

Creation of an Off-campus Domestic Program

Assignment: A Reflective Account

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Abstract

Study abroad is a well-known way to expose students to different cultures, but participation rates in the U.S. have remained troublingly low. This reflective account describes the creation of an authentic assessment for graduate students in a global education course in the form of an off-campus domestic program assignment as an accessible alternative to traditional study abroad. Benefits of the assignment include students' use of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, writing, public speaking, and knowledge application, all skills which employers value. Further, students are introduced to domestic off-campus programs as a form of study away which may be more inclusive, affordable, and accessible than traditional study abroad programs. Guidance is provided for individuals wishing to construct a similar assessment, including activities and resources used to orient students to the subject, organizational details of the assignment, examples of student work, and suggestions for tailoring the assignment to undergraduates and different disciplines.

Keywords: authentic assessment, domestic off-campus programs, educational leadership, global education, study away

Introduction

For the past six years I have taught a course on global education for students in the higher education track of my college's educational leadership doctorate program. Students in the track are employed in institutions across the U.S. higher education landscape, from community colleges, to for-profit institutions, to four-year public and private universities, and serve in leadership roles in areas as diverse as admissions, athletics, and instruction. The global education course fills a need in the doctorate program curriculum by giving students a space to learn about the impact of globalisation on higher education. One of those impacts is an increasing trend for U.S. institutions to internationalise their campuses (Helms & Brajkovic, 2018). While study abroad may be the most common example of campus internationalisation, it is not a form of learning that many students experience. In fact, only 1.6% of U.S. college students participate in a study abroad program (NAFSA, n.d.). Additionally, few faculty, deans, or provosts have direct experience with study abroad (Carter et al., 2019), which has implications for how these programs are perceived and promoted on college campuses. An alternative, the domestic off-campus study program addresses some of the problems associated with study abroad and provides opportunities for encounters with difference for diverse populations of college students.

This article describes an authentic assessment which requires students to work in teams to propose a domestic off-campus study program as an accessible alternative to study abroad. I begin this reflective account by reviewing the need for authentic learning and the benefits of authentic assessments, followed by a discussion of the literature related to domestic off-campus study. Next, I describe the domestic off-campus study assignment I created, including examples of team projects developed by past students. I conclude with remarks about how this assignment, which was designed for higher education students in a doctoral program, can also be adapted to other contexts, including diverse fields of study and undergraduate education. My goal in this article is

to describe a plan for constructing an authentic assessment in the form of a domestic off-campus program assignment for college students

Authentic assessment

Higher education has been criticized by employers for failing to provide students with the skills they need to become valued employees (Rhew et al., 2019). Particular skills and abilities such as critical thinking, writing, public speaking, and knowledge application in real-world settings are especially lacking from employers' perspective (Bauer-Wolf, 2018; Jaschik, 2015). Researchers have found that authenticity, or realism, is a key factor in learning which promotes student understanding and employability (Bloxham, 2015; Sambell et al., 2013). Hence, authentic assessments are viewed as one way to address employers' concerns with students' college education.

Wiggins placed "worthy intellectual tasks" at the centre of authentic assessment (1990, p.1). Examples of authentic assessments include portfolios, case studies, capstone experiences, internships, simulations, problem-based tasks, proposals, and projects. Adoption of a real-world scenario that requires the student to engage in work specific to the discipline is an essential component of authentic assessment. It follows that assessments can be particularly effective when used with learners who already have some work experience in their field of study, such as graduate students. In this case, students are able to draw on their own learning as well as the content provided by the instructor and apply both to an assignment. Authentic assessments also redistribute the typical power dynamic in a classroom setting by shifting control of the form the final product takes from the instructor to the student (Pratt, 1998). Allowing flexibility in creativity and control over the final product may appeal to the experienced, or professional student, who is used to making decisions concerning their work.

Study away

The phrase *off-campus study* has been used by researchers and practitioners as an umbrella term which covers both study abroad and domestic study away. As Carter,

Kaufman, and Torp have aptly noted, "off-campus study is a wilderness of models, goals, assessments, and vocabularies" (2019, p. 11). Acknowledging that it is not a new term, Sobania (2015) has championed the use of *study away* to refer to all academic credit-bearing off-campus programs. The term is considered more inclusive as it can be applied to study conducted in the U.S. or abroad (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009). One form of domestic study away is the domestic off-campus program. Common to all domestic off-campus programs is an immersive educational experience that occurs somewhere in the U.S. (Sobania, 2015).

The body of literature associated with domestic study away is much smaller than for study abroad (Carter et al., 2019). As yet there is no national professional organization or association that represents domestic study away (Sobania, 2015), nor is there a central repository which collects statistics for student participation in these programs (Carter et al., 2019). However, existing research indicates that domestic off-campus programs address some of the problems that have long plagued traditional study abroad. Chief among barriers to student participation in study abroad programs is cost (Lee, 2017; Shaftel et al., 2007). Affordability is particularly problematic for minority students (Brux & Fry, 2010), a population that has lower rates of participation in study abroad (Dessoiff, 2006). Even short-term study abroad programs, typically lasting one to eight weeks (Hulstrand, 2006), can cost thousands of dollars, whereas domestic off-campus programs are more affordable, costing as little as a few hundred dollars (Fischer, 2015). The modest cost of domestic off-campus programs coupled with their flexible format may be more appealing to a broader array of students and may therefore attract groups of students who don't typically participate in study abroad programs, such as first-generation students, working parents (Fischer, 2015), and community college students (Dessoiff, 2006; Zhang, 2011). While the primary demographic for study abroad has traditionally been white females (Dessoiff, 2006; Institute of International Education, 2018), domestic off-campus programs have proven popular with males and athletes (Fischer, 2015), two groups with lower rates of study

abroad participation. The relative ease with which the programs can be planned may make them more appealing to faculty who don't want to invest significant time in organizing a trip abroad, but do have an interest in leading a student group for a domestic experience (Sobania & Braskamp, 2009). Finally, there is less hassle for students participating in domestic off-campus programs because they don't have to worry about obtaining international travel documents and whether or not academic credit for the experience will transfer back to their home institution (Shaftel et al., 2007).

Proponents of domestic off-campus study do not claim that it is superior to study abroad nor that students who participate in it can achieve the same learning objectives as may be achieved through study abroad. There are, however, benefits and advantages of domestic off-campus study that make it an attractive alternative to study abroad. Similar to study abroad, domestic off-campus study is considered a high-impact educational practice which helps to increase student retention and engagement (Kuh, 2008). Research has shown that programs which are designed as experiential and include cross-cultural elements, such as domestic off-campus programs, can be as effective as study abroad programs in increasing students' critical thinking skills and cultural awareness (Johnstone et al., 2018). Further, civic identity development was more apparent in students who participated in off-campus domestic programs than for those who participated in study abroad (Lee, 2017). Service-learning, one form of domestic off-campus study in which students meet a community need and engage in reflection on their efforts (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), has been linked to increases in students' cultural knowledge and sense of self (Engberg, 2013). Students who participated in service-learning also scored higher in social responsibility, that is, the responsibility to make a positive difference in society (Engberg & Fox, 2011). Finally, in light of the current global pandemic, with its health concerns and travel restrictions, domestic off-campus study still offers students an opportunity to broaden their thinking

and interact with people from different cultures even when study abroad in its traditional form is not possible (Whalen, 2020).

Creating domestic off-campus programs as a form of authentic assessment

The domestic off-campus program proposal assignment tasks students with creating a program for student learning which is accessible and provides opportunities for “encounters with difference” (Sobania, 2015, p. 326). It allows them the opportunity to gain experience with program development and curriculum design in a low-stakes situation where they can engage in critical thinking, express their creativity, and function as a member of a team. All of these activities require skills – analytical reasoning, creativity, and collaboration – that employers value (Petroni, 2019). I place the domestic-off campus assignment in the last quarter of our 16-week semester. This gives the students a chance to become familiar with concepts introduced earlier in the course such as identity, culture, and education, globalisation, campus internationalisation, global learning, intercultural competencies, cross-cultural leadership, and challenges presented to educational leadership by globalisation. In-class activities prior to the assignment include a “test your global IQ quiz” using Kahoot, a free game-based learning platform (Kahoot, n.d.), a discussion of globalisation in which students collaborate to create their definition of the process, a think/pair/share activity that requires students to identify and demonstrate ways in which globalisation impacts educational learners and leaders, and a review of scholarly articles focused on campus internationalisation, study abroad, and domestic off-campus study. Because enrolment in the global education course is typically small, ranging from four to 10 students, I prefer to assign members to teams. In doing so I am able to construct teams that are likely more diverse than if students self-selected into groups (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Assignment into teams also forces students out of their comfort zones and puts them in situations where they have to collaborate with others who may not share their

worldview. In keeping with best practice for collaborative learning (Caulfield & Persell, 2006; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010), I generally limit teams to 3 or 4 people, although this means that occasionally the entire class constitutes one team.

In addition to instructions for how to approach the domestic off-campus program assignment (see the Appendix for assignment components and guiding questions), I give students examples of programs featured in Sobania's book *Putting the Local in Global Education: Models for Transformative Learning through Domestic Off-campus Programs* (2015). To assist students with writing objectives for their programs, I provide them a resource related to Bloom's taxonomy action verbs (Anderson et al., 2001). Completion of the assignment requires that the teams present their program proposals in class and submit a written synopsis. The presentation gives students the opportunity to make the case for their program and allows them to answer questions and receive feedback from classmates and the instructor. The teams employ public speaking skills during the presentation portion of the assignment as well as time management skills because I impose a time limit of 20 minutes for presentations. I provide written feedback to the teams on both the presentation and the synopsis. It is my policy that all members of a team receive the same grade because the expectation is that while they will all contribute differently to the assignment their contributions will be equal. In light of criticisms of grading group performance (King & Behnke, 2005), I require a description in the team's written synopsis of their proposal detailing exactly how each member contributed to the assignment. This gives the team a way to hold each member accountable and demonstrates for me that each student pulled their weight in the assignment. If the team's synopsis indicates that not all members contributed equally, then I have a place to start to determine how the grades should be awarded per team member. In my experience with this assignment the majority of teams (60%) proposed credit-bearing programs in the form of a traditional course,

internship, directed study, and seminar course, offered in varying lengths from a full fall or spring semester, to a summer semester, to a three-week Maymester. Forty percent of teams proposed non-credit-bearing programs in the form of a retreat, a series of meetings, and a trip or a series of trips, offered in length from one day to several days. Below I describe both a credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing domestic off-campus program proposed by teams in my global education course.

Experience Ybor City is an example of a team's proposal for a credit-bearing domestic off-campus program. The team conceived of the program as a faculty-led three-week Maymester course for undergraduate teacher education majors with weeks one and three being held on campus and week two being a cultural immersion in Ybor City, Florida. The purpose of the program was to provide future educators with the opportunity to study various frames of education (e.g., historical, philosophical, sociological, political, and economic) in a culturally diverse location in the U.S. Week one of the course included presentations by guest speakers and inventories on social and cultural sensitivity. The focus of the cultural immersion portion of the program (week two) was the historic Latin culture of Cuban immigrants to the U.S., and included visits to local schools, restaurants, and museums. Week three of the course provided time for reflection and work on a final project. Funding for the program would be covered through tuition, and cost of the visit to Ybor City would be minimized by agreements with local universities which would provide affordable on-campus housing. At the conclusion of the program, the team suggested that student participants should be able to analyse the role of culture in teaching and learning, translate knowledge gained through cultural immersion into cultural practice, and reflect on cultural sensitivity as a means to mediate and encourage appropriate classroom behaviours.

The Cultural Exchange Program is an example of a non-credit-bearing domestic off-campus program. The team proposed the three-month program as a form of service-learning for newly initiated undergraduate students in a foreign language honour society and recently placed refugee families identified through a local social services

agency. The purpose of the program was to provide students an opportunity to serve others through the planning and implementation of monthly cultural programming (such as game night or a holiday party) for refugee families. Prior to working with refugee families, students would be briefed by an expert on cultural norms. The honour society faculty advisor would provide students with an overview of the program and give guidance at mandatory monthly honour society meetings. As a result of participating in the program, students would be able to appreciate different cultures, recognise similarities and differences in cultures, plan events from beginning to end, speak clearly in front of groups, and develop an understanding of the importance of cultural events. Rather than earning academic credits for involvement in the program, students would be able to earn service points for the honour society, necessary for maintaining membership. The team proposed that funding for the program would come from a portion of honour society dues and a grant, and that the program would be assessed through student evaluations, a questionnaire related to program outcomes, and student reflections.

In addition to providing students an opportunity to increase skills previously discussed (e.g. critical thinking, collaboration, creativity), the domestic off-campus program assignment requires students to engage in curriculum and program planning with intentionality, experience that is desirable for higher education leaders. Although I do not formally solicit student feedback on this assignment, there have been some comments on the course evaluations over the years which may speak to the domestic off-campus program assignment. In the portion of the course evaluation which states "List up to three things that you liked about this course," students have written "group work," "I also really enjoy the projects for the class," "provides important insights to other cultures," "encouraged students to expand their worldview," and "student presentations were informative and varied." These comments suggest that students are benefiting positively from the assignment.

While it is not necessary for the instructor to have led a group of students on an actual domestic off-campus program in order to successfully implement this assignment, there are ways to increase the instructor's familiarity with the concept. Inviting a faculty or staff member who has had such an experience as a guest speaker for the class prior to the assignment is one suggestion. Similarly, hearing from students who participated in domestic off-campus programs can be enlightening for both the instructor and class. Offices of Service Learning or Study Abroad are a good place to locate these individuals. Instructors who are interested in tailoring the assignment to fit their particular needs can consult research describing domestic off-campus programs in various disciplines and areas, including agriculture (Leggette et al., 2013), communications (Meyers & Arnold, 2015), public health (Fifolt & McCormick, 2020; Walser-Kuntz & Iroz, 2017), nursing (Lane et al., 2017), sport (Stinnett & Oregon, 2018), and student affairs (Mitchell, Jr., & Westbrook, 2016). Instructors may also consult the work of Villarroel et al. (2018) which provides a four-step model to creating an authentic assessment in individual higher education courses.

Conclusion

This paper provides educators with a plan for constructing a domestic off-campus program assignment for college students. The assignment described here could be used with a number of student populations and courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level to teach global learning. Many institutions have a global studies major, minor, or certificate (Campbell et al., 2004; Cierniak & Ruddy, 2016) for which the domestic off-campus program assignment would make a complementary addition to the curriculum. One can also imagine the assignment instructions tailored to a specific topic for a course, such as immigration or health disparities. Alternately, the assignment might require that students create a proposal for a particular academic program such as a culinary arts program or a freshman seminar. This authentic assessment helps students practice skills valued by employers and introduces them to an inclusive,

affordable, and accessible method of allowing college students to experience different cultures in the form of domestic off-campus programs.

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APPENDIX: Assignment Components and Guiding Questions

- Name. Does the program name clearly indicate what the program is about?
- Target audience. Who is the program created for? For example, is the target audience undergraduates, engineering majors, graduate students, foreign language majors, non-traditional students, etc.?
- Enrollment. What is the ideal number of students to participate in the program? Is there a cap on enrollment in the program?
- Purpose. What is the purpose of the program? For example, is it to allow students to engage in service-learning opportunities, to acquire clinical experiences (such as in the health professions), etc.?
- Rationale. Why is the program necessary? What is it being offered? How is the program an alternative to an international study abroad program?
- Leadership. How is leadership for the program provided? By university faculty, staff, a third-party service provider, or a university department? Who provides “on the ground” leadership for participants (in other words, who is with them/guiding them throughout the program)? Who provides continued leadership for the program over time (in other words, who provides administrative leadership for the program by promoting it, assessing it, securing funds for it, etc.)?
- Duration. What is the length of the program? A weekend? One week? One month? One semester?
- Affiliation. Is the program affiliated with an academic course/program? For example, is it embedded in a history course, or a requirement of a teacher education degree program?

- **Format.** What does the program look like? What is/are its physical location(s)? What kinds of activities will students in the program be engaged in? What would a typical day in the program look like?
- **Prerequisites.** Are there prerequisites to enrollment in the program? For example, do participants need to have attained junior status, or a certain GPA, or have taken an introductory sociology class before being eligible for the program?
- **Preparation.** How are students prepared for the program? Is there an orientation session? What training, skills, or background are students provided prior to engaging in site activities?
- **Objectives.** What are the objectives of the program? Is increasing intercultural competence in participants a goal of the program? What should students be able to do as a result of participation in the program? How is student learning in the program assessed?
- **Logistics.** If the activity site is physically remote from campus, how will transportation, lodging, and meals be arranged?
- **Funding.** How is the program paid for? Scholarships? Grant funding? Additional tuition/credit-hour charges?
- **Cost per participant.** What is the approximate cost of the program per student? Provide an approximate estimate of expenses that make up this cost (for example, transportation, lodging, meals, etc., if appropriate).
- **References.** If you draw "inspiration" from another program, be sure to reference it.

Disclosure Statement

The author affirms that all materials included in the article represent the authors own work and anything cited or paraphrased within the text is included in the reference list.

The author affirms that this manuscript has not been previously published nor is it being considered for publication elsewhere.

The author affirms that no funding was received for this research.

The author affirms that no conflict of interest exists which might have influenced the author in reporting findings completely and honestly.