

An Overview of Study Abroad Programs

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American students, and students of other nationalities as well, have been coming to India since 1947 to learn about Indian culture, history, and society. These have usually been post-graduate students—graduate students, as we would call them in the US—whose relationships with host universities in India have been very diverse. These people, although they are students at their home universities overseas, enter India on visas to carry out research, and not to be students. For the most part, Indian universities, as institutions, have not known how to deal with them, since they have not been enrolled in degree programs. Although the terminology of “affiliation,” without any defined relationship, has been confusing, Indian faculty advisors of foreign postgraduate research students have usually been able to provide the necessary academic guidance.

Now, however, India is looking at an entirely different, and much larger, group of students from overseas, the majority of them Americans. These are undergraduates who want to study in India for a period of time in order to add knowledge of Indian history, culture, and society to the repertoire provided by American liberal education. Undergraduate liberal education in the US is based on an old ideal about what every educated person should know. Indian educators understand this ideal just as well as Americans, although liberal education has certainly not become a leading trend in this country. Indian undergraduate education is still mostly specialized, and aimed at providing knowledge that is not necessarily shared by all educated people.

Indian professors are quite capable of teaching liberal arts courses. Thousands of them do so in American universities, deploying the specialties they cultivated in Indian universities to serve the broader aim of general education, which Americans often regard as the best preparation for an uncertain future in an increasingly global society. However, although the professors are well able to do so, Indian universities are not yet well prepared to deal with students who are not seeking degrees in established courses. As a consequence, most American study abroad programs in India are run by a home institution in the US, often with professors from the home institution doing much of the teaching. Indian universities are missing opportunities to make a significant contribution to world understanding and to the understanding of India in the rest of the world.

Adapting themselves to offer courses of shorter duration that are not meant to lead to Indian degrees can create many valuable opportunities for Indian universities. Foreign undergraduate visitors will contribute immediately to a more international environment on Indian campuses. The opportunity to have foreign fellow students will be enriching for both hosts and guests. At the same time, Indian universities will have an unprecedented opportunity to serve their own institutional priorities in ways that cannot be met from standard government sources. A great deal of experience tells us that students who learn about India at first hand, develop personal relationships with faculty and fellow students that lead to further exchanges and collaboration, in addition to lasting friendships.

My aim here is to review some of the features of American undergraduate education that are pertinent to developing study abroad programs, to review some of the differences among educational institutions in the US that bear on establishing cooperative relations, and to discuss some of the needs and expectations that American students bring with them that would not ordinarily be encountered in India.

American Undergraduate Education

A. The Institutions. There is enormous diversity in American higher education, as there is in India. There are colleges that offer only undergraduate degrees, located in remote rural communities, which, unlike many Indian of their Indian counterparts, are not affiliated with some reputed university. The value of their degrees is attested by the American accreditation system, which is carried out by non-governmental regional associations of educational institutions that employ external review teams of experienced professors and administrators to assess each member institution at least every ten years. Fear of losing accreditation—and, with it, students and revenues—keeps even poorly endowed institutions attentive to educational standards. At the other extreme are private research universities that have endowments of a billion dollars or more. The names of these elite institutions are well known around the world; admission to them is sought by the best students at every level. Public institutions of higher education, which receive significant support from the governments of their respective states, are also major parts of the educational landscape, with enormous enrollments, often 20-30,000 students on a single campus, faculties consisting of thousands of Ph.D.s in every field of study. These are typically very fine institutions, overall, and public universities such as the University of Michigan or the University of California at Berkeley are sometimes difficult to distinguish from private research universities.

Students at the elite institutions usually do not live at home but on or near their campuses, which adds considerably to the cost of their education. However, the very best in higher education has increasingly come to be regarded as a form of investment by American families, and they often make considerable financial sacrifices to get excellent education for their children. In this respect, American and Indian families are quite similar. However, American students often take out loans for themselves, to be repaid over many years after graduation. The cost of American higher education today is staggering. The undiscounted price of an undergraduate degree from the University of Chicago, for a student who enrolls in 2004—tuition, room, board, books, and insurance— will be something more than \$40,000 a year for four years—about \$175,000 in total. This price is discounted for more than half of the undergraduates, but the average is still more than \$100,000, while the price of four years in a residential public university is about \$80,000. Middle class Americans think \$80,000 is a lot of money.

There are a lot of institutions in the US, both public and private, that do not have large endowments or generous contributions from their state's tax revenues. Such institutions finance their activities from year to year on tuition income. And even the richest American educational institutions are sensitive to annual income. They are self-managed not-for-profit corporations. They have to create budgets and balance revenues and expenditures to the satisfaction of knowledgeable outsiders who serve as Trustees. Most institutions have ambitious administrations that want to compete in a very competitive educational marketplace; they are looking for opportunities to improve the standing of their institutions. Study abroad programs attract good students. They have become so popular in leading American universities over the last decade that one is not competitive for very good students without a broad array of such programs.

B. Studying Abroad. A period of study away from the home institution is a venerable practice. However, like higher education itself, it began as a privilege of the children of the upper class. After World War II, some American universities began to offer opportunities for middle class students to study abroad, often for a full academic year, but almost always only in Western Europe or Latin America. Some institutions, like the University of Chicago, were wary of study abroad programs because they were regarded as "soft," not up to the standard of the courses we expect a student to count toward degree requirements. A student who took a course at another university—regardless of location—had to submit a copy of the syllabus, examinations, and papers for review and evaluation if it was to be considered for University of Chicago credit. The first study abroad opportunities that were made available to Chicago students for automatic credit were taught by Chicago faculty members overseas, or were taught by faculty of other elite

universities with which we agreed to cooperate. When I was the Dean of the College of the University of Chicago, between 1987 and 1992, Chicago had a program in Paris overseen by one of our Ph.D.s, a program in Seville taught by Chicago faculty members, and program in Bologna that is a Brown University project. During my tenure as Dean, Chicago started a program in Germany that was conceived and supervised by a Chicago faculty member. In the 12 years since then, 19 programs have been started; in 2004 there are 23 programs that are operated by the University of Chicago for its own students, and there are 12 others in which Chicago cooperates. There are several other institutions with demanding curricula, like Chicago's, that are now adding programs that permit their students to earn academic credit for a period of study at an overseas location.

India has an enormous contribution to make to these institutions. But before I talk about what India can add to an American liberal education, I should remind everyone of some of the characteristics of the American higher educational system. First, although it is irrelevant to our discussions today, it is important to recognize that millions of American undergraduates do not even consider studying overseas. Financing higher education for a majority of American families is not an easy matter. The students, their families, and their home institutions have to be persuaded that studying abroad will be rewarding in every sense of the term. These students have certain expectations about the standard of living they will enjoy even during their undergraduate years. While most students coming to India will be prepared for a different standard of living, there are some minimum expectations that must be met, and these are different from the expectations of Indian students. Second, the structure of the academic programs of American undergraduates is quite different from that of their Indian counterparts. Educational offerings designed to appeal to students from the US may seem odd in the context of Indian universities.

C. American undergraduate curricula. I do not want to exaggerate the devotion of American colleges and universities to liberal arts education. There is a great deal of lip service paid to this ideal. However, most institutions offer specialized degrees, especially in engineering and business, which make very feeble gestures toward educational breadth. Nevertheless, if you ask an American professor to describe a good undergraduate education, you will usually get an account that includes a significant commitment to the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, no matter what specific "major" or "concentration" the student chooses. We believe that students should know enough about history, literature, other cultures, economics, mathematics, chemistry, and biology to read with intelligence beyond their own field of specialization. (We also realize that American secondary schools don't do a very good job of

providing general education.) The typical method for assuring such breadth is by specifying "distribution requirements," stating how many courses or credits of humanities (i.e., arts), social sciences, and natural sciences a student must have to qualify for a bachelors' degree.

As America has become a more diverse society, with immigrants from more parts of the world than ever before—and increased consciousness of cultural difference as a valuable part of our nation—the demand for what is sometimes called "multicultural" education has grown. This growth has created new opportunities for faculty members with experience and specialties that deal with the world outside the US. Study abroad programs are a logical step for multicultural education, since a student can learn so much more and so much more effectively in the environment of another culture and society. Moreover, it did not take long for us to realize that Britain, France, and Germany are "other cultures" in only a limited sense. Much of what we think of as "American" comes from these countries. China and India, by contrast, are ancient civilizations with cultural traditions that are independent of the legacies from which American culture derives. These are authentically different from America, and offer students opportunities to begin to see the world from a truly contrasting perspective.

Although China was not a US colony, the relationship between China and the US from the nineteenth century up to the Communist Revolution in 1949 was close. The number of Chinese immigrants to the US over a century, and the visibility of Chinese communities in major American cities all meant that Chinese civilization has had a place of importance in the US that India has not had. World War II and the Korean War brought Japan and Korea into high visibility in the US as well. Thus, for many years, "Asian studies" in American universities meant East Asian Studies. I can well remember the beginning of my own studies of India in the 1950s: India was very poorly represented in American higher education. Needless to say, that situation has now changed, for which many of us in Indian studies in the US are greatly pleased. Today, India has assumed an importance for America that is well warranted and truly gratifying. I won't go into the reasons for this change, since they are quite well known. It is sufficient to say that India's newfound importance in the US, and the true significance of its ancient civilization, both contributed to its rapidly increasing interest in American higher education. What I hope to do next is identify some of the steps Indian universities might take that would assist them in serving this interest, and would, I believe, serve their own interests at the same time.

What Makes an India Studies Program?

The Academic Year. The academic year in most American colleges and universities begins in the period between the second half of August and the first half of September and ends in the period from the middle of May until the middle of June. A majority of institutions divide the year into two semesters of approximately 14 weeks each. A minority of colleges and universities maintain the "quarter system," with three quarters of ten weeks each. Both systems have a period of examinations at the end of each unit, semester or quarter. There are typically two long holidays during the academic year, the "Christmas-New Year vacation," beginning in late December and extending to some time in January, and "spring break," in April.

Almost all institutions offer an additional term during the period between the end of one academic year and the beginning of the next. This "Summer Term," usually ten or twelve weeks in duration, is often used to take advantage of educational opportunities, such as studying abroad, that are difficult to accommodate in the academic year because of required courses. In a few institutions, the month of January is available for special programs.

Study abroad programs occur in all of the terms of all of these calendars: summer, autumn, winter, spring, and January "intersession." One key to success in offering programs for American undergraduates in Indian institutions is adapting to the academic calendar and needs of the sending institution. The academic calendar in India has its own structure; the ability of an institution to remain open during what may be a holiday period in India, and to bring faculty members to teach at such times, may be critical in establishing valuable relationships.

Institutions that use the semester system generally expect students to take five classes, or fifteen credit hours, per semester, that is, each class normally meets three hours per week. Courses that require more than three hours per week, such as science classes with laboratories, contribute more than three hours of credit toward graduation requirements. Under the semester system, the summer term is sometimes compressed into twelve weeks by increasing class frequency to four times per week. Colleges and universities that employ the quarter system make have four terms of the same duration, usually ten weeks of classes followed by a week of examinations. Students taking a class in the month-long January term, where this scheme is offered, take only one course during the month, with daily class meetings. A very small group of undergraduate institutions divide all of their terms this way, with intensive month-long classes in single subjects. This is called the "block plan," and, although it is not a common feature of American higher education, it is very well suited to short study-abroad sessions.

B. Credit. American students who take study abroad programs expect to receive credit toward the degree requirements of their home institution. Thus, it is quite important to devise courses of study for them that fit the expectations of the students and their home institutions with respect to class hours and intensity. The work demanded may include examinations over the content of the course and original papers written outside of the class. American professors are accustomed to preparing their own individual syllabi for courses and offering them for students to take in a marketplace of courses. Creating and sustaining a course that is heavily enrolled by students on a voluntary basis is an achievement to which most professors aspire. Some faculties have curriculum committees that approve courses, and some of the centralized state systems of higher education have more bureaucratic processes. However, compared to India, there is little central oversight of the courses in US colleges and universities, other than a small group of courses that are mandatory for degree requirements. Teaching required courses is generally considered less desirable than teaching courses of one's own devising. Thus, a reputation for offering popular and heavily enrolled "free elective" courses liberates a faculty member from what is often perceived as the drudgery of "service course" teaching.

Courses that deal with Indian history, society, and culture are not mandatory in any American undergraduate curriculum that I know of. Such courses may satisfy a "distribution requirement" in social sciences or cross-cultural studies, or in a departmental program, but, when they serve such requirements, they are typically included in a menu—often an extensive list—of comparable courses among which students are free to choose. The reputation of the course—for intellectual excitement, for stimulating experience, for the vitality of the teaching—is the key to acceptance. In the present environment, in which there are many study abroad opportunities, creating a program that is competitive is indispensable to its success. It is impossible to get all of the aspects of a new program correct from the start, so continuous evaluation and feedback from the students is very important. The students must have a sense that the institution is responding to their needs. It is usual for professors to think they know what students need to learn, and—speaking as a professor—I believe this is correct. However, in a competitive marketplace, it is critical to get students to see that what is good for them is also what is the most interesting for them to learn. We are constantly, these days, responding to student evaluations and trying to bring together in the classroom what we think is important and what the students think is fascinating.

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student's record more meaningful and interpretable. Written evaluations of a student's work, spelling out strengths and weaknesses, is used in some smaller colleges, where enrollments are not high and where the preparation of lengthy records of student work, known as "transcripts," is feasible. The transcript is a compilation of all of a student's course enrollment and achievement throughout a degree program, and is the indispensable document for the next step in a person's career. Work done in study abroad programs appears on the transcript, and it is important that the courses and grades be at the standard of the courses taken at the home institution. The diploma given to a student when he or she receives a degree is almost never requested by a prospective employer or graduate school, but a transcript is normally requested. Individual courses and their grades are accorded very great significance.

Student Life

A central value in study abroad programs is the experience a student has in living and working in a social setting and cultural environment that truly contrast with those that are familiar. In this respect, India is especially well placed, since it is home to an ancient civilization, quite distinct from that of the US, and yet one in which English is widely used. This advantage should be very clear to universities that are seeking foreign experience for their students. Less clear to both sending and receiving institutions are expectations about student life outside the classroom.

Students who take advantage of opportunities to study overseas are usually living away from home attending residential universities or colleges. Residential institutions operate extensive systems of residence halls (commonly called "dormitories") for undergraduates. Students share rooms, usually, with one other person. Dining is in a common dining hall. There are numerous jokes about how small dormitory rooms are, and how bad dormitory food is. The truth of these characterizations is difficult to assess because most of the students have lived at home until age 18. At home, most have enjoyed private rooms, often quite spacious, individual televisions, stereos, computers, telephones, and numerous other personal possessions. Managing all of that paraphernalia in a small room shared with another person demands concessions. Institutional food, which is prepared on a large scale and with economies in mind, may not be as appetizing as one's accustomed diet, even if it is just as nutritious. Dormitories that are being constructed today take account of the standard of living to which today's students have been accustomed, so their luxury is rising. Today's dormitory food service is typically increasing the range of choices available. These changes, notwithstanding, many students move "off campus," to privately operated rental units, at their earliest opportunity. While they may not enjoy

their own cooking more than the food they were getting in the dormitory, the additional space and the freedom from the constraints of dormitory rules are valued very highly.

Students who come to India do not usually expect to have the same amenities they are accustomed to in the US. However, the average student hostel and mess will not meet the minimum expectation. While the experience of living together with Indian students would be of great value and highly appreciated by the American visitors, they are not prepared for this particular experience. Some special accommodations will be necessary for students from the US. It can be assumed that at least half, and probably more than half, of any group of American students will be women, that they have been accustomed to living in close proximity to men in dormitories at their home universities, and that they will be extremely distressed when they encounter "Eve teasing." American students are more prone to gastroenteritis and other infectious diseases than their Indian counterparts, who have developed immunity to some conditions that are ordinary in India. Thus, sanitation in the general environment and in food preparation is an important feature of accommodations for these students. Where paying guest accommodation with Indian families can be arranged for the duration of a student's stay, this has often proved to be highly satisfactory. Seeking and evaluating paying guest accommodations for students is an intensive effort, especially where the number of students is large. It is often simply not possible to place them, or enough of them, and hostel-type housing has to be used. In such instances, opportunities to stay with Indian families are very valuable experiences, even if only for a few days or weeks. In a minority of instances, students have reported being placed with families whose primary motivation is financial. However, in the great majority of cases, the students and their host families become very close and the relationship endures for years afterward.

Most universities in the US will not select a student for study abroad if he or she has a record of behavioral or psychological problems. However, it is impossible to eliminate all troubled students from a group going overseas. Also, it is impossible to predict the reaction of some seemingly well-adapted students to a new social and cultural environment. Some of the most serious difficulties that have to be dealt with in university housing systems have to do with mental illness, particularly depression. We have an elaborate system of resident heads and resident directors who are attuned to the problems of students in this period of their lives, and who have resources to intervene and prevent problems from becoming serious. However, there is some adolescent behavior that seems immune to the most well conceived supervision. Without going into great detail, I can summarize by saying that the problems arising from alcohol, drugs, and sex are pervasive among all kinds of students, and these do not seem to go away when students go overseas to

study. The American system typically include the office of "Dean of Students," accompanied by a staff dedicated to the problems of student life and, when necessary, discipline. This staff does not go abroad with the students, and the functions devolve on a general administrator who has to deal with a wide range of problems and who may not have had as much experience as his or her counterparts on the home campus. Based on my own experience, I must say that such problems have not been so common in India, but they will occur and they cannot be ignored.

Cultural Experience

A great deal of the knowledge of India that an American student takes from a period of study here is gained outside the classroom and beyond professorial oversight. The most important and valuable part of this knowledge is probably what is gained from knowing people in their ordinary, everyday lives. Visiting Indian families, enjoying the generous hospitality that guests inevitably receive in the land where a guest is a god, and learning something of the intricacies of Indian family life are among the enduring contributions to education India can offer. When foreign students meet and socialize with Indian students as peers, these opportunities develop quite naturally. This is one of the most important reasons for conducting study abroad programs in Indian universities. Nearby coffee shops are the places students establish friendships. Fostering these opportunities for informal contacts is a genuine contribution to education.

Bollywood films are also extremely popular among at least some American undergraduates. It is nowadays quite easy to see such films in the US, and it seems that some students who enroll for study abroad programs in India began their interest through the cinema. I cannot vouch for the educational value of seeing a lot of films, but it is likely that it makes a contribution to fluency in Hindi.

Travel during holidays is, likewise, significant in getting to know India. Classroom discussion of the cultural and linguistic diversity of India is given a reality by travel. Of course, personal experience of Indian monuments and scenes is also more memorable than what we can teach in class. However, students do best when they travel with others. Being able to watch out for one another, especially when traveling by train, is quite important. Robbery or attack usually ruins India for the victim ever afterward, and it does no good for the victim's program. Young women are especially vulnerable, with sexual harassment being added to the list of crimes to which they are subject. Preparing women students for what to expect in this regard is very important.

“Exchange Programs”

After World War II, the US sought to reestablish constructive relations with other countries by “student exchange,” in which young people traded places, so to speak, for a period of study in one-another’s countries. These were mostly war-ravaged European countries and upper income students whose educations included sufficient foreign language skills to make such an experience fruitful. With increasing prosperity and awareness of the world beyond Western Europe, educational exchange blossomed, and the Fulbright Program was its greatest fruit. Fulbright and all of the programs fashioned after it were based on a principle of bilateral reciprocity, even in situations where the US had to pay most of the cost of both sides of an exchange.

Cooperation between universities and colleges in India and the US that is not financially supported by some generous external source is not likely to be symmetrical. Few American institutions are willing to forego tuition income to play host to very many visitors from overseas. They are prepared to pay the cost of programs especially constructed for their students in foreign institutions, using tuition revenues. Attempts to create symmetry through programs of faculty exchange usually fail because every academic guest in an American university needs a host, usually a person whose research interests are related to those of the visitor. Such matches between research interests are not easily achieved. And American universities cannot tell their faculty members what to do or where to spend their time. If a faculty member is interested in doing some work at a foreign university, it can usually be paid for by some source other than an exchange program.

In short, I would encourage Indian universities to create programs for American students to study on their campuses not under the guise of an exchange, but rather as an educational opportunity in its own right. Indian universities need to establish relationships with counterparts in the US that are based on the needs of the American institution and the strength of the Indian institution. Undergraduates in US universities need to learn something in depth about the world beyond their experience. India suits this need to an extraordinary extent, and has a higher education system of exceptionally high quality. This system can increase its range and effectiveness by bringing groups of students from the US—and from other countries as well—for periods of study outside the normal degree courses. An increasing number of American colleges and universities are seeking well-prepared programs for their undergraduates and many Indian universities are well prepared to provide them.