Exploring Student Feedback in Order to Help Build an International Summer Program

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Studying abroad presents students with the opportunity to acquire and develop a diverse range of employability and life skills. Exposure to diverse cultures introduces you to innovative ideas and ways of thinking that you might not have thought of otherwise. International travel is extremely beneficial to those working in the construction industry as they can study foreign business practices, architectural styles, and intercultural communication. While Cal Poly has had a successful summer study abroad program in the past, the faculty leaders are looking for student feedback to help better structure the program and in turn hopefully increase enrollment. This project is designed to gauge interest from the Cal Poly Construction Management student body of a summer program in Prague. Students were sent a survey that asked them to answer 6 questions regarding the future program. Five multiple choice and one free response question. The design of this survey aimed to provide both quantitative and qualitative data which could be used to inform the faculty leaders of student interest and suggestions in a construction management study abroad program. Survey results confirmed student interest in the summer program as well as the desired courses, delivery method, and duration.

Key Words: Construction Management, Study Abroad, Summer, Survey

Introduction

In previous years, the program consisted of 8 units broken down into two classes: CM 450- Integrated Project Design and Program Management and CM 443– Management of the Construction Firm. The session lasted 6 weeks with the entire time spent in Prague, Czech Republic. Some of the primary objectives that the program aims to provide include extending students’ studies and perspectives beyond the familiar classroom and campus environment, expanding the students' understanding of international construction and the role the construction industry plays in a global built environment and experiencing living and studying in another country. Since the pandemic, the professors leading the program have struggled with how to format the curriculum to allow for maximum enrollment. The purpose of this senior project survey is to use student responses to build the program based on the preferences on the majority of respondents.
Literature Review

Given the nature of this project as a survey, my literature was not very extensive. From my limited research, I found a few papers talking about the benefits of studying abroad. One paper, *Evaluate the Impact of a Summer Study Abroad Program to the Students in Construction Management* by Huanqing Lu, Erich Connell, and George Wang examines how the students of a study abroad program grew in their global perspectives, developed personally, and acquired new knowledge in construction management. Another reference I found to be interesting was a Cal poly Senior project titled *Learn By Traveling Through AIESEC: The Importance of Studying and Experiencing Intercultural Communication* by Haley Gross. This paper highlights the value of intercultural communication, how culture impacts communication, which our industry could benefit from a better understanding of. On a construction jobsite, you are more than likely to come across someone who does not speak the same language as you. It is important to learn how to effectively communicate apart from spoken words. Finally, I referenced a couple of previous senior projects containing in-depth surveys to see how successful surveys were formatted in the past.

Methodology

Data for this senior project was collected through a survey of the Cal Poly Construction Management student body. The survey primarily targeted students with an existing interest in the program, as their opinions/suggestion will help build the study abroad program. The survey was forwarded to students via the Construction Management department email. The survey was developed with the assistance of project subject matter experts and faculty leaders Lonny Simonian and Scott Kelting, providing critical feedback. Overall, the goal of this survey was to collect data on what courses, delivery method, and duration students prefer. Faculty leaders hope that by restructuring the summer program around student feedback they can increase enrollment. The survey was concise and limited to six questions in an effort to increase the number of student responses. A brief survey description was included above the actual questions describing the purpose of the survey, as well as outlining the proposed structure of the program.

The first question asks students what year they are within the Construction Management program, in order to gain a better understanding of the age of survey respondents. Question two asks' students to rate their interest level in a 10-week summer construction management study abroad program, with 4 weeks in Prague and the remaining 6 weeks conducted virtually, asynchronously on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the strongest. This ensures that the responses faculty leaders take into consideration when making decisions regarding the program are from students who would actually enroll. Question three asks' students if they would rather the program take place at the end of their senior year, or in conjunction with an internship. This comes in response to what me and faculty leaders believe to be a reasoning for decreased enrollment. The CM encourages students to get summer internships from the beginning of their college career, so many of them do not believe they have the time to study abroad. Questions three and four will hopefully present us with data that shows the best way to structure the program so these students can participate. As a follow up to the previous question, the fourth question asks if they would prefer to have the 4-weeks in Prague immediately following spring quarter finals or right before the start of fall quarter. This question is designed to inform us what option would work best for students that would like to study abroad in conjunction with an internship. Faculty leaders asked for student feedback regarding the course load with question five. They presented students with three different options ranging from 10-11 units and varying methods of delivery (Virtual vs. In person). This question also included a short course description for a class most students are unfamiliar
with: CM 463. It is a three-unit lab class and is an acceptable substitute for CM 460, 461, and 462. Finally, the last question asked for any suggestions students might have for the program.

**Survey Analysis**

**Question #1:** The first question helped us identify the year of each student who participated in the survey. The results from this question are critical to helping faculty leaders make decisions regarding the program. 4th and 5th year students are likely to be graduating soon and therefore would not be able to participate in the future program. These students are also more likely to have taken the suggested courses already. As seen below, the majority of students who responded to the survey were 4th years (31%), then 2nd years (29%), 3rd years (16%), and finally 1st and 5th years (both 12%).

1. **What year are you?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th year</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Response to Question 1: What year are you?

**Question #2:** ensured us that the students responding were interested in the summer program. Knowing that the suggestions and responses were made by students who might potentially enroll reassures us that the decisions made based on this survey will be beneficial. Of the 51 students who responded, over half of them (53%) had an interest level of a 4 or 5. Out of the remaining students, 20% of them had an interest level of a two, 21% for three, and only 6% for one. These results tell us that there is a large number of students interested in a CM study abroad program.
2. **On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the strongest, what is your interest level in a 10-week summer construction management study abroad program, with 4 weeks in Prague and the remaining 6 weeks conducted virtually, asynchronously?**

![Figure 2](image.jpg)

**Figure 2.** Response to Question 2: What is your interest level in a Construction Management summer study abroad program?

**Question #3:** This question highlights one of the major roadblocks for a summer study abroad program in construction management. Many CM students have summer internships that make it difficult to study abroad. With this question, faculty leaders aim to see who to structure the program for. 51% of respondents said they would prefer to study abroad in conjunction with an internship and another 17% said they would have no preference. The faculty leaders now know they must structure the program around the idea that students will also have an internship.

3. **Would you be more interested in taking the program at the end of your senior year (graduating senior), or in conjunction with an internship?**

![Figure 3](image.jpg)

**Figure 3.** Response to Question 3: Would you rather take this program at the end of your Senior year or in conjunction with an internship?
**Question #4:** To follow up on the last question, we have asked students if they would rather have the four weeks in Prague be at the front or back end of the summer quarter. Both of these options would leave roughly ten weeks for a summer internship, separate from the four weeks abroad. We hope to identify which option works better for both the students and the companies they intern at. As you can see from the results below, travelling immediately following Spring quarter was the preferred option. Another thing to note is that almost a quarter of respondents did not have a preference at all.

4. **If your preference to Q3 is “in conjunction with an internship”, would you prefer to have the 4-weeks in Prague immediately following spring quarter finals or right before the start of fall quarter?**

![Pie chart showing responses]

- Following Spring Quarter (6/13- ...) 21
- Before Fall Quarter (8/22-9/16) 13
- No preference 10

**Figure 4.** Response to Question 4: Would you prefer to have the 4-weeks in Prague immediately following spring quarter finals or right before the start of fall quarter?
Question #5: Students were given three options of course loads and delivery methods to choose from. This question will help decide what classes students will take and whether they will be delivered in person or virtually. The first option (our preferred choice) would consist of 9 units including CM 426 International Construction Studies, CM 450 IPD Design and Program management, and CM 463 Senior Project.

5. Which of these options with different courses and delivery methods do you prefer?
   [Note that CM 463, Senior Project: Professional practice for constructors, is an acceptable substitute for CM 460, 461, and 462. The catalog description is “practical application of construction management theory and practice solving problems related to the built environment”. It is a 3-unit lab class.]

- **Option 1** (9 units, SP and IPD courses, no technical electives - our preferred option)
  - CM 426 International Construction Studies (Virtual)
  - CM 450 IPD, Design and Program Management (Virtual and Prague)
  - CM 463 Senior Project (Prague)

- **Option 2** (10 units, SP and Sustainability courses, 2 technical electives)
  - CM 317 Sustainability and the Built Environment (Virtual)
  - CM 422 Managing a Virtual Construction Company (Virtual)
  - CM 426 Special International Construction Studies (Prague)
  - CM 463 Senior Project (Prague)

- **Option 3** (10 units, Management and IPD courses, 1 technical elective)
  - CM 422 Managing a Virtual Construction Company (Virtual)
  - CM 443 Management of the Construction Firm (Prague)
  - CM 450 IPD, Design and Program Management (Virtual)

Figure 5. Response to Question 5: Which of these options with different courses and delivery methods do you prefer?
Question #6: The final question gave the respondents to relay any suggestions they have for the program that were not previously covered. Out of the 51 students to respond, only about 10 had suggestions to make. Those included:

Arrange the program so students that want to travel for the summer while they take online classes, opposed to returning after Prague to do an internship, can do so

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter long program ??</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would very much be interested in a study abroad program; however, I do not think I would sign up if some of the course had to be virtual. If I were to go abroad, I would want all of my classes to be in person. Since we can take virtual classes from anywhere, I don’t see the point of being abroad to take them. I would rather have all in person abroad classes to maximize my time away from Cal Poly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating a program that is structured for fall quarter would be beneficial if someone would like an internship over the summer.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can we offer this program any other time than in the fall so it does not conflict with my internship back home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a Senior so it doesn't matter but I think towards the end of summer would work better for the quarter system offer scholarships. It is very expensive and not in budget for a lot of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it typical for study abroad to only be 4 weeks actually abroad? Seems like a waste of the other 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was interested in the program and the only real reason I didn't go was because of how expensive the program is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More weeks abroad</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 6. Response to Question 6: Do you have any other suggestions for the program?
Conclusion

This study sought to gauge student interest in a Construction Management summer study abroad program, and the best potential subject matter, duration, and delivery method for such a program. The inspiration for this senior project survey came from faculty leaders hoping to build the program around student feedback. From our results, Lonny Simonian and Scott Kelting will be able to make decisions in regards to the future program.

We can conclude that there is a vested interest in the program among the CM student body at Cal Poly. Something that the faculty leaders and I were unsure of was when the four-weeks abroad should take place because many students would like to have a summer internship as well. The data tells us that students would prefer the four weeks to occur immediately following spring quarter finals with the remaining 6-weeks occurring asynchronously. In regard to coursework and delivery method, the majority of respondents favored the first option which consists of three classes: CM 426 International Construction Studies (Virtual), CM 450 IPD, Design and Program Management (Virtual and Prague), CM 463 Senior Project (Prague).

Future Research

Our survey has created an open channel of communication where students can express their opinion and help build their ideal summer program. The final question of the survey was open ended and asked for any suggestions to the program that were not previously covered in the previous questions. Like we had anticipated, a number of students made comments about the duration and how they would like to see more weeks abroad in the future. This is something faculty leaders could eventually look into if they could find enough students and an adequate program that could last an entire quarter.
References & Appendix

Lu, Huanqing. “Evaluate the Impact of a Summer Study Abroad Program to the Students in Construction Management.” ASC Proceedings Archive, ascpro0.ascweb.org/archives/.

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