

Crisis Management in Study Abroad: An Instructor Steps in as Director

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This case is based on actual events which occurred during the summer of 2003. The case describes a study abroad program at a small liberal arts college in the deep south. The Director of the program and her husband both teach in the program, along with another faculty member. The Director's husband becomes ill and the faculty member must face the possibility that the Director and her husband will depart for the U.S., leaving the remaining faculty member to cope with finding at least one replacement teacher as well as directing the program. College priorities are to first assure students' safety and then to protect the academic integrity of the program. The broad issue of crisis management provides a background for the case analyst to consider specific issues in the areas of academic programs, logistics, safety, and personnel components.

Introduction

In January, 2003, I returned to my college teaching job filled with new ideas for ways to improve my classes and research. I was teaching four 3-hour classes and things were going well. By midterm I was convinced that this was to be the best semester of my academic career. I had finally reached the point where my teaching experience was paying dividends. Just two months before the semester began, the Director of Study Abroad had called with an interesting proposition. A colleague who was scheduled to teach in the European study abroad program in June and July had become ill. I was asked to take over her teaching duties which would include travel to Italy, Switzerland, and Great Britain. I had taught in England several times but not elsewhere overseas. The Study Abroad Director expressed confidence in my abilities, I enjoyed teaching International Business, and now I could expand my exposure to other cultures which should strengthen my classes and enrich my life. What I couldn't know was how quickly or how radically my role in study abroad could change: In the midst of the venture, I was destined to go from instructor to site director overnight!

Background

MC is a private liberal arts college located in the deep south. The Study Abroad Program was established in the 1960s and was one of the most well-known and respected programs at the college. Study Abroad is especially important for students who attend small colleges as it is a way for them to broaden their studies while staying on track for graduation. The current director of Study Abroad has been directing the program for 16 years and she inherited a thriving program which she has improved over the years. Her many years of taking students abroad make her extremely well-informed and her extensive personal travels give her insight that many program directors don't have. She has developed many new programs and has sought out opportunities for students at other schools that meet the high standards set by the Study Abroad office. The flagship international program is a summer-long program based in Italy, Switzerland, and Great Britain.

One of the hallmarks of all MC programs is the emphasis on safety and pre-program education. Each study abroad program is reviewed and approved by the Study Abroad Committee prior to recruiting students. The package which must be submitted to the Study Abroad Committee includes information about the academic requirements of the program, logistical information, country information, foreign contact information, and even a plan for emergency evacuation of students. The priorities of any MC program are first and foremost, student safety, and secondly, preservation of the academic integrity of the students' program. Student and new faculty orientation sessions include information on travel logistics, geography, safety and health, country culture, cultural opportunities and many other topics. There are usually four or five orientation sessions, each of which is three hours long. Parents or spouses of students are welcome at these sessions and often attend.

The MC summer program recruits students from all classes, but especially targets students who will be completing their sophomore or junior year. These students are generally more focused and understand the importance of study abroad to their liberal arts education as well as the connection between study abroad and their selected majors. Students who have completed their freshman year may be accepted in limited circumstances.

The entire MC summer program lasts approximately 12 weeks, the first six weeks the program is based in Italy and Switzerland, while the last 6 weeks of the program is based in London and northern England and Scotland. The summer program is priced at about the same cost as a regular semester and a student who elects to take both segments of the program would earn 12 academic credits. Financial aid is available to students in much the same manner as it is for the fall and spring semes-

ters. The culture of the College is very supportive of Study Abroad, but recruiting students has become increasingly difficult because of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and because the economy in the southeast has slowed down in the past year. In spite of recruiting challenges, the program for the summer of 2003 included many talented and eager students.

Summer 2003 Program

Three classes are taught in each program segment and students take two of the three courses. In each segment of the program students take one required course and one course selected by them. The required course in the first segment is IDS 300: Arts, Artifacts, and Culture—the Continent and the second segment required course is IDS 301: Arts, Artifacts, & Culture—the U.K. The two additional courses are different each summer and students must choose one of these courses. Courses offered this year in Italy/Switzerland were: Eng 944 - Italy in Literature, and HIS 944: Warfare in Modern European History. Courses offered this year in England were: POL 360 British Parliamentary Government, and BUS 310: International Business. Students are not permitted to take fewer than two courses because it is important to the College that the program is viewed as academically rigorous, and not as a vacation in which students can earn college credits. Courses are designed in such a way that the student has the same classroom time as she would in a course taught on the regular campus. Field trips and cultural activities are included in the required courses and may be part of the elective courses if the faculty member chooses. As an example, students in International Business visited businesses involved in protecting intellectual property rights, marketing computer software, and a brewery.

Students can choose to take the first segment of the program, the last segment of the program, or both parts of the program, thus earning either six or twelve academic hours. Students are encouraged to study abroad for the entire summer program if it is feasible for them to do so. The travel breaks during and between the programs provide important learning experiences and students who commit to the program for the entire summer are able to more fully appreciate the joys and problems associated with living and working in an unfamiliar cultural environment.

The Director and her husband are with the program for the entire summer, while additional faculty teach in either Italy/Switzerland or in England. Teaching in the Study Abroad program is viewed as a “plum” for faculty who are invited to participate and faculty apply to the Director of Study Abroad for the opportunity to teach. The application includes information about the proposed course’s target audience, prerequisites, and a detailed explanation of ways in which the course would be adapted to teach it in an international environment. Faculty are typically chosen two years in

advance and are therefore able to make arrangements in advance for field trips and guest speakers. Every attempt is made to integrate available resources unique to the location into the classes. For example, art courses would use resources at local museums, theatre courses would target local productions, and business classes would tour local businesses.

Approximately 12 years ago the Director of Study Abroad married an Englishman who was a retired Clerk from the British House of Commons. Because of his education, work experience, contacts, and knowledge, he was able to design a "British Parliament" course which is taught every summer in the portion of the program based in London. The course is designed to include extensive meetings with Members of Parliament, a personal tour through Parliament, and several sessions in which the students observe the activities in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords. In the summer of 2003, the students were scheduled to attend a meeting in which Prime Minister Tony Blair was interviewed by the chairs of the Select Committees of Parliament. This course has been received enthusiastically by the students and would be difficult for another professor to teach.

The students who were participating in the second segment of the program traveled with me to London on June 28, 2003. We arrived in London and were joined by the full-program students who had been studying with the MC program in Italy/Switzerland. The students who had made their way from the continent were now seasoned travelers and eager to share their experiences and expertise with the novice travelers who had arrived with me. Initially there was a bit of resentment at the superior attitude of the full-program students, but this waned and by the end of the first week, all students were working together.

The three courses began as scheduled and students were involved in coursework as well as the cultural requirements of the "Arts, Artifacts, and Culture" class. By the end of the first week, the students were fully engaged in their studies and immersed in the culture of the United Kingdom. They were at local libraries doing research for their classes, visiting museums, attending plays, and learning to navigate London's excellent transportation system.

The Problem

On Friday evening, after a rewarding but very busy week, I was preparing for sleep when the Director of Study Abroad came to my room. She was visibly shaken and said that they were leaving for the hospital. Her husband had fallen ill and was experiencing symptoms which might be related to a heart attack. She recognized

that she was under a great deal of stress and needed assistance. The first priority was to obtain medical attention for her husband who had suddenly become ill and been taken to the hospital, next priorities were student welfare and preservation of the academic integrity of the program. Her parting words to me were, "Think about how we can preserve the academic integrity of the program if I have to take my husband back to the United States for medical treatment. Can you step in and deal with travel arrangements and logistics as well as supervise the 'Arts, Artifacts and Culture' class? Who can we get to teach the 'British Parliament' class? I should know more by tomorrow morning. Please prepare a plan and we'll evaluate it when I return."

My quiet evening had taken an unexpected twist. In my International Business class I was teaching the value of flexibility, adaptability, and the importance of learning crisis management. Now was my opportunity to "Walk the Talk."

Crisis management takes on an entirely different meaning when the problems encountered are compounded by being thousands of miles away from most resources and not knowing how to navigate unfamiliar systems. While I had the advantage of speaking the local language, it was clear that my English was not always the language of England. We had in place a plan for evacuation of students if it became necessary to do so because of medical or safety reasons. The same plan could work for a faculty member, but we had the additional problem that we would lose two faculty members if the Director had to take her spouse to the U.S. for medical treatment.

The medical well-being of my colleague was being taken care of by his wife and doctors, so I decided to focus my attention on making certain that students were (and felt) safe and that the academic integrity of their program was preserved. It was obvious that I couldn't teach three classes. But could I expect to successfully teach my own class as well as the Arts, Artifacts, and Culture class and also assume the duties of directing the program? Where should I look for a teacher for the British Parliament class—in the U.K., or back in the U.S.?

It also occurred to me that if I was to assume the duties of directing the program, there were a lot of things I hadn't been trained to do. The responsibility to my students, the College, and my colleagues was overwhelming. Where could I turn for help? What resources were available? How much should I share with the students? How would I ever survive the summer?

Student Guidance

1. What steps should be taken in a crisis situation?
2. What are the problems and in what order should they be approached?
3. What is your advice to the faculty member who would remain in Great Britain?
4. Identify resources available to the faculty member.

Sources

There are a number of excellent articles and websites available. Those that follow are a representative sample. Appendix B is an excerpt from the Interorganizational Task Force on Health and Safety in Study Abroad's publication on safety.

"Colleges Intensity Protection of Study Abroad and International Students," AScribe Newswire, February 24, 2003.

Hoye, William P., "Safety for Americans Abroad," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 4, 2003,
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weeklu/v49i30/30b01201.htm>

Institution for International Education of Students (IES) website,
www.iesabroad.org/safety.htm

McMurtrie, Beth, "SARS Teaches Crisis-Management Lessons to Universities," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 18, 2003,
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekl/v49/i45/45a03201.htm>

NyBlom, Steven E., et al, "Understanding Crisis Management," *Professional Safety*, March 2003, Vol 48, Iss 3, p. 18.

Ueda, Takahiko, "Student Exchange Groups Rethink Safety," *Japan Times*, Nov 30-Dec 6, 1992, Vol 32, Iss 48, p 17.

USC website, <http://www.usc.edu/glovaled/safeti/>

U.S. State Department's advisories, <http://travel.state.gov>

APPENDIX A

Information about summer program in Italy, Switzerland, and Great Britain

Location:

The program begins with four weeks in Sansepolcro, Italy, a small town located in the beautiful Tiber Valley about halfway between Florence and Rome. From Italy, the group travels to Switzerland, first to Gimmelwald where the Swiss Alps will dazzle you, and Walter Mittler, our host, will charm you. We then settle for the remainder of our stay in Lugano, a lovely town in the Ticine, the Italian region of Switzerland.

During the second half of the program, the group will travel to England beginning in London, in beautiful Kensington Square. After four weeks in London, the group will head north to Edinburgh, Scotland, spending nights en route in York and Durham. After a little over a week in Edinburgh we will depart for the English Lake District via Hadrian's Wall.

Curriculum:

NOTE: Students are required to take a minimum of 6 credit hours, and three of those must include IDS 301:Arts, Artifacts, and Culture.

Course Offerings for the Italy/Switzerland Half:

IDS 300: Arts, Artifacts, and Culture—the Continent

An introduction to the culture and the social life of the peoples of continental Europe based upon a study of the arts and artifacts produced by those peoples. We will place special emphasis on Italy and Switzerland. We will define our terms broadly, looking at literary, visual, and musical arts as well as dance, architecture of both private and public spaces, and artifacts of all sorts. We will be interested in folk culture as well as high culture, ancient times as well as modern, traditional modes as well as avant garde, secular expressions as well as religious, utilitarian expressions as well as purely ornamental, communal as well as personal. Required of all students. Level of work, 300-400. Credit, 3 hours.

ENG 944: Italy in Literature

Italy has long fascinated British and American writers. This course will look at the perspectives of Italy emerging from visiting writers such as Byron, the Brownings, Hemingway, Hershey, James, Mortimer, M. McCarthy, Ondaatje, E. Spencer, Wharton, Wilbur, and others. The course will include a mix of genres: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, and film. Level, 300. Credit, 3 hours. Literature elective.

HIS 944: Warfare in Modern European History

This course will examine the powerful and enduring influence of warfare in Modern European history. Students will explore the nature of war in the broadest sense, addressing its military, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects, and paying particular attention to the role of warfare in European social transformation and development. Students will examine such specific issues as the nature of modern combat, the destructive role of technology, the influence of popular nationalism and militarism, values and attitudes regarding violence, conceptions of gender, the experience of the home front, and the practice of ethnic discrimination and genocide. A combination of lecture, discussion, and media will be used. Level, 300. Credit, 3 hours. History elective.

Course Offerings from the U.K. half

BUS 310: International Business

A study of the policies, institutions, and practices of international business and trade, with emphasis on the global integration of the United States' economy, international commercial and financial practices; international marketing and management techniques; differences in the cultural environment and customary business methods; and the role of multinational corporations. Prerequisites: BUS 346, BUS 366 and ECO 210. Level, 300-400. Credit, 3 hours

IDS 301: Arts, Artifacts, & Culture—the U.K.

An introduction to the culture and the social mores of the peoples of the United Kingdom based on a study of their arts and artifacts. Principal assignment—in addition to readings—is an in-depth travel journal of what students see and learn in numerous galleries, museums, theaters, concert halls; and other venues in England. Required of all students. Level of work, 300-400. Credit, 3 hours. Fine Arts or Social Science Elective.

POL 360 British Parliamentary Government

An introduction to British parliamentary government with an emphasis on contemporary political issues confronting Europe. Readings in texts as well as lectures will be supplemented by regular visits to Westminster where students will attend sessions and meet with MPs. LEVEL, 300-400. CREDIT, 3 hours. Political science elective.

APPENDIX B

The Interorganizational Task Force on Health and Safety in Study Abroad urged colleges to:

- Conduct periodic assessments of health-and-safety conditions for the program, and develop and maintain emergency-preparedness process and a crisis-response plan.
- Provide orientation to participants before the program and as needed on site. The orientation should include information on safety, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural, and religious conditions in the host country, dealing with potential health-and-safety risks and appropriate emergency-response measures.
- Communicate the college's codes of conduct and the consequences of non-compliance to participants. Take appropriate action when aware that participants are in violation
- Provide information for participants and their parents, guardians, or families regarding when and where the sponsor's responsibility ends, and the range of aspects of participants' overseas experiences that are beyond the sponsor's control. In particular, program sponsors generally:
 - Cannot guarantee or assure the safety of participants or eliminate all risks from the study-abroad environments.
 - Cannot monitor or control all of the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants.
 - Cannot prevent participants from engaging in illegal, dangerous, or unwise activities.
 - Cannot assure that U.S. standards of due process apply in overseas legal proceedings or provide or pay for legal representation for participants.
 - Cannot assume responsibility for the actions of persons not employed or otherwise engaged by the program sponsor, for events that are not part of the program or that are beyond the control of the sponsor and its subcontractors, or for situations that may arise because a participant fails to disclose pertinent information.
 - Cannot assure that home-country cultural values and norms will apply in the host country.

Interorganizational Task Force on Safety and Responsibility in Study Abroad, <http://www.secussa.nafsa.org/safetyabroad/>