

Making Study Abroad a Win-Win Opportunity for Pre-Tenure Faculty

William G. Moseley

Macalester College

Introduction

While study abroad is increasingly popular among students in the United States (IIE 2007), tenure track faculty involvement with these programs has not kept up with demand (Obst, Bhandari and Witherell 2007). University and college-run programs often struggle to find sufficient numbers of tenure track faculty, especially junior faculty, to staff their programs (Peterson 2006). While older faculty may view their own participation as instructors on a study abroad program as an opportunity to travel and to interact with students differently than they would on the home campus, junior faculty frequently perceive study abroad as something which must wait until after receiving tenure (Peterson 2006). Common impediments to pre-tenure faculty participation in such programs might include: a perception that study abroad interrupts scholarly productivity; a limited conception of study abroad as a vehicle for student-faculty research collaboration; a view that study abroad teaching constitutes a form of service and therefore is discouraged for untenured faculty at some colleges and universities; and the fact that junior faculty may have young families or other personal and financial constraints.

Assuming that junior faculty have something to contribute to study abroad, how might colleges and universities increase the participation of pre-tenure faculty in study abroad programs in a way that both enhances the student experience and furthers the goals of these faculty members? While much has been written about the positive aspects of study abroad for students (e.g., Dwyer and Peters 2004; Hadis 2005), there is a smaller literature on the benefits of study abroad for faculty (e.g., Goodwin and Nacht 1991; Hornig 1995), and especially junior faculty. Using a Macalester College-Pomona College-Swarthmore College sponsored program at the University of Cape Town as a case study, this article outlines how study abroad opportunities may be leveraged in support of the research imperatives of junior faculty, as a mechanism for encouraging student-faculty research collaborations, as a vehicle for exploring collaboration with non-US faculty, and (most obviously) a joyful opportunity for sharing one's place-based knowledge.

Background

“Globalization and the Natural Environment: South Africa” is a study abroad program jointly administered by Macalester, Swarthmore and Pomona Colleges. After a long period of development, the program was launched in January of 2004. As of June, 2008, this semester-long program had completed its fifth full year of operation. Administration and staffing of the program rotates between the three colleges. The program is run on-site by a director from the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Enrollment in the program is kept deliberately small, capped at 12 U.S. students and two South African students. In all, nearly 60 students have participated in the program since its inception.

The program begins in early January with a six-week core seminar which is co-taught by an American and a South African professor. The core seminar runs every day and tackles the major themes of the program, i.e., globalization and the natural environment. The seminar is designed to be rigorous with equal doses of social and physical sciences. While the core seminar must address the core themes of the program, each instructor is free to modify the syllabus to reflect their research and teaching interests. In addition to classroom-based lecture and discussion components, the core seminar is heavy on field trips, which vary in length from single to multi-day excursions. After the core seminar is completed, students take two courses at UCT during the regular semester that runs from mid-February to mid-June. In addition to these two courses, students undertake an independent research project which is supervised by a faculty member at UCT with relevant research interests. During the semester, students continue to meet regularly for social events, occasional guest lectures, short trips, and several times at the end of the semester to present the findings of their independent research projects. In sum, this is a hybrid study abroad program that includes a mix of local courses, a specially-designed and administered core seminar, and an independent research component.

I joined discussions about the design and implementation of this program when I started working at Macalester in the fall of 2002 (and these are discussions which had started long before I arrived at the college). I also participated in an annual meeting of key program stakeholders every year since the program began running in 2004. My most direct involvement occurred in 2006 and 2007 when I was the U.S. professor co-teaching the core-seminar with a South African colleague. I participated in this program as an assistant professor, before formally receiving tenure (February, 2007).

Research Imperatives of Junior Faculty

Faculty with international research agendas at the top liberal arts colleges face a challenging mix of opportunities and expectations. Not only must they maintain a high level of scholarly productivity and be good teachers, but increasingly there is an expectation that they involve students in their research. Junior faculty may consider teaching in study abroad programs as an activity that must wait until after tenure is obtained (Peterson 2006). I thought differently and believed that study abroad could help me achieve some of the aforementioned expectations.

Shortly after I arrived at Macalester in the fall of 2002, and learned of the South Africa study abroad program, I decided to finish research projects in Mali and begin to explore new research opportunities in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. This was a practical decision that could help me meet the multiple expectations of junior faculty. One expectation is that by the time of tenure decisions, junior faculty will have finished publishing from their dissertation and started a new research project. As such, I knew that I needed to start a new phase of field work on a new research topic in enough time to be producing publications by the time of my tenure decision. Also, at a college keen for its faculty to involve students in their own research, the South Africa study abroad program could be a vehicle (both for peaking student interest and developing their historical and cross-cultural understanding) for preparing students to become involved in my own research projects.

I made my first exploratory research trip to the Western Cape in June of 2004. This was at the end of the first year of the program, giving me the opportunity to meet with several students and faculty involved with the course. The South African Director of the program, based in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science at UCT introduced me to various contacts showed me around different areas of the Western Cape. and was a good sounding board for my ideas. After this trip, I came away with enough information to write various research funding proposals. I would eventually receive funding from the National Science Foundation, the Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad Program, and the American Geographical Society for a project examining land reform and farm worker knowledge in the Western Cape. I spent June to August 2005 in the Western Cape doing fieldwork accompanied by my family. I returned in January 2006, July 2006, January 2007 and March 2008 for follow-up research. During January 2006 and January 2007, I also taught the core seminar of the study abroad program.

The study abroad program allowed me to work simultaneously towards multiple goals. It brought service, teaching and research together in a way

that was mutually reinforcing, making it difficult to separate one task from the other. My teaching in South Africa fed into my research in two different ways. On a practical level, my teaching responsibilities with the program allowed opportunities on the weekends and in the afternoons to pursue field-work. More importantly, preparation for my lectures forced me to read more broadly about South Africa, reading which often found its way back into my own research and writing.

Student-Faculty Research Collaborations

As mentioned previously, one of the major reasons I sought to undertake research where my college had a study abroad program was that I believed the program could provide the basic skills to my students (in terms of cultural and historical understanding) that they would need to engage in collaborative research. Involving undergraduate students in one's own research is particularly challenging for international scholars, and in previous experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer and then development professional in Mali, I had seen Americans struggle to cope with a very different culture. These struggles often involved cross-cultural misunderstandings, illness and depression. For any student attempting research in a different culture, I knew that it was important for them to have the necessary time to learn about the history and culture of the place before they considered becoming involved in a research project. While this certainly can be done alone or under a faculty member's supervision, the context of a study abroad program provides the necessary infrastructure for acculturation.

An added impetus for student-faculty collaboration was the independent research component of the program's curriculum. In the two years that I was directly involved with the program, four students worked on themes related to my research for their independent projects. Two students worked in a rural 'coloured' community that was one of my research sites, a place we had visited on a field trip during the core seminar. One of these students examined small-hold crop farmers and the other examined small-scale animal herders. A third student became interested in land reform and, as a consequence, I arranged for her to study a land reform project that I knew could benefit from further study. This particular student visited this project, but this site was not part of a regularly scheduled field trip. The fourth student studied the involvement of women in the land reform process and was able to interview a list of key informants in government, academia and the NGO sector that I had met through the course of my own research. Of these four students, three used their study abroad-based research for honors theses.

My research in the area enabled me to provide students with good contacts, ideas and feedback. For the two students directly under my supervision for their honors projects, their work became an important component of my larger project. When I returned to South Africa in March of 2008 to share research findings with government and university partners, their work was a component of my presentations. Furthermore, government field staff who had worked with my students had very positive experiences and were thus open to the idea of students working in the area in the future (Williams, 2007; Grinde 2008; Palchick 2008).

Other faculty members involved with this study abroad program have had students collaborate with them on research projects. In the initial year of the program a group of students worked on a project conceived by the South African program director. One of the students in this project went on to co-publish an article with this faculty member (Meadows, Rahlao and Dietrich 2007).

This highlights an example of local faculty getting more than just financial rewards from involvement in a study abroad program. The University of Cape Town is one of the best universities in Africa and its faculty face rigorous benchmarks in terms of research and publication. In fact, South African scholars are rated by, and their scholarly output often has a direct bearing on, the amount of research funding they receive (Mather 2007). Because of this system of incentives, there is very little motivation for a top scholar at UCT to become directly involved in a study abroad program. The incentives, however, begin to change if the quality of the students is high and possibilities exist for collaboration that could enhance the scholarly output of the South African faculty member. As the one publication so far suggests, this is slowly beginning to happen with our program.

Collaboration with Non-U.S. Faculty

One clearly comes into contact with faculty based at universities outside of the U.S. in the course of attending academic meetings or carrying out fieldwork in other countries. My experience, however, is that much of this contact comes in the form of information exchange. I have had these exchanges develop further, but many times one simply never gets to know the person well enough to consider collaboration. Becoming acquainted with faculty at another university through study abroad tends to be a more intense form of interaction. One may plan the program together, co-teach with the person in the same classroom, or go on field trips together. Working in an academic department also gives one the opportunity to meet other faculty who are based there. Whether or not these contacts develop into collaborative research or

writing will depend on your level of shared interests, personal compatibility and other factors. I was lucky in that the department running our program and I share the same discipline, perhaps increasing the likelihood of collaboration. I have been fortunate in that one of the faculty members I met during the study abroad program will now be collaborating with me on a book project.

Sharing of Place-Based Knowledge

If one has the privilege of leading a study abroad program in a place where one has conducted research, clearly one of the greatest pleasures as an instructor is being able to share one's knowledge of that area with your students. While there has been a lot of attention in the academy to the notion of integrating teaching and scholarship (Healey 2005; Robertson 2007), teaching a study abroad program in one's region of research clearly makes good on this promise.

I would never have been nearly as effective an instructor on my study abroad program had I not previously undertaken research in the region. This is not to say that I taught solely on topics related to my research. While I did some of this, I also taught on a variety of other themes. The point is that my general understanding of the area and the contacts I had established during my research were immensely useful when it came time to design the syllabus for the core seminar. While I did not always achieve this, my ideal teaching sequence was to lecture on the topic, facilitate a student-led discussion based on a variety of articles on the theme, and then to take a field excursion where we actually went out and saw what we were talking about. (see Appendix 1 for an excerpt from the core seminar depicting two such sequences.) Subsequent course evaluations revealed that students found this to be the ideal sequence as well.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This article is largely a review of my own involvement in a study abroad program as a junior faculty member. Given the variety of pressures faced by junior faculty at top tier liberal arts colleges, proper planning and the strategic choice of a study abroad program can lead to a win-win situation for faculty and students. Students win because they are taught by faculty who have a deep understanding of the area. U.S.-based faculty win because their research can be enhanced; they may be able to involve students in their research projects; there are often opportunities to develop connections with international faculty; and the level of satisfaction derived from teaching is very high. Faculty at the host university may also derive many of the same benefits as US-based faculty.

Study abroad administrators and faculty deans would be wise to consider the potential synergies that exist for faculty and study abroad. In the face of little to no action, most junior faculty will likely continue to steer clear of study abroad. However, administrative recognition of the particular circumstances faced by junior faculty will help bring these faculty to study abroad. Furthermore, deans and study abroad administrators should consider adopting policies and programs that would encourage junior faculty involvement in study abroad programs. These policies might include: providing small amounts of funding for faculty and student research done within the context of study abroad programs; consideration of involvement with study abroad programs as a positive contribution when reviewing a faculty member's tenure portfolio; support of publications based on faculty-student collaborative research which evolves out of study abroad programming; and greater recognition that junior faculty who become involved with study abroad programs may have different needs than more senior faculty (such as time for research and writing, responsibilities related to young children, etc.). Policies along these lines would go a long way towards encouraging junior faculty to become more involved in study abroad programming.

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Notes

¹In the South African context, coloured is not a derogatory term as it is in the United States. The term refers to a mixed race group that has an identity separate from other black ethnic groups, such as Xhosa or Zulu.

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Appendix 1
Lecture, Discussion Field Trip Sequence
from Core Course Syllabus (2007)

15 Jan (Mon)

Lecture on Globalization and Agriculture in the Western Cape (9-10:30 pm)

Discussion 4: Agriculture in the Western and Eastern Cape (10:45-12:15 pm)

Scully, P. 1992. "Liquor and Labor in the Western Cape, 1870-1900." In: Crush, J. and C. Ambler (eds). *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press. Pp. 56-77.

Meadows, M.E. 2003. "Soil erosion in the Swartland, Western Cape Province, South Africa: implications of past and present policy and practice." *Environmental Science & Policy*. 6: 17-28.

Mather, C. and S. Greenberg. 2003. "Market Liberalisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the Restructuring of Citrus Exports after 'Deregulation.'" *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 29(2): 393-412.

Bundy, C. 1979. *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. (preface and introduction)

16 Jan (Tuesday)

Day field trip to visit commercial fruit farm near Grabouw/Elgin and Genadendal to visit smallhold farmers.

17 Jan (Wednesday)

Lecture on Environmental Justice, Emerging Farmers and Land Reform in the Western Cape (9-10:30am)

Discussion 5: Land Reform in the Western Cape (10:345-12:15)
Mather, C. 2002. "The Changing Face of Land Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Geography*. 87(4): 345-354.

Zimmerman, F.J. 2000. "Barriers to Participation of the Poor in South Africa's Land Redistribution." *World Development*. 28(8): 1439-1460.

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Moseley, W.G. 2006. "Post-Apartheid Vineyards: Land and Economic Justice in South Africa's Wine Country." Dollars & Sense. Jan/Feb issue.

Hart, G. 2002. *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 323-325 (Op-ed from July 8, 2001 Sunday Independent).

18 Jan (Thursday)

Day (field) trip to Stellenbosch-Paarl to visit one regular vineyards and two worker co-owned vineyards