Study Outside the Box

An Honors Thesis Project (HONRS 499)

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Senior Honors Thesis Project
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Abstract

*Study Outside the Box* is a narrated photo book created using Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com). The book will be used as a marketing tool for Miller College of Business study abroad programs. My motivation for this project stemmed directly from the time I spent at Ball State. As an international business and marketing major, I participated in three field studies, each of which opened my eyes to a new perspective on the world. In particular, my final business college-sponsored field study to India developed my understanding of international business more than a lecture ever could. Because of this, I wanted to use my expertise to inspire students to take their studies outside of the classroom and gain that new understanding for themselves. I used my personal experiences and photos to more effectively connect with students and pique their interest.

Throughout the project, I consulted my advisor and professor of marketing, Dr. Daniel Baack, as well as the coordinator for immersive and experiential learning programs for the Miller College of Business, Angie Cravens. With their input, I was able to create a tool that addresses the benefits, common concerns, and activities associated with study abroad programs. Because the file and all of the photos are stored online, the book can be altered and reprinted as needed. This means that *Study Outside the Box* can continue to be used for years to come, encouraging students to broaden their perspective of the world as well as to stand out among their peers.
Education Redefined

Despite the fact that I was raised in a city that many would call “Middletown, USA,” I have been fortunate to gain exposure to different cultures throughout my education and personal life. I love to travel and have participated in multiple field studies to Asia in addition to family trips to England and Italy. It is from this exposure that I have acquired a strong affinity for experiencing new cultures and learning new points of view. I continually seek out opportunities that will broaden my understanding of the world, and I feel that studying abroad has pushed the limits of my comfort zone and tested my capabilities both professionally and personally. For these reasons, I have chosen to complete a creative project entitled “Study Outside the Box” for my senior honors thesis.

My goal for this project is to generate greater interest in study abroad programs, particularly in the Miller College of Business. These opportunities fully represent Ball State University’s promotion of immersive learning and have the ability to shape students both personally and professionally. Much of my education has been guided by my desire to understand others; my degree in international business has had a heavy focus on cross-cultural understanding and adapting to the societal norms of other countries both as an expatriate and as a member of a foreign community. Hearing theories and concepts about acculturation in the classroom and seeing them as a visitor on field studies has provided insight into the process of living and working in another culture, but in order to learn these things, a person must assimilate the culture. I believe that MCOB study abroad programs are an opportunity to apply information from the classroom to real-world situations while interacting within an unfamiliar culture.

Being immersed in another culture teaches valuable skills that translate to businesses both in and outside of the United States. As a participant in field studies, I have become comfortable working with diverse groups of people; I had home stays with families in India and China and worked with people from various different majors and countries, ranging from the age of eighteen
to sixty-three, on my field studies. Because of this, I have been placed in numerous situations where I have been forced to expand and improve upon my verbal and nonverbal communication skills. While on the business-oriented field study to India, I was provided with the opportunity to meet with leaders in many types of businesses to discover how they run on a functional and managerial level, as well as gained insight to the needs of employees. Additionally, we visited business school and interacted with students to gain an understanding of their focus and background training in business. These situations have pushed me to broaden my grasp of right and wrong in terms of business practices and have encouraged me to develop as a leader in my field. I feel that these experiences provide an in-depth education about the interconnectedness of the global marketplace as well as provide the tools necessary to succeed.

In March of 2008, I participated in a Miller College of Business field study to India, focusing on topics of culture, business, and education. This specific trip prompted me to encourage others to participate in business study abroad programs. Each area of study was an integral part of the experience, and seeing how they are interrelated provided an in-depth and comprehensive curriculum that allowed us to tie societal norms to business practices. Cultural exposure was inevitable, and when I went to India I noticed that several students went through a period of culture shock. We were confronted by different languages, foods, clothing, and customs. Instead of waking up to television and cereal, we woke up to unknown breakfast foods served by people whom we could not entirely understand. This was difficult, but the environment in which we confronted it was regulated and controlled by the faculty in order to give us a safe and effective learning environment.

Additionally, corporate and university tours allowed us to observe common practices, such as appropriate interaction and dress, as well as ask questions firsthand. Certain cultural elements filtered into daily routine at school and in the office. For example, we saw a hierarchical relationship
between teachers and students as well as among levels of employees. By understanding the impact of one element on the others and how that changes the relationships between different countries throughout the world, students gain an insight into what the term “global” really means.

In order to demonstrate how the comprehensive and in-depth curriculum provided by MCOB study abroad programs affects students, I designed this portfolio using my experiences to address the benefits of participating in a program, as well as concerns that students and parents may have. Additionally, a sample itinerary is used to reveal what happens on business trips. These segments are discussed in a way that makes them feel more comfortable about pursuing a study abroad opportunity.

Casual observance of foreign cultures does not teach us to adapt and to react differently to the everyday situations that are taken for granted in our own lives. Nothing can open your eyes to what the world has to offer like getting out there and seeing for yourself. By participating in field studies, students can begin to comprehend what it feels like to integrate into a foreign society and culture rather than feeling like a tourist, and I truly believe the best way to learn and to understand what one is learning is to experience it firsthand. Opportunities like those provided by study abroad programs are crucial to becoming a well-rounded and levelheaded individual, and I believe this compels students to work hard and broaden their perspectives to achieve a greater understanding of the world that surrounds them. This is immersive learning in its fullest: education redefined.