The Graduate Learning Experiences and Outcomes: The Landscape of Graduate Study Abroad (GLEO)

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Abstract

As the world becomes an increasingly interconnected global community, it is essential that today’s graduate students develop international perspectives and the ability to work with others in diverse settings. To help address this need, many professional schools and graduate programs in the U.S. are creating international experiences for their students, ranging from short-term, faculty-led programs to joint and dual degree programs.

Unlike undergraduate study abroad, graduate students have different goals and purposes for engaging in international experiences and tend to seek opportunities for research, networking, personal growth, and other professional development. There is, however, a dearth of research information available on graduate study abroad. One of the few reports available is through the annual Open Doors publication by the Institute of International Education. However, little research or information exists that focuses on the design, experiences, and outcomes of international opportunities at the graduate level. Given the paucity of information available, such interests create substantial challenges for programs seeking to develop effective international experiences for their graduate students.

The Graduate Learning Experiences and Outcomes (GLEO) project addresses this gap in research by exploring the landscape of international opportunities offered at the graduate level. To begin to understand these opportunities, the GLEO team focused on faculty-led, group experiences. A survey was administered to 15 research universities in the Midwest and New York, with the goal of building an inventory of faculty-led programs available to graduate and professional students.

Findings suggest that most faculty-led programs were less than four weeks, offered for academic credit, and did not require foreign language competency. Many programs were interdisciplinary in nature, revealing that graduate and professional students from a wide range of academic disciplines had the opportunity to participate. The top destinations were Europe, the Americas and Asia. Most programs included a combination of cultural excursions, lectures and presentations, academic field trips/site visits, and group discussions. Faculty program leaders represented a wide variety of disciplines and had diverse motivations for leading international graduate programs. Limitations and implications for further research are discussed. Future research should focus on how faculty leaders design and facilitate these programs, and how students perceive and make sense of what and how they are learning.

Subsequent to this phase of the study we intend to study the kinds of learning experiences associated with the different kinds of experiences (besides faculty-led) available to graduate students and to document individual and organizational outcomes associated with these experiences.