

Short-Term Study Abroad in Business: Text Analytic Review of Recent Research and Guidelines for Faculty Leaders

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Abstract. The purpose of this research is to review recent findings related to short term study abroad (STSA) programs and provide a set of guidelines for faculty leaders seeking to develop and implement such programs. Text analytics utilizing Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was employed to understand underlying themes in recent research. Key themes emerging from text analysis of prior studies include cultural enrichment, leadership, and design; academic impact; language learning and enhancement; professional development opportunities; family and community connections; and career relevance. These findings, prior research, and author experience are all utilized to offer step-by-step guidelines for faculty members interested in developing and implementing STSA program offerings within the business curriculum.

Keywords: short-term study abroad, text analytics, guidelines for program development.

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen an increase in number of business-focused short-term study abroad programs (henceforth referred to as STSA) at universities and colleges across the United States and beyond (Bradly and Iskhakova, 2022). Such programs typically involve a trip to one or more foreign destinations over a time frame of two weeks or shorter and are typically led by one or more faculty members. Such short-term duration programs have significantly risen in popularity (compared to semester long programs) among students thanks to better affordability and shorter duration of being away from campus thus allowing for easier scheduling within a student's program of study (Janda, 2016; Opengart, 2018). Research has also found that STSAs are valuable in that they affect important student outcomes such as cultural intelligence, global mindset, entrepreneurial abilities, and global industry capabilities (Hallows *et al.*, 2011; Janda, 2020; Slotkin *et al.*, 2016), in addition to enhancing student outcomes in

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the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains (McGrath *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, faculty-led STSA programs can help universities create a global mindset among both faculty and students and as such help accomplish one of the nine guiding principles for business school accreditation (DiMaria *et al.*, 2024).

Due to the significance of STSAs in the business curriculum, there has been considerable research related to such programs, particularly during the last decade. Such research has focused on (1) understanding student motivations and attitudes related to STSA and key considerations students utilize to select such programs (e.g., Aresi *et al.*, 2018; Janda, 2016; Janda and Janda, 2018); (2) understanding the link between STSA and key student outcomes (e.g., Hallows *et al.*, 2011; Janda, 2020; Opengart, 2018; Varela, 2017); and (3) guidelines for developing STSAs (e.g., DiMaria *et al.*, 2024; Peng, 2013; Womble *et al.*, 2014).

Extant research related to STSAs has enriched our understanding of this field, particularly as it relates to student motivations, concerns, and outcomes. Most research is conceptual in nature or utilizes quantitative data. To our knowledge, there are no studies utilizing a text analytical framework to summarize findings of recent research related to STSAs in business. The first aim of this study is to provide an overview of extant research highlights utilizing a text analytics framework. Text based insights can uncover unique and useful insights by providing more context as opposed to simply providing frequency of occurrence as in empirical data (Khan and Vorley, 2017). Large volumes of data can be analyzed in ways human-based categorization would be limited meaning that new knowledge can be extracted to identify significant patterns and hidden correlations (Hassani *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, even though there is some research related to guidelines for developing STSAs, much more research needs to be done as a resource for beginning faculty members who wish to develop and implement such programs, particularly as increasing number of institutions are enhancing efforts in this area (Bradly and Iskhakova, 2022; DiMaria *et al.*, 2024). Thus, a second aim of this study is to utilize the text analytics insights to provide a step-by-step framework for developing and executing a STSA program in business. In this latter aim, one author (henceforth termed the *lead author*) has incorporated insights from extensive personal experience (developing and executing forty plus STSA programs over the last fifteen years, each trip with typically 18-25 students).

The next section provides an overview of the methodology for identifying the extant research articles and conducting text analytics to extract relevant insights, followed by a description of the results of this analysis. Subsequently, key insights derived are utilized, along with the lead author's personal experiences to provide a framework for developing and implementing a STSA program in business.

2. Methodology

Literature Search

A literature review was conducted to identify recent research (within the last 12 years from 2011 to 2023) related to short term study abroad. In addition to emphasizing the most current findings, this focus is also consistent with the fact that STSAs have gained prominence in recent years. Twenty-five articles were identified using keywords such as STSA, study abroad, short term, education abroad, among others. The search strategy identified studies that reported best practices based on actual trips. Other criteria included that the articles were (1) peer reviewed; (2) published in English; (3) focused on STSA; and (4) included a discussion of findings. Google Scholar, and ABI Inform database were used to identify the articles.

Unstructured Data Extraction

Discussion and conclusion sections of the candidate source articles were extracted and placed into unstructured datafiles in a PDF format. The material was reviewed by 2 independent scholars to ensure the material was properly and consistently extracted. Several adjustments were made to ensure the retrieved articles were eligible for inclusion. One article was excluded due to its format as a meta-study that did not contain unique practical experiences, thus resulting in a final sample of twenty-four articles. Several articles contained paragraphs that did not pertain to STSA and those paragraphs were removed. Appendix A includes references for each of these studies which were included based on relevance as measured by articles that reported findings from either qualitative or quantitative data.

Data Preparation

A custom Python script was developed to prepare the data for further analysis. The script utilized the following libraries: PyPDF2, tabula-py, NLTK, Pandas, and WordCloud. The libraries performed the following functions in this script: PyPDF2 was used to extract text from PDF files; tabula-py provided functionality to extract text from tables within PDF files; NLTK provided natural language processing functions, permitting extracted text to be lemmatized, parsed, tokenized and otherwise managed; Pandas was used to filter, aggregate and organize the data; and, finally WordCloud provided visualization tools for preliminary and exploratory analysis. The Python script followed these primary steps:

- 1. Import Unstructured Data:** PyPDF2 and tabula-py were used to interface to the database of PDF files and extract text content while discarding metadata and other PDF file contents. The data were stored in a Pandas dataframe for ease of handling.

