize opportunities that could help with student employability. The curriculum should also help students develop an intercultural identity.

I recommend three courses of action for Northern Plains if they decide to develop their own study abroad program. First, they should create a preparatory course for students interested in the study abroad program. Second, the study abroad curriculum should prioritize the goals of employability and intercultural identity. Third, the college should ensure that they have enough resources to support the students in these programs. These three courses of action will prepare students for their experiences abroad, provide excellent experiences for students, and support the students during their experience abroad.

The rest of the report will address and explain these findings in-depth.

## **Research Methods**

I began this report by researching the current literature available on the study abroad experience. I focused on how the experience impacted students, rather than on how much it would cost for students to engage in this experience. This is because it is important to establish that a study abroad experience is beneficial to students before investigating how much it would cost to run such a program.

I had three tasks to complete.

1. research study abroad programs and how they impacted college students
2. analyze the research and establish the key areas in the data
3. prepare the recommendation report

### ***Task 1: Research study abroad programs and how they impacted college students***

There were a variety of studies that focused on how the study abroad experience impacted students. I began this research by reading the available studies on college students and the study abroad experience.

I then selected sources that specifically discussed study abroad programs, students' study abroad experiences, and the long-term impact of study abroad programs.

### ***Task 2: Analyze the research and establish the key areas in the data***

I analyzed the selected sources to discover trends in the study abroad experience. This analysis revealed that there were three key areas in the research:

1. How the student will benefit from the experience
2. How the student could be negatively impacted by the experience
3. Important considerations for creating a good study abroad program

The first two areas of research clearly pertain to the students because it addresses how the experience impacted students. The third area was not as apparent. However, research revealed that a good study abroad experience was related to the experiences provided by the program and how the program prepared students for the experience.

### ***Task 3: Prepare the recommendation report***

After completing the analysis, I drafted and edited this report. I wrote the report to address the three key areas discovered during task 2.

## **Results**

This section reports the results of the research I conducted for the Northern Plains Community College.

### ***How the student could benefit from the experience***

There were two main benefits to the study abroad programs. The first main benefit was related to student agency and the second was related to life satisfaction.

The first main benefit of the study abroad program is that it allows the students to practice their own agency (Raby et al., 2021). This practice in agency helped students to make the most of their study abroad experiences, even if institutional resources fell short of their needs (Raby, 2021).

Then, short term study abroad trips were associated with mood improvements for college students (Yamanaka et al., 2021). It also increased student life satisfaction and gratitude levels (Yamanaka et al., 2021). This improved mood level also persisted long-term after the study abroad trip ended, demonstrating that study abroad trips can have benefits beyond academic achievement (Yamanaka et al., 2021).

In short, while the benefits listed here are not academically related, these benefits still had a significant impact on college students.

### ***How the student could be negatively impacted from the experience***

Despite the benefits, there were still two major drawbacks from the study abroad experience. The study abroad experience had a negative impact on student anxiety, and there was also an increased risk for students.

One of the first concerns is that students in foreign language classrooms tend to suffer from increased anxiety (Liu, 2018). This anxiety occurred in Chinese students when they had to listen, speak, write, or test in the German language at their German university (Liu, 2018).

Male students in study abroad programs were more likely to engage in risky sexual and alcoholic behaviors (Pedersen et al., 2020). Students were also at risk for sexual violence, with 21% of students experiencing some form of non-consensual contact (Pedersen et al., 2020). The risk was even higher for students who had already experienced sexual violence (Pedersen et al., 2020).

So, this research demonstrates that there could be a risk to student's physical safety and mental health.

### ***Important considerations for creating a good study abroad program***

When discussing experiences, the programs provided can have a significant impact on that experience. Thus, it was important to discover what students prioritize, or need prioritized, to reap the benefits of a study abroad program.

Research demonstrates that students highly prioritize opportunities that will boost their employability while on study abroad trips (Fakunle, 2021). They have a strong desire to pursue opportunities that will build their resumes and help them secure a good job. This can involve part-time jobs, volunteering, internships, extracurriculars, or special societies (Fakunle, 2021).

Study abroad trips also need to place an emphasis on learning culture, language, and intercultural communication to cultivate feelings of intercultural citizenship (Fang & Baker, 2017). This study also notes that there is a significant difference between the in-class experience and the out-of-class experience for students in study abroad programs (Fang & Baker, 2017).

Therefore, these results show that students seek a particular kind of study abroad experience, and that the results of these experiences will rely on the student's ability to navigate different cultures.



## **Conclusions**

In this section, I discuss the conclusions based on the research conducted for Northern Plains Community College.

### ***Benefits for Students***

Usually, when people discuss study abroad benefits, they focus on academic benefits. However, this research demonstrates that there are more long-term benefits for students beyond academic courses. First, the ability to learn self-agency is beneficial to college students. Students will have to advocate for themselves in the workplace. Students will also need to be able to advocate for their own interests, even in unfamiliar or difficult situations. The study abroad experience would help them develop this valuable skill. Then, research also demonstrates that even short study abroad programs can positively impact students' quality of life. While it may be easy to overlook the benefits of an improved mood, increased life-satisfaction will help students thrive as they graduate college and enter the workforce.

### ***Drawbacks for Students***

While there are benefits, there are some concerning problems students can encounter while studying abroad. First, student anxiety while taking foreign classes could negatively impact their mental health and their ability to learn. The purpose of a study abroad program is to encourage students to learn, if students cannot learn in that setting then they will not benefit from their study experience. Furthermore, risky alcohol and sexual behaviors could also negatively impact students and university image. It would also go against the purpose of the study abroad program. Then, experiencing sexual violence while abroad could also inhibit student's personal and academic progress. Thus, these drawbacks need to be considered carefully.

### ***Considerations for Study Abroad Programs***

Students do not go abroad solely to experience another country; they are looking for ways to boost their employability. To accomplish that, students need to be able to adapt to different cultures and to develop their intercultural citizenship. So, the study abroad experience is impacted by the quality of the study abroad program.

## **Recommendations**

Based on this information, I recommend three courses of action.

### ***Action 1: Create a preparatory course for students***

Two main problems with the study abroad programs were student anxiety in the classroom and risky sexual and alcoholic behaviors outside of the classroom. These problems could be addressed by preparing students to handle these pressures before they go abroad. So, Northern Plains should research and invest in a preparatory course that prepares students for these problems. The main goal of the course should be to educate students about these risks and to equip students with healthy coping mechanisms.

### ***Action 2: Focus on employment opportunities and intercultural identity***

The main benefit from the study abroad program comes from developing intercultural citizenship and from engaging in opportunities that boost employability. So, Northern Plains should invest in study abroad opportunities that provide students with employment and opportunities that will help students develop an intercultural identity. For example, the university could ensure that their students can be easily employed at foreign universities. Regardless, these goals would help students gain positive study abroad experiences.

### ***Action 3: Ensure that the college has enough resources to support their students***

Students abroad often rely on self-agency. This is good, and it should be encouraged. However, this self-agency should not happen because students cannot rely on their college. Students who cannot rely on their university will have a frustrating experience abroad. This would also be dangerous for students who experience sexual violence while abroad. Thus, if the college decides to create a study abroad program, they should focus on making sure they have enough resources for the students in the program rather than focusing on how many students they can get into the program.

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