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Library Support for Study Abroad

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Research universities have long supported study abroad programs of varying nature, including short-term study tours and service learning experiences, as well as semester- and year-long academic programs. For this survey, “study abroad program” was broadly defined as a short-term, formal, credit-bearing educational program taking place outside of the country of the home institution. As society becomes more globally focused, and industry requires workers who are prepared to work in a multinational environment, these programs are becoming more critical to America’s competitiveness.

Providing research materials and library services targeted to participants in these programs is a particular challenge. This survey was designed to explore how ARL member libraries are responding to the needs of faculty and student participants in various types of study abroad programs. It explored which library services and resources are provided to participants, how library support is staffed and administered, whether collections are physical or online, and how services are delivered.

The survey was distributed to the 123 ARL member libraries in May 2008. Fifty-three libraries completed the survey by the deadline of June 27 for a 43% response rate. Forty-four of the respondents (83%) reported that their university sponsors study abroad programs. The number of programs per institution ranges from as few as two to as many as 1200, with an average of 141 and a median of 50. At 26 institutions, study abroad programs receive library support, at

12 they do not. Four respondents did not supply this data, though one explained, “The programs don’t receive library support but the individual students are supported.” The 12 respondents from libraries that do not support study abroad programs submitted the survey at this point.

Description of Study Abroad Program

The remaining 32 respondents were asked to select one representative program and describe its location, subjects offered, duration, and number of students and faculty. Some described the overall program. Not surprisingly, programs are located around the world and cover a full range of disciplines. They vary in length from a few weeks to a semester to a year or more. The number of students ranges from a handful to over a thousand. The number of faculty is proportional to the number of students and subjects offered, with as few as one and as many as 68 faculty spread across a number of locations.

Half of the programs are at a campus that is administered by a partner host institution. Only three are at a campus that is administered by the home institution. Others are in rented spaces, field stations or, in the case of the Semester at Sea, on a ship.

Library Support Provided to Study Abroad Program

All of the responding libraries report that students and faculty have remote access to online resources through the home institution in North America. Twenty-three (74%) report that employees at the home

institution in North America provide library services remotely. Slightly fewer than half also rely on a host partner for access to physical and online resources and staff to provide services. Only nine home institutions provide collections at the study abroad site and only five of those have staff who provide services. In open-ended comments, several respondents reiterated that students and faculty with a valid ID and an Internet connection have access to all the same online resources and services wherever they are located.

Administration of Library Support for Study Abroad Program

In all but one case, the library at the home institution administers library support for students and faculty in study abroad programs. In the other case, the host institution administers support. In a third of the programs, administration is shared between the home and host libraries. In a few cases, the home library partners with a study abroad or distance education office or an academic department at the home institution.

About a third of the programs have a single individual who has administrative responsibility for library support services. Half of these individuals have a title that includes some variation of distance education. Others are reference or area studies librarians, or manage public or access services or a branch library.

The other two-thirds of the respondents described library support for study abroad along the lines of the following: "Services to all students at a distance are built into existing services: ILL, e-reference, and access to online resources."

Funding of Library Support for Study Abroad Program

A majority of respondents (22 or 71%) report that funding for these library services comes from the home library's general, acquisitions, and/or personnel budgets. Or as one respondent commented, "This work is absorbed into regular collections and services." A few libraries also receive some funds from the home or host institution or student fees. Only

two libraries report that they receive funds from a separate institutional budget for the study abroad program.

Study Abroad Program Library

If employees of the home institution provide library services and access to library resources in a physical location at the study abroad site, respondents were asked to answer questions about the collections, equipment, and staff in that facility. There were five responses.

Collections

These five collections include books, journals, AV materials, maps, and reference works. The number of items ranges from just over 100 to 12,000. All five respondents report that the collection is catalogued and searchable as a discreet collection, though only three say the materials are included and searchable in the home library OPAC. Circulation policies are similar to the home library's.

Equipment and Staffing

All of the libraries provide desktop computers and printers. Since most students bring their own laptops, two provide wireless Internet access and only one has a loaner laptop. Four have photocopiers but only two have scanners. Two provide video equipment. Three of the libraries are staffed by one non-librarian professional, two of whom work full-time. A fourth has one librarian and two additional support staff. The fifth is staffed by two librarians and a few student assistants.

Library Services for the Study Abroad Program

In addition to the online resources that are available to all students and faculty who have a valid ID and Internet connection, study abroad participants also receive a range of library services. All but one of the 30 responding libraries offer reference service; the other only offers document delivery. Eleven libraries offer a combination of reference, ILL and/or document delivery, and instruction. Ten others offer at least reference and ILL or document delivery.

Reference and instruction services are largely delivered by library staff at the home library via e-mail, chat/instant messaging, or phone. Eleven respondents report they are delivering resource guides and tutorials online using such tools as Libguides, Camtasia, Captivate, and Searchpath. Eight communicate with students, whether studying abroad or not, by means of blogs, wikis, and Facebook.

All but two of the home libraries deliver electronic materials directly to study abroad students and faculty; half of the 28 respondents will also deliver hard copy directly to students and faculty. A few send materials to the onsite library instead.

Challenges of Library Support for Study Abroad Programs

Twenty-four respondents described one or more challenges the library faces in providing support for study abroad programs. Several categories emerged, as represented by the comments below.

ILL/DD: “Costs and security of delivering hard copy library materials. Institutional/policy constraints to providing document delivery to students.”

Acquisitions: “Materials ordered by the home institution are shipped directly to the study abroad location. It can be difficult to verify receipt of materials for which we are invoiced.”

Awareness: “We suspect that many Study Abroad students are unaware that they are eligible to continue receiving full library services while they are away.”

Time zones: “Time differential in providing reference services such as IM/Chat which is not provided at the home institution on a 24/7 basis.”

Cooperation: “Engaging faculty in a serious cooperative effort geared towards the selection and provision of library resources.”

Internet access: “While we assert that study abroad participants have the same access to e-library collections and services that our local users enjoy (as long as they authenticate via a proxy server), the reality may be that hardware, software, and network/bandwidth issues abroad may severely limit that access, or make it impracticable.”

Number of programs: “It’s difficult to keep up with the ever-increasing number and variety of study abroad opportunities on this campus, therefore difficult to know how well we’re meeting needs.”

Changes Over Time

The survey asked whether the number of study abroad programs—and the number that receive library support—had increased, decreased, or stayed about the same in the previous five years. The majority (20 of 28 or 71%) report that both the number of programs and the number that receive library support increased. Seven report that those numbers have stayed about the same. Only one reports they have decreased. Eighteen respondents anticipate that the number of study abroad programs will increase in the coming five years and most will increase library support. Eight libraries expect that the number of programs and library support will stay about the same in the near future.

Conclusion

A comment from one survey respondent summarizes the current level of library support for study abroad students and faculty at ARL member institutions, “We do not have any particular initiatives aimed at study abroad participants. We have a large number of distance students (remote users) to begin with and we provide the same level of support for study abroad students as we do for distance students. At this point we are not sure that the students heading off to study abroad programs know that the services we have for distance users apply to them. Anecdotally, we do get feedback every semester from students who go abroad and tell us that their access to our library’s databases and full-text journals was a lifesaver.”

According to the Institute of International Education’s most recent data, over 223,000 US students annually study abroad for academic credit. While this is a small percent of the total student population, IIE’s annual survey of student mobility shows steady growth since 1985 and there are widespread calls to double, triple or even quadruple the number of participants in the coming decade.

Congress is pushing forward with the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act that establishes the recommendations put forth by the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. This legislation creates a national program that will establish study abroad as the norm, not the exception, for undergraduate students. It would use

leveraged grants to increase the number of American students who study abroad to one million annually within a decade.

As the number of study abroad participants grows, ARL Member libraries will be well positioned to serve these and other remotely located students through their increasingly digital libraries.