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INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) WITH STUDY ABROAD COURSES

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Abstract:

This session will address the challenges and opportunities of developing short-term study abroad courses. In addition, this tutorial will provide lessons learned from integrating technology assignments into the study abroad experience. Collaboration across borders will be important in the future. Developing these skills first hand will prepare students for the workplace of the 21st century. There are two innovations to be addressed: 1. Developing a short –term study abroad course and 2. Integrating technology (social networking) into these classes. The workshop is based on first-hand experience developing short –term study abroad courses for China, India, and the Middle East. These courses were implemented during 2008-2009 time frames.

Keywords: Study-abroad, information technology, collaboration, social networking

I. INTRODUCTION

The vision for the this program is to develop courses that include both an in-class and a 2 to3 week study abroad component that provides students with in-depth knowledge of doing business in various parts of the world. Company visits, exposure to executives in these countries, alumni working in these countries, and faculty lectures from universities in the country provide valuable learning opportunities. Technology integration and related learning opportunities are a major focus of the course. Faculty from the liberal arts and business provide in-class lectures prior to leaving for the study abroad. Speakers from around the world are also included with the use of state-of-the art videoconferencing equipment. The first phase has provided valuable insights that will lead to new ways to use technology to reach a larger audience with greater impact. Technology has leveled the playing field. Students quickly learn that major universities across the globe have access to the same technologies which provide for opportunities to collaborate in ways not possible before. Courses were initially developed for China, India and the Middle East with plans to expand to other countries representing cultural diversity and business opportunities.

II. MAJOR OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the study abroad include the following:

- To provide a short-term study abroad opportunity for students who may not have any other opportunity for an international experience.
- To integrate curriculum initiatives across the business functions and liberal arts.
- To incorporate global communications and related technology experiences into the study abroad learning experience.
- Through a supervised comprehensive project, provide a learning experience that gives students knowledge of opportunities and obstacles associated with doing business in other countries and in making global IT decisions.
- Provide international opportunities in areas of the world currently underrepresented in the offerings for business students (Asia and The Middle East).

- To better meet the demands of the current business environment and the business community hiring our graduates.
- To meet the objectives of the business school strategic plan and overall university strategy to provide students with unique hands-on international experiences and include more diversity in student participation and programs.
- To incorporate experiential learning activities into the business school curriculum.
- To provide students with an understanding of the role that particular parts of the world are playing in the global marketplace.
- To provide an awareness of the cultural norms and social dimensions of doing business in other countries.
- To provide an awareness of technology trends around the world.
- To give first hand perspectives from executives of local and multinational companies operating in a given part of the world.
- To provide an appreciation of the political, legal, regulatory, cultural and economic issues that impact business operations in other countries.
- To provide an understanding of how social software and other technologies can enhance communication among partners around the world.

III. TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS

The following technologies were used by the students as part of the study abroad experience. Students were expected to become proficient in the use of the technologies and experiment through collaboration assignments in the countries being studied.

A **Wiki** (Wetpaint) was used as the backbone textbook for the class and as a collaboration tool. The material was developed through student research. During the study abroad experience the students were required to write a collaborative journal of their experiences and include links to important information, photos and discussion threads. One student was responsible for writing the summary for a particular day while the others add information and edit the content. The wiki is password protected but the parents of students had access so they could read about the adventures of their students while on the trip in real time.

Podcasts were used to record important lectures and speaker presentations. Video Podcasts were also used for professor lectures and important information. Students were required to subscribe to podcasts provided by companies such as Gartner, a leading IT research firm. In addition, students record podcasts of chapter summaries of some of the books they are reading. Students can share the workload of reading a book and listen to the other summaries on their iPod while walking or exercising. Podcasts were posted to the wiki.

Blogs were used for discussion of major topics and to express opinions on issues and current events. Students take on specific roles or topics for their participation on the blog. Students from universities in the country being visited also participate and this gives different viewpoints and enhances the global communication experience for the students.

Micro-blogs (Twitter) was used for short clips to remind students of upcoming activities or notify them spontaneously of plans or other events. This is a good way to track students while on the trip. Others can keep track of fellow students and everyone's schedule. If someone is lost it is a way to get in touch quickly. Of course, students must frequently update their status for this to be effective. It also requires access to a cell phone or internet which can be problem at times in other countries.

Mash-Ups were used for applications that students may find helpful in the context of this class. There are thousands of these available for students to research.

YouTube was used as a means for recording short videos and posting these to YouTube so those back in the US can see what the students are doing on a daily basis.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) was used to get feeds of relevant information and organize the information related to the course content.

Virtual Worlds (Second Life) were used as the platform to experiment with a class exercise that includes students from both countries.

Electronic Meetings (Breeze) were used to conduct an electronic meeting across borders with students in both countries.

Video Conferencing was used to bring in speakers from other countries to the classroom in the US. Time differences pose some issues but careful scheduling takes care of most of these issues.

Other technologies were used as appropriate. Wireless technologies, cell phone usage in other countries and internet access are some examples.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNING POINTS

Students experience first-hand the value of having access to information and communication technologies anywhere in the world. In addition, they develop an understanding of how technology enables on-line global communities and a network of contacts. Students begin to experience the world from a global perspective and technology becomes the platform for linking people through ideas, knowledge and community. The program is currently in its second year. The Middle East course (Dec. / Jan.) and the China course (May) will be offered for the second time in 2009-10. With additional funding we will be able to supplement student expenses and include more students and greater diversity. In addition, the program will be expanded to include more countries. The program or components of the program can easily be transferred to other institutions. The value has been established. Lessons learned from these applications can be extended to students who are not able to participate in study abroad opportunities.