



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

Learning to change the world
Making international education core to the institutional mission

Victor J. Boschini, Jr., Chancellor, Texas Christian University

“Study abroad gave me the strength to take on the world, the inspiration to understand it, and the confidence to believe that even a girl from Henrietta, Texas, can have the ability to change it,” says Jennifer Klein, a 2001 Texas Christian University graduate. Involved with nongovernmental organizations over the past decade, she has lived and worked in Mexico, Japan, West Africa, Peru, Greece, Cambodia and Guinea.

At TCU, we believe *a truly educated individual of the 21st century must become an actor in the world, not an incidental observer*. Consequently, we must engage our students in the world far beyond our campus borders in meaningful ways.

Graduating students with a global point of view—students like Jennifer—has been an intrinsic element of our mission since 1999, when the university formally redefined the mission statement: “to educate ethical leaders and responsible citizens in the global community.” TCU thereby took its place among institutions of higher education that strive to take an expansive look at a world unlike any previously known.

I am convinced that international education is implicit in the mission of *any* institution of higher education in this increasingly global, connected environment, the “flat” world. The 21st century is characterized by symbiotic relationships of peoples across the globe. What affects one of us, affects us all. However, with so many challenges facing our colleges and universities, international education may become *less* rather than *more* a part of many students’ experiences as schools are forced to make painful choices.

That would greatly diminish us all.

For as Jennifer observes: “Study abroad gave me confidence and cultural curiosity. Without the confidence that I gained studying in London—confidence that I could live, adapt and flourish in unfamiliar environments—I wouldn't have dreamed that I could have lived and worked in the places I have been in the past 10 years.”

Because of our experiences at TCU, I remain confident that it *is* possible to broaden and deepen our students’ global perspective, even in these difficult times. By thinking differently, planning more strategically and utilizing and integrating the many resources already available on our campuses and in our larger communities, global education can remain at the core of the institutional mission.

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Creating a transformational student experience

At TCU, we realized that to graduate citizens of the world, we must offer our students more than travel with a study component—we must make international education commensurate with its prominent place in our mission.

To ensure that internationalism was truly core to the university’s mission in action as well as words, we determined we must move our already successful Center for International Studies: Study Abroad (the Center) in new directions. Consequently, we reconsidered, redefined and restructured, using the framework provided by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal in their book *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*. Besides this recognized book on leadership, we looked to the American Council on Education and the Forum on Education Abroad for strategic review and guidance.

The impetus was the 2000 report of the Task Force on Global Positioning of TCU, a part of a universitywide, yearlong effort, *The Commission on the Future of TCU*. While the task force agreed that the term *global* was not easily defined, the report stated that its authors had “worked to develop a set of initiatives that would help students gain an understanding of the interdependency of all societies, competence in the international marketplace and the ability to cross cultural boundaries with skill and grace.”

This glimpse into the future proved fruitful on many fronts. But it is vital to note that the path to today’s programs and policies took some unexpected twists and turns along the way. Most important, where raw numbers of students going abroad once drove the agenda, quality programming became our preferred goal.

Looking at international education in new ways

As one of the initial steps in the transformative process, the Center articulated a clear mission and vision, intrinsically linked to the university’s mission. The Center determined its role: “to clearly support international academic programs that foster understanding of the global community.” Its aspirations were defined as well: “to transform study abroad at TCU by embedding the global experience into the students’ academic experience.” Thereby, the Center repositioned itself at the heart of, rather than supplementary to, the academic mission.

The Center’s overriding mission evolved into a strategy for improving the study abroad experience. Critical areas of concern included:

- Improvement of pre-departure preparation and learning for students, so they would be prepared to get the most out of their experience
- Enhancement of programs abroad to ensure they would be academically strong and culturally rich and
- Encouragement of students upon return to become involved in international activities so they could capitalize on their experiences

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Maximizing financial resources

Financial challenges accompany study abroad, and new strategies were necessary to make our programs affordable. One solution was a fee structure that utilized tuition revenue generated by summer programs to offset the cost of faculty travel. This policy reduced faculty-led program fees by 25 percent, thereby reducing costs to students.

In addition, a cost analysis determined an established belief to be a myth: that outside provider programs were less expensive than our own study abroad programs. To the contrary, as a private, nonprofit university, TCU's tuition was not significantly more than provider programs, and in some cases less. This discovery resulted in another new policy: TCU tuition is charged not only for university programs but also for provider programs. As a result, students can now utilize scholarships, financial aid and grants for all study abroad programs. In addition, need-based and merit scholarships for international study require recipients to "give back" through participation in the TCU undergraduate research festival, conversation partners, International Student Association or other approved venues when they return to the home campus, thus extending the reach of this funding.

Leveraging human resources

The Center – or any unit for that matter – does not operate in isolation, and leveraging the vast human resources of the university has been vital to success.

A respected faculty member was named to lead the Center, thus bringing together two crucial aspects of study abroad, academics and logistical implementation. The outcome has been more frequent and consistent communication between the Center and the university community, fostering spontaneous interaction and new ideas. The faculty appointment to the directorship is also a symbolic message to the TCU community: Study abroad is an academic, as well as a culturally enriching, experience.

The creation of a common working community has been another key element in transforming international education. Communication and collaboration between various offices (admission, academics, fiscal, scholarships and financial aid, registrar, technology services, and marketing) has resulted in non-duplication of efforts and has accelerated more effective communication, increased interaction and, consequently, a superior study abroad experience.

Also of importance is an increased focus on students, exemplified by the launch of the VISA (Veteran International Student Ambassador) Corps. This select group assists the Center in promoting study abroad by attending events, visiting classrooms, facilitating study abroad fairs and making presentations to alumni. VISA Corp members benefit as well from opportunities to share their experiences with other students, continue to develop language skills, and articulate the meaningful attributes of their study abroad experiences and the personal changes these experiences have brought.

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Among the results of more closely integrated academic and study abroad efforts are:

- A Certificate in International Studies awarded at Commencement to students who participate in intercultural and global courses and co-curricular activities prior to, during and upon return from studying abroad
- An annual service learning trip to Nicaragua focusing on health care and sustainability open to students in all majors at TCU
- Performances by music students from Cuba to the Ukraine
- International TCU Frog Camps in London and Rome for incoming students, where they learn about their new university, fellow students and global opportunities
- Annual site visits by faculty and staff members to our study abroad locations and partner programs to evaluate academics and student life and engage with participants

The future of study abroad here continues to be a moving target. Fortunately for TCU, the mission of the university to educate leaders and citizens in the global community is advanced by any number of units and individuals. The Center often serves as a catalyst, but is also the beneficiary of a cohesive commitment to global learning.

Guide points for strengthening international education at your institution

Here are some of the lessons we have learned over the past 11 years:

- Adhere to your established goals and objectives.
- There are many different approaches. The culture of your institution will be a significant factor in defining your goals.
- Furthering international initiatives takes time. Refrain from too many changes in your institution's defined path.
- Employ organizational resources and external review processes to assist you in defining and implementing your approach to international education.
- Utilize external members of your community to advise you.
- Finally, remember the process is evolutionary. Eventually you will experience a connected cycle that defines the global approach to your mission.

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