

STUDENTS OF COLOR, CULTURAL PROFICIENCY, AND STUDY ABROAD: A SERIOUS GAP WITH SERIOUS BUSINESS AND MARKETING IMPLICATONS

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ABSTRACT

This contemporary issues presentation is intended to be a forum for discussing the personal, business, and cultural importance of undergraduate students of color's participating in study abroad. The overall value of study abroad, the current state of participation of undergraduate students of color, and the serious business and marketing implications of student of color not participating as readily as Caucasian students will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural proficiency is critical to any professional person working in our ever-changing global environment. Sometimes referred to as intercultural capability, cultural proficiency is defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs that enable people to work well with, respond effectively to, and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings. Numerous research studies have consistently reported that study abroad programs (SAPs) during a business student's undergraduate studies enhances that person's cultural proficiency, global understanding, and cross-cultural skills in profound and important ways.

STUDY ABROAD BENEFITS

Researchers show gains by students who studied abroad in the areas of intercultural communication, cultural pluralism, efficacy, interconnectedness, global mindedness, intercultural communication, and openness to diversity. Students who engage in SAPs find themselves more aware in a wide range of global issues critical to business and marketing decision-making. Students themselves report increased self confidence, changes in self-perception, risk-taking, new personal and social skills, and changes in perceptions of the world from their study abroad experiences.

STUDENTS OF COLOR PARTICIPATION

According to the Institute for International Education's *Open Door Report* for 2008, students of color only make up 18.3% of study abroad participants nationally while their Caucasian

counterparts represent 81.7%. The limited number of students of color participating in study abroad is limited and the impact goes beyond personal and minority group implications - it affects our future economic growth and culture.

BUSINESS AND MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Given the globalization of our economy and the political demands for the United States, not leveraging our students of color population via study abroad educational opportunities leaves the United States with a serious gap of national and international concern. In a 2002 cry-for-action essay posted on the Institute for International Education website, Dr. Olusoji Akomolafe stated, "[t]oday, the demand for government, business, and education sectors for qualified personnel with international skills is far greater than supply. As a result, institutions of higher learning have an important role to play in addressing this situation."

Students of color, like all students who do not participate in SAPs, miss out on gaining greater intercultural competence, increased openness to cultural diversity, and the opportunity to become more globally-minded. Also relevant to students of color, is SAPs offer participants an edge in the competitive and increasingly complex global job market.

OTHER CONNECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In a recent exploratory study, Theresa M. Conley investigated the topic of students of color and study abroad participation with a group of undergraduate marketing majors during a quarter-long study abroad program at the University of Bologna in Italy. The results of these discussions, and other literature insights on the topic, were revealing.

This topic is worthy of interest and debate as a contemporary issue topic with marketing faculty who agree with the merits and long-lasting effects of study abroad programs for all students.

References Available on Request