



# **Assessing and Integrating the Academic Benefits of Study Period Abroad : A Case Study of The European Business School London**

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# Structure of Presentation

- Provide background information about the school and the context for the research
- Outline the two phases of the research project with their objectives
- Discuss research approach and findings for the phase 1 study
- Discuss research approach, findings and recommendations for the phase 2 study

# Background information about the European Business School London

- Established in the U.K. in 1979, part of Regent's College. Charitable trust status. Validated by the OUVS
  - About 800 students from more than 80 countries
- **B.A. in International Business with Language**  
All students in the Undergraduate programme:
  - Study any 1 or 2 of 8 languages
  - Spend two semesters of study of abroad
  - Undertake 36 weeks of work placement
  - Major in economics, finance, etc. (optional)
- 66 Partner Institutions around the world
  - 22 countries, 5 continents

# Context for research

The Study Period Abroad (SPA) was perceived by staff and management to add real value to our degree offering but:

How was the SPA experience used on return?

How was this accessed when students returned to EBSL?

How might we communicate this benefit to various stakeholders?

The situation at this time was that students simply brought back credits, not grades, to EBSL

## Outline the two phases of the research project with their objectives

- The Study Period Abroad Research Project was broken down into 2 distinct phases.
- Phase 1 took place in 2004/5 and was aimed at **exploring** how the SPA is integrated into the final year academic programme of the school
- Phase 2 took place in 2006/7 and was aimed at **monitoring** SPA linkages in assessment structure and **recommending** ways to further integrate the SPA in the final year of studies.

# Key Conclusions from the project

- Consider a holistic approach to integration
- Get faculty's involvement and support
- Identify what to integrate

# Phase 1 research approach

- Literature review of journal articles and research reports from other universities
- Documentary research of current practices at other universities
- Focus groups with students
- Survey with students
- Interviews with staff

# Literature Review and Document Search: Key Findings

Much of the British literature focuses on the importance of **debriefing** in order **to enable the student to reflect** upon their own **personal development** and to aid tutors and administrators in improving the experience of future SPA cohorts. This is through tutor meetings, reports and SPA feedback forms.

Integration is often seen as students **aiding future cohorts** through helping at SPA open days, giving presentations to L2 students and the creation of on-line chat rooms and FAQ facilities by which to share info with cohorts preparing for or undertaking SPA.

More recent, primarily US, academics are calling for a **differentiation between student satisfaction and student learning**. Universities are undertaking large scale, long term projects to identify learning outcomes based around 1) language proficiency, 2) intercultural proficiency and 3) **discipline specific proficiency**.

# Primary data : stakeholders

## **Students:** Focus group + Survey

- Benefits & Value of SPA
- How currently integrated / assessed in modules?
- Is there potential for more?
- Evaluate assessment alternatives

## **Lecturers:** In-depth interviews with Subject Area Coordinators in Business & Languages

- How currently integrated / assessed into modules?
- Is there potential for more?

# Student Survey Results: Benefits of SPA

Through a rank order scale question the following was established in terms of benefits:

1. Language proficiency
2. Personal development
3. Intercultural competence
4. Business knowledge & skills

(87% of students ranked business least important)

# Staff Interviews: Academic Usage of the SPA Experience

## Languages

- informs student contributions to class discussions
- assessed reflective essay in the Target Language (TL)
- questionnaires on perceived linguistic gains
- assessment **may require** incorporation of SPA acquired knowledge (other than TL.)

## Business

- students loosely encouraged to relate SPA learning to module
- assessment allows for **voluntary** incorporation of SPA acquired knowledge
- difficult to formally & uniformly assess
  - variety of experiences (countries, institutions, subjects, knowledge) and student mix (L3 + L2 + IS)

# Student Survey Results: Was there potential for more academic integration

How integrated were Business and Languages SPA into Final Year?

55% felt SPA was integrated in Languages but....

15% still wished for more

58% said it was not in Business modules and...

25% strongly felt there was a need for more

# Student survey, Focus Group and Staff Comments on Alternatives for Assessment

During the research both the diary/portfolio and dissertation forms of assessment were rejected.

Primarily because:

- Strong resistance to diary assessment by students
- A SPA dissertation would restrict student choice too much

## Alternatives for Integration:

diary

business/culture research project to replace current dissertation

assignment incorporated into Final Year International Business Module.

assignments incorporated into language class

keep things as they are

# Recommendations of Phase 1 Study

## Short term:

- **monitoring** SPA incidence on assessed work
  - Staff: explicitly encourage SPA incorporation in task briefs

## Medium term:

- setting up **SPA-profile-rising** activities
  - newsletter, essay competition, on line quizzes, etc

## Long term:

- discussion of **alternatives and structural changes to degree**

Recommendations of first study formed the objectives of second study

# Phase 2 Research Outline

- Survey staff on SPA related learning outcomes
- Interviews with staff on assessment strategies
- Monitoring whether SPA is specifically discussed in L3 assignments
- Survey and collation of SPA-related activities
- Survey of students on Marketing and HR modules to determine potential SPA linkages

# Findings and analysis

## On Learning Outcomes

### L3: the relevance of A13

To demonstrate critical knowledge and understanding of contemporary economic, socio-political, and cultural dynamics in an international setting,

(a) particularly a knowledge of the countries where the foreign language studied as part of the programme is spoken.

# Learning Outcomes findings

At the beginning of the phase 2 project in 2006, 11 of 24 final year modules listed A13 as a learning outcome but only 3 specifically mentioned the possibility of using the SPA in the assessments.

# Findings & Analysis

**Staff on SPA assessment: By the end of the project we found increased integration in:**

## Languages

- Written Debriefing papers, topical oral presentations
- Feedback on courses taken
- most elements allow / some require incorporation of SPA acquired knowledge, including Final Exam

## Business

- Modules explicitly encouraged to relate SPA to assessment. From 3 to 8, including 3 core modules.
  - Dissertation now promotes more thought on SPA
- ‘Carrot’ rather than ‘stick’: encouraged, not forced

# Findings & Analysis – Results of Pilot Survey

To identify what to integrate, the pilot survey asked:

- Which related modules they studied abroad?
- How their learning might be incorporated into L3?

Pilot survey examined all Level 3 Marketing modules and International HRM

# Findings & Analysis – Results of Survey

- **Student mix**
  - 63% of students taking elective modules were exchange students. Important to recognise this in making integration work
- **Previous knowledge**
  - Useful to know how many students don't have a background in your subject area for group management

# Findings & Analysis – Results of Survey

- Useful to know the variety and range of related models students have taken abroad, for example, luxury goods marketing at ISC Paris, political marketing ESPEME Lille and PR for Tourism at CEU Madrid.
- Useful to see what SPA modules students consider are related to the modules we teach here. For example, one student brings together Strategic Analysis as a strongly related course to International Marketing. In the International HRM class one student mentioned sociology, contract law and management as being modules they had studied connected to IHRM.

# Findings & Analysis – Results of Survey

- **Teaching style**

33% of students specifically mentioned the practical, participative, case study based approach at EBSL, comparing this with theory driven, lecture oriented teaching at partner universities. Offers opportunities for integration.

# Recommendations

- Incorporate student survey of SPA curricular linkages into every L3 module. Surveys could be completed via Moodle (VLS) and at the end of week 2/3
- Information from modules could be fed back to Subject Leaders in order to effectively disseminate information between cohorts and modules. SLs build a bank of useful knowledge about partner schools.
- A major benefit of the survey was the impact it had on the number of students writing about SPA experiences in their assignments. Around 5% to 20% when matched with initial draft proposals on one module.

# Recommendations

- Provide space for and encourage curricular integration of SPA into L3 modules
  - Consider including A13
  - State clearly ways in which students will have the opportunity to apply knowledge & skills acquired abroad
  - Encourage and monitor connections between study abroad and assignments

# Recommendations

- Get to know partner institutions and modules taught abroad in your areas of expertise; establish links
- Participate in the Teacher Mobility Scheme: internationalisation and cross fertilisation among institutions

# Further Recommendations: structural changes to degree

## Add academic value to SPA

- Review SPA credit requirements. Grades rather than pass/fail marks are brought back to EBSL
- Consider double majors
- Acknowledge
  - students who do extremely well on SPA perhaps through a Dean's list ?
  - students who bring SPA back into the class

# Key Conclusions from the project

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# Selected References

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