Cal Poly’s Role in Globalization

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Course Instructor Professor Andrew Morris

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By:
Ava Fry
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Abstract: This paper discusses the effects of an uneasy position for America in the 1980s business markets on the university’s decision to internationalize the curriculum, specifically the responses of Cal Poly’s administration and its student body. The rhetoric used for the proposal of an International Education Office in 1988 by the Academic Senate, revealed an unexpected motivation behind its creation that intrigued me to look further. It seemed that the education system was rapidly globalizing in schools across the nation. A dramatic increase of studies on programs abroad support this claim, however, research failed to show the same international action at Cal Poly. Instead a long process ensued to reach the level of proposed globalization laid out in earlier years.

Key Words: International, Higher education, Competition, Study abroad, American markets

INTRODUCTION

Study abroad is the act of traveling to another country during one’s educational career for an extended period of time to earn credit while immersed in another culture. This practice has existed since the aristocratic European class implemented the Grand Tour in 1660 and has since evolved into a much more accessible version. The draw to see the world mixed with the educational lessons that are produced from travel have caught the attention of many students. On the Cal Poly campus that has been the case since 1963 with the first opportunity to study abroad sponsored through a government program known as AID (Association for International
Development), which sent students to teach developing nations how to capitalize on their productions\(^1\).

Helping others is a worthwhile goal of going abroad and still there are a myriad of other reasons to set typical schooling aside temporarily for the more foreign alternative, most commonly: cultural exchange, travel experience, foreign linguistic practice, and personal development. These core aims were overshadowed in American study abroad programs during the 1980s for a desire to improve career opportunities, which prevailed above the others. The sinking stance of United States business markets elicited a call to action for more rapid globalization, the effects of which were felt not only in businesses, but also the institutions they would hire their employees from: universities. California Polytechnic State University was immersed in this push to internationalize school curricula just the same as other universities in the nation at the time, however their response was slower than most due to grandiose claims and plans that hit roadblocks on their way into reality. A national backdrop of economic competition in the late 1980s prompted many proposals of improved internationalization, the “International Education Office” being the most promising, which were not acted upon at Cal Poly until the 2000s due to budget and spatial constraints.

Though foreign students had long been present on campus, the surrounding culture of international programs was to help foreign countries rather than for them to help Cal Poly students; that is until the late 1980s when it was realized that other countries had important lessons to teach. These proposals, though slow to fruition, ultimately set the precedence for Cal

\(^1\) International Development Activities, 30 September 1986, International Center Records, Box 1 folder 20, Special Collections and Archives of Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University. San Luis Obispo, CA.
Poly’s successful study abroad programs, showing finally a matching of student interest with administrative abilities.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

By the late 1980s, the American business sector was still struggling with the disillusionment of slipping global trade in the new digital age. The nation watched as “unemployment and inflation rose simultaneously…. Economic growth fell to a fraction of its 1950–1970 levels. Firms based in Germany and Japan, which had recovered from their post-war collapse, now expanded globally, competing aggressively with U.S.-based firms even in the American consumer market.”² Scrambling to identify and address the lack of foreign knowledge, many studies and committees were put into place which disseminated information on opportunities for advancement and put pressure on the institutions needed to reach those goals. The three studies I will examine in this section are particularly pertaining to the educational field, making them relevant to the experience here at Cal Poly. With employers picking their employees from diploma to desk, it became the university’s job to produce globally equipped students. A flooding of internationally minded sources in this field from 1986-1992 praised the implementation of study abroad programs and internationalization of curriculum. Clearly this rhetoric was fueled by the larger fear of competing business markets and the result was a viewpoint that “internationalization of higher education, including study abroad, is no longer merely desirable, it is a necessity.”³

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³ “Assessment Survey and Report,” 1989, International Center Records, Box 1 folder 11, Special Collections and Archives of Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University. San Luis Obispo, CA.
The post-World War II era allowed for an economic bubble to form within America, seeing that almost all other world powers were still recuperating. Industry boomed and the United States was universally acknowledged as the leading world power in business, which gave the nation an inflated sense of self and a ‘too-big-to-fail’ mentality. Roles began to reverse however, when nations such as Japan and Germany began getting back on their feet and were ready to compete. The decline could be captured in statistics showing that

In 1970, the United States had 14 of the top 20 industrial companies ranked by assets. By 1986, that figure had dropped to less than 10. [As well as] in 1960, Japan’s Gross National Product per capita was less than one-fourth that of the United States... as of last year [1987] that has changed. Japan now has a GNP slightly higher than America’s.4

These numbers scared the American business sector and they took a hard look at their employees as a result. Realizing that finding hirable graduates with global competency was rare, pressure on the university system to increase study abroad programs was eventually felt at Cal Poly. Schools, especially those heralding polytechnic standards, had been viewed as centers for job preparation. Students in the 1980s viewed being “being very well-off financially” to be the primary result of earning a degree, while the previously top desire of “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” dropped to sixth place.

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“These contrasting trends began in the early 1970s, continued through the decade (crossing paths in 1977), reaching their opposite extremes in the late 1980s.” Schools needed to assess where they stood in internationalizing their curriculums and create a template for advancement, so studies were conducted to gather the essential information.

The earliest book I will examine was published in 1988 by Craufurd D. Goodwin and Michael Nacht through the Institute of International Education, entitled Abroad and Beyond: Patterns in American Overseas Education. It served as a general overview of why, how, and what is gained from study abroad by analyzing the mindsets of students both going and returning from abroad. It later delves into the policies that should be put in place by universities across the nation to best cater to the student’s needs, reassuring them that foreign programs of education are viable opportunities for them. Goodwin and Nacht begin with highlighting more than sixteen main reasons why study abroad should be looked upon with respect rather than disregarded as an ‘escape’ from education, information gathered from examining several hundred programs. They conclude, with clear steps to be taken by both faculty and administration to present the offer of an external study program as an enticing opportunity to students.

For describing the background surrounding Cal Poly’s increased attention to the topic of international affairs, the “Point of It All” section was most helpful. The authors offered two stances on the soaring trade deficits during the 1980s, one being the “isolation of American

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economy from the rest of the world. Another approach is to get to know the rest of the world and beat them at their own games. In this more promising latter strategy overseas study by scientists, engineers, business managers, and other professionals is of singular importance.”

Competition seems ingrained in this second approach. Though aggressive, this mindset of learning as informants rather than inquisitors seemed pervasive on campuses in the late 1980s and is what bred such an emotional call to action at the administrative levels of colleges who feared falling behind the trend.

The second source, *Study Abroad: The Experience of American Undergraduates*, published in 1990 by Jerry S. Carlson and his collaborators, was another study on the same topic but with a greater emphasis on a student’s mindset surrounding time abroad. Looking at four universities with ties to over thirty European institutions, they were able to collect data over an extended period of time to gain the best understanding of how a student changes after spending time in another country compared to their counterpart who remains at the university. Using multiple surveys, they collected information to help target the type of students who would benefit from a program in a foreign country. Personalities most inclined to apply for programs on their own, were often those who already had some of the traits characteristically gained through exchange studies. Therefore it was discovered the students who stayed at home often had the most to gain from these offered experiences. Carlson criticized universities for the fact that despite convincing evidence of beneficial outcomes “few academic

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7 Goodwin and Nacht, 20.
departments consider study abroad to be an important aspect of their curriculum,” perhaps the reason that abled and driven students “perceived lack of curricular relevance of study abroad and... [believed] that study abroad may delay their graduation from college.” This study would be integral for administrators in the process of setting up international programs and recruiting larger numbers of students, so as to avoid pitfalls and remedy student doubt.

Thirdly the 1991 compilation of eight case studies concerning the integration of study abroad by Barbara B. Burn, succeeded the last study by addressing the problem of international programs not playing an essential role in higher education classes. The lack of accreditation irritates the author who reminds the readers “that for the emerging generation of college graduates internationally involved careers are not only likely but probable.” The case studies then provide eight examples of schools worth following on the path to further globalization. Included in the schools, was an entire section devoted to Pomona, a school closely related to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, due to the fact that they had “been successful through... extensive offerings and financial aid to serve the majority of its potential participants.” Surely this served as a motivating factor at Cal Poly to take further steps towards an organized center for internationalization.

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9 Carlson, 11.
10 Carlson, 17.
12 Burn, 65.
EARLY CAL POLY

Long before the consideration of consolidation of international tasks, foreign students and programs abroad had a substantial role at Cal Poly. As early as 1941 there were “five students from Mexico, one from Honduras, and one from the far off Argentine... registered”\textsuperscript{13} and more had preceded them. The students were welcomed with the goal of instilling in them an American education along with the hope of diversifying the campus. Other aspects such as cultural sharing and increased enrollment were also driving factors for having students from different lands on campus. Business competition was not a motivator until the 1980s but was preceded by international political competition in foreign pursuits through the Agency for International Development (AID). It is important to note the shift in mentalities from political to capitalistic. Early internationalization of Cal Poly was to the benefit of other countries, to ‘Americanize’ those around them rather than in response to sinking world marketplace positions that shocked America into considering the valuable lessons to be learned abroad. The early involvement with AID highlights the foreign ties that later led to the necessitation of an international center, so it is valuable to examine how they formed.

AID was developed by the government in the 1950s and sponsored educational programs to improve third world countries through monetary and intellectual aid. To put it bluntly, their aim was to minimize the reach of communism. Countries looking for a way to escape poor living conditions were profiled to be more likely to succumb to the Soviet cause, however if their situation was improved before they became too desperate for change, the roll

\textsuperscript{13}John Carricaburu, “Many countries represented in studentbody at Poly,” \textit{El Mustang Newspaper}, 31 January 1941.
of red ideals could be remedied. This message was hidden behind more politically correct terms such as ‘democratization’ and the need to train less fortunate countries “how to identify and analyze their own development problems.” The university system was enlisted as a source of manpower and training facilities for the government’s cause.

Cal Poly was approached by AID as a desirable candidate due to its standing as a polytechnic school and the “learn by doing” mentality which fit well with their directive. After a period of hesitance, a contract between the school and the agency allowed for funding of foreign students to attend agricultural classes. The benefits of the government funding became clear to administration soon after and further contracts were signed, not only for bringing students here but sending them abroad as well. The 1960s were the peak years for these contracts because soon after, state budget cuts “completely eliminated the Foreign Student Office operation” at Cal Poly and “in the mid 1970’s... policy changes both in Washington, D.C. and California made continued involvement in international programs difficult.” International involvement continued to decline and it seemed the initiative to be a global presence was lost with the funding. The foundation for an international center was created during this period with ties to other countries, but operations were left in disrepair, filling in cracks with volunteer positions and leaving each international task in their respective departments. It started becoming concerning that “many students [were] unaware of the programs offered in 17 countries throughout the world.” To add insult to injury, as mentioned earlier, a report

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14 International Development Activities, 30 September 1986.
conducted by Barbara Burn of eight exemplary colleges in the international arena during the late 1980s included Pomona (the other, and supposedly less significant, Cal Poly) on its list.

TRANSITION

Administration at Cal Poly began recognizing the need for greater globalization in 1987 with its “recommendation of funding and staffing” of an international center. However it would become apparent later on that their seeming devotion to its creation was more in theory than reality. In the beginning stages many supporters, including the Academic Senate, University Vice President: Malcolm W. Wilson, and Academic Affairs, were vocal about the potential benefits of a centralized department for foreign concerns.\(^\text{18}\) No doubt talk of increasing job opportunities abroad and the benefits of cultured, worldly students, idealized the push for a more internationalized curriculum in their minds. Not to mention the newly formed and highly successful London Study program that would supposedly pave the way for many new programs like it. These ponderings encouraged Jon M. Ericson, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, to move forward with the planning and advocating of such a center. When his efforts culminated into a proposal and it came time to make sacrifices by allocating resources, the choir of supporters fell quiet. Recognition of international importance dwindled and turned a once clear path to an unsteady journey at Cal Poly.

The idea of an international center was brought to light by the Academic Senate after the Council of International Exchange reported that “other countries are ahead of us in the

\(^\text{18}\) Resolution to Academic Senate, 6 November 1987, Box 1 Folder 15, UA0051 International Center Records. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
international education of their students” and to prevent “diminishing the world status of the United States,” schools needed to know more about the other competing countries. The proposal for the international center reflected the increasing concern for the station of America in global business, in fact that was the main reason for its creation or at least the one used to justify it. Its opening line states: “Academicians who have followed closely the growing attention to international education have observed a shift in objectives from the more general and idealistic goals of ‘world understanding’ to a more pragmatic goal of being competitive in both business and politics.”

To this aim a more streamlined process for sending students abroad seemed to be the logical first step. In fact doing so would have fallen in line with the rest of the schools in the nation during the late 1980s, for which this “period in international education [was] characterized by consolidation and reconfiguration.”

Previously, while international concerns were under student services, aspects of international information could be found scattered throughout many departments which limited efficiency and organization. The function of the center would be to bring all the tasks under one roof. There were plenty of jobs to be done for the new international office including developing a “comprehensive policy statement on International Programs,” advising and approving of new study abroad opportunities, processing documents like visas and labor certifications, and growing the awareness of study abroad activities through the quarterly

19“Proposal for the Establishment of an International Center,” 1989, Box 1 Folder 14, UA0051 International Center Records. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
As a jumping off point, the proposal seemed to be well backed with support and high hopes surrounded its planning, acting as a “morale booster” for those concerned with international affairs. It was well understood that the center would be a pivotal change towards an international campus.

Spearheading the progress into a global age for Cal Poly was Jon M. Ericson. He began his impact while still the CLA Dean but took a larger role in international concerns when he was asked by the Academic Vice President in 1988 to consider the interim director position of the new International Programs. He accepted that role, in part, due to his knowledge of the London Study program which he created in 1985. It was the “first time students [would] have this kind of opportunity to study abroad through a Cal Poly program.” It served as a test to see to what extent study abroad was beneficial to Cal Poly students, and would only continue if it proved to be worthy. Indeed it did, moreover it was a hit among students and faculty alike. It became a continual option every spring quarter. Students got the benefit of learning while experiencing life located centrally in London. Not wanting to fall behind on their graduation track, students could be reassured by the guaranteed transferal of general education credits in “courses offered, [in] English, political science, history, music, art, business and humanities.” Another main advertising point was the affordability of study abroad. With the program being provided through Cal Poly itself, the tuition was equivalent to a quarter in San Luis Obispo with minimal

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24 “Minor Capital Outlay Project Proposal” (Form PPD 2-31), 24 February 1988. Box 2 Folder 11, UA0051 International Center Records, Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
extra expenditures. Whether or not the surrounding costs of travel and lodging were truly that affordable, administration understood cost could be a concern deterring students from taking advantage of schools in other lands. Their positive portrayal in the student newspaper helped dispel doubts the student body had for the attainability of an experience abroad.

With this accomplishment of the London Study under his belt, Jon M. Ericson hoped to create another program modeled after it, this time in Paris. He was planning the layout of this new exchange while simultaneously taking over the International center preparations. He had a very full plate with teaching, organizing, and planning all at once. Perhaps he was spreading himself too thin, yet things seemed to be progressing. In 1988 the first cracks in the smooth path to success developed. A moratorium was placed on all emerging abroad programs in the California State University system. The vice-chancellor for academic affairs feared that increasing numbers of students taking campus-provided international options would put the CSU programs under budget. The Paris program was therefore put on hold indefinitely or until the moratorium was lifted. This information came as quite a disappointment to the students and faculty planning on Paris Study to be ready the same year. In their opinion, each individual school should determine which programs are effective or not, depending on the specific culture of the university rather than it be decided in a far-off Chancellor’s office who had no personal connection to the school. Nevertheless, nothing could be done other than to wait it out and hope sovereignty would be restored to each individual international department.

27 Rebecca Proug.
29 Alexiou.
The second crack came from the Academic Vice President, Malcolm W. Wilson, in March of 1989. In response to Jon M. Ericson’s budget and location requests, an apathetic answer stated: “This year will be used to determine if we can pull together a manageable plan for an international center. Absent such a plan, I believe it is premature to start talking about the relocation of functions.” Instead of the support Ericson expected on the new plan, Wilson had switched sides to a more hesitant approach regarding making changes for the implementation of the international center. Finally in July of 1989 “due to fiscal constraints,” the planning for the center came to a halt, leaving almost two years of Ericson’s preparations to wait for better timing and funding. When put on the spot to make a monetary sacrifices for advancement, the advocates both on the state and campus level, backed away from their original sermon of international development.

Wavering through tests and budget restraints for a decade, the International Educational Office finally gained a solid footing and culminated into the International Center that was imagined in its much earlier proposal. Many other internationalizing factors underwent this same process, namely the Japanese Studies Minor that was also proposed in 1988. The wording of the proposal echoes the globalization rhetoric of the time stating:

The minor will internationalize both the student body and various curricula by attracting students with particular ethnic and career needs based on Japanese

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30 Malcom W. Wilson, Memorandum to Jon M. Ericson, 14 March 1989, Box 1 folder 14, UA0051 International Center Records. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

31 Malcom W. Wilson, Discontinued Office of International Program Planning, 24 July 1989, Box 2 folder 15, UA0051 International Center Records. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
studies... and aid faculty members with specializations in matters relating to the Pacific Rim by giving them a programmatic anchor in the Orient.³²

This proposal failed however despite the acknowledgement that although “some critics say that all the new emphasis on Asian studies is faddish and destined to decline... the trend appears strong.”³³ A similar opportunity only came about in 2010 in the form of the CLA’s Asian Studies Minor, continuing the trend of internationally driven ideas taking many years to find proper funding and support.

Unsteady as the journey was, the sheer amount of documents created in the late 1980s on the topic of international concerns formed a base to build from. Increased awareness in the form of memorandums and news articles sparked interests in both the faculty and students for further opportunities abroad. Eventually the successes of these beginnings became clear and thankfully the drive to participate was always there, as is clear in students’ readiness to take advantage of these programs.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Administrative goals between the 1960s and 1980s went from bringing foreign students to Cal Poly to sending students abroad. The students however, did not change their reasons for either staying or going in this time. When examining the student perspective in regards to motivators for studying abroad, the shift towards competition, seen all the way down to the

³² “Proposal to Create a Japanese Studies Minor,” 4 May 1988, Box 3 Folder 14, UA0051 International Center Records. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
faculty level, was almost untraceable in their given reasons. Students did not view education in other countries to be a key factor of obtaining a job. This is not to say they believed it would hurt either; in fact “between 87 percent and 95 percent of the study abroad students felt that they would be able to utilize the general aspects of their international experience in their later professional life.” However, this gained career experience was a side effect, not the deciding reason. Ranked as primary concerns were “foreign cross-cultural experience, improvement of foreign language ability, desire to live in/make acquaintances from another country, desire to travel, and enhancement of a particular host country.” Career preparation did rise on the list during the 1980s however, it never surpassed the time-old tradition of studying abroad for the cultural benefits in students’ minds. This constant is important in comparison to the volatile administrative approach to international program funding and consolidation because despite their disorganization at Cal Poly, a desire in the student body to go abroad was still present, allowing for greater success when the information in the late 1980s culminated into implementation in the 2000s.

CONCLUSION

As universities across the nation digested the new “global competency” rhetoric in their own ways and attempted to follow the guidelines set out for them in the many new studies, Cal Poly sat and theorized important implementations to keep pace with other fast-adapting schools. Unfortunately moving past the proposal stage proved difficult and a painstaking process for Jon M. Ericson. Hitting roadblocks both with funding and spatial issues, the

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34 Carlson, 17.
35 Carlson, 17.
administrative talk of supporting internationalization of the curriculum fell flat during the 1990s. Persistence and the continued national concern for the American global business markets prevailed ultimately. Cal Poly received national ranking in 2009 as the third highest college in its category for sending students abroad. This article hyperbolized Cal Poly’s standing in the nation by only mentioning the narrowed category of “universities that offer master’s degrees.” Cal Poly was surprisingly able to still do better than comparing schools who faced far less challenges, such as fitting a semesters of study abroad into Cal Poly’s quarter system as well as trying to attract a student body who largely majored in sciences and engineering where ‘time away’, is seen as a hindrance. In this same article, one can see the lasting effects of the competitive mindset when “John Battenburg, Cal Poly’s International Education and Programs director, said study abroad is important... in preparing students to enter a widely diverse workforce,” even in 2009. Although the International Center was not fully functioning until the early twenty-first century, the push in advertising and accessibility of program information in the 1980s set the precedent for later years in the realization that internationalization is an important aspect of the modern college.

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37 Battenburg.
38 Battenburg.
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Secondary


