Beyond the Language Requirement: Interdisciplinary Short-Term Study-Abroad Programs in Spanish

Barbara Gorka
Richard Niesenbaum
Muhlenberg College

Abstract: In order to show students the interdisciplinary relevance of language study and to encourage non-language majors to study abroad in programs where English is not the principal language of instruction, we propose the development of interdisciplinary short-term study-abroad programs. Using our course in cultural and environmental conservation in Latin America as a model, we offer evidence that short-term programs can provide students with an initial exposure to Latin American culture and diversity, give them a different perspective on their own field of study, spark their interest in further language study, and inspire them to find a way to fit a semester- or year-long study-abroad experience into their academic careers.

Key words : interdisciplinary study, study abroad, foreign language requirement, team-teaching, community interaction, experiential learning, environmental education

Introduction

Many colleges and universities today are attempting to internationalize their curricula in order to prepare their students for what is commonly referred to as the Global Village (Rivers 1992). Since its inception as a pedagogical trend, internationalization was never meant to be the purview of any one department. One could then assume that the common goal of internationalization would link departments together, and that this, in turn, would affect curricular decisions. The reality, however, is that despite the frequent use of such terms as *internationalization* and *globalization* in curricular discussions, most changes have been cosmetic in nature and have not greatly affected the way we teach or the way students learn. Students and many advisors still treat graduation requirements as courses one must "get through" before serious study of one's major can begin. The insular nature of most departments is mirrored in the course of study of most students. As they "check off" courses from their list of graduation requirements, students might have a vague notion of how they might benefit from taking a given class, but usually fail to relate it to their major or their overall college experience. Clearly *internationalization* has provided us with an intended goal, yet we have failed to implement it in a way that will make such a goal attainable.

One might think that to become truly *internationalized,* all students—not just those who are language majors—should achieve a high level of competency in a second language (Krueger and Ryan 1993). This would suggest that the focal point for international education would be the foreign language department. However, the increased attention for international education has paralleled a decrease in internal support for foreign languages (Goodman 1998). Many of us find that despite the apparent support of internationalization from the administration and colleagues across disciplines, we must continually justify the foreign language requirement (Patrikis 1988). We could blame administrators or our colleagues in other departments for this sort of "English Only" internationalization, but perhaps we ourselves need to reevaluate how we do what we do.

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The foreign language requirement is burdened on many campuses by being considered a "skill" rather than a discipline worthy of intellectual exploration and critical thinking (Kramsch, *Context* 1993). However, many foreign language departments justify the requirement in part because of the culture students learn through studying a foreign language. In this sense, we are using the "content" to justify a "skill." Although language professors might know that the two are intrinsically linked, we must articulate our goals better to our colleagues in other departments as well as to our students. To many of us, the lower-level language classes *are* seen as service classes (Rivers 1992), often taught by part-time instructors or graduate students, who may or may not be prepared to teach the cultural component that we claim is so important. Furthermore, many tenured and tenure-track professors see these classes as preparation for the true intellectual pursuit that will take place in the upper-level literature and civilization classes (Kramsch, "Foreign" 1993). Thus, even we help to perpetuate this notion that lower-level language study is something one must "get through."

Once those who do not continue on to major in the language have fulfilled the requirement, they tend to be through with language study. Is there some way for us to make the study of a foreign language more accessible and meaningful for the students who never become language majors? Can we provide them with opportunities to apply the skill they learn in the required language courses to the content they learn in others? If internationalization is truly one of our goals, shouldn't more of our students study abroad in programs where English is not the primary language of instruction? Since a complete overhaul of the way we teach foreign languages is unrealistic, unlikely, and unnecessary, one way to build on what we already do is to offer short-term, interdisciplinary study-abroad programs for students who have completed the language requirement but who do not intend to become language majors. Considering the growing number of students of Spanish across the country (Brod and Welles 2000), perhaps we must play more of a role in the development of innovative programming than other language groups.

In this paper we explore how short-term interdisciplinary study-abroad programs can effectively engage the non-language major in the study of foreign languages and cultures. Taking advantage of the larger pool of students in Spanish, we present our interdisciplinary program in Latin America as a model for this type of program and provide evidence that it helps retain students for further study in Spanish and even for longer study-abroad experiences.

Interdisciplinary Short-Term Study Abroad Programs

Although more and more American college students are studying abroad each year, the percentage continues to hover at less than 1% of the total student population. Of those who do study abroad, almost one-third enroll in programs in English-speaking countries (Goodman 1998). And while we might do a good job encouraging our language majors to study abroad in non-English-speaking countries or in programs where English is not the language used in classes, we have been less successful with those outside our department. As Kramsch observes, "While any attempt to send social science, business, and engineering majors abroad must be applauded, it seems that language study is not always at the core of the experience" ("Foreign" 10). If we all agree that study abroad is one of the best ways for students to experience first-hand the interconnectedness of language and culture, how do we encourage more non-language majors to do so? Short-term programs could be implemented as one possible solution.

Most language professors eschew short-term study-abroad programs because they feel that fluency, or at least proficiency, can only be achieved with extensive, long-term exposure to the language in an immersion setting. Research supports what our own experiences abroad have proven: That a

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

combination of formal classroom language study prior to travel with extended practice with the language in an immersion setting abroad is one of the best methods to achieve foreign language competency (see Freed 1995). But neither traditional study-abroad programs that focus on language, civilization, and literature, or newer programs that are discipline-based but taught in English, are necessarily the most appropriate for students who have completed the language requirement but are not language majors. While it is true that foreign language proficiency and increased cultural awareness have been our main goals for students studying abroad, we need to consider what short-term programs can offer our non-major student population.

Most of our non-majors have never used their second language outside of the classroom. They complain of the irrelevancy of studying a language for up to three or four semesters when they never intend to use it for their future career. Although *we* know why language study is useful for both practical and intellectual reasons, many of our lower-level students do not. Furthermore, since this same group of students rarely considers study abroad in programs where the second language is used (Kramsch "Foreign" 1993), they are less likely to experience first-hand the relevancy and usefulness of language in an authentic cultural context. By creating study-abroad programs that target students who are finishing their language requirement, we give a new group of students the opportunity to use their language skills outside of class. Rather than rejecting such programs because they may not immediately lead to fluency, we should focus on what they can do: Short-term programs can provide students with an initial exposure to another culture, show them that fluency is not necessary for effective communication, give them a different perspective on their field of study, and perhaps of most importance, spark their interest to continue language study and to find a way to fit a semester abroad into their academic careers. Furthermore, short-term programs specifically in Latin America can enhance the lower-level student's awareness of the diversity among Latin American countries.

Interdisciplinary Courses

Colleges and universities are beginning to realize that interdisciplinary courses and majors are one way to help prepare our students for a world where problems can not be solved in "the tidy packages of disciplines" (Davis 1995, 39). Likewise, many language faculty are collaborating with colleagues in other departments to allow their students to experience the connection between language, culture, and other disciplines. For example, on many campuses across the country Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum (FLAC) and discipline-based language programs have attempted to address the traditionally insular nature of language study. Although the nature of these programs varies, the basic premise is that students will be given the opportunity to use a foreign language to complete all or part of their course work for designated classes in a variety of disciplines (see Krueger and Ryan 1993). By integrating foreign languages with disciplinary study, many colleges hope to change attitudes about the language requirement (and consequently, languages in general). At St. Olaf's College, one of the goals of their FLAC program is to "overcome the 'requirement syndrome'... The requirement is no longer seen as an endpoint; it provides tools and skills which students can then apply to a variety of disciplines" (Anderson, Allen, Narváez 1993, 105). Although increased foreign language proficiency is not the main goal of such programs, providing students more opportunities and more relevant disciplinary contexts in which to use what they have learned in their lower-level language classes can certainly alter their perception of foreign-language study (see Jurasek 1993), and perhaps, provide them with the incentive to continue (more research is needed to determine how proficiency and attitudes are affected by FLAC programs). In addition to the change of attitude, stu-

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

dents gain access to texts (and perhaps individuals) of another culture previously inaccessible to them in their college classes.

Although FLAC programs seem to be a step in the right direction, students are still not *experiencing* the culture and language first-hand, only through texts and, in some programs, in-class discussions carried out in the foreign language. In theory, the idea of FLAC programs is laudable, but in practice, foreign language use is still limited to the classroom. In order to build on what FLAC programs are already doing, a travel component could be added to increase the relevancy of the interdisciplinary study.

Designing the Course: The Need for Campus and Community Involvement

Our course, "Environmental and Cultural Conservation in Latin America," forces students to consider the inseparable relation between the culture of a people and the environment in which they live. We find that superficially dissimilar disciplines actually have much in common. For example, the examination of culture plays a vital role in both disciplines. Leading scientists have stressed the need to consider humans as an essential component of any modern biological community (Primack 1992) and emphasize that the most effective conservation projects are "biocultural" in nature (Janzen 1988; Primack 1992). In our course, taught by faculty in Spanish and Biology, students learn that to be effective environmentalists, they must take into account the culture, history, and values of the people that live within a particular habitat, and to get to know those people, they have to be able to speak their language.

Unlike traditional year- or semester-long study-abroad programs where students live with local families, take classes (usually in language, literature, and culture), and become immersed in the daily life of the foreign culture, short-term programs tend to have a different structure. In many, students do not live with families and might be little more than tourists who receive credit for traveling. They see the historical monuments and pretty places, and might eat in restaurants that serve local cuisine tailored to foreign tastes, but have very little contact with the people who live in the towns or cities they visit, and therefore, next to no reason to use their foreign-language skills. This is the sort of itinerary that gives short-term programs a bad reputation. In order to compensate for the shorter time abroad, students need to be better prepared before they leave the country, they need to be more actively involved with the community while abroad, and once they have returned, they need ways to apply what they have learned abroad to their lives on campus and in their own communities.

In order to maximize the travel experience, students should be well prepared before they leave the country. During the semester prior to travel in our course, students learn about Hispanic culture and history (with a focus on the country to be visited, currently Costa Rica), practice conversational and environmental Spanish, study the habitats of the region, engage in biological and environmental problem-solving, and begin research on an independent study project. As part of their research project proposal, students write questions in Spanish that they would want to ask local experts or other people they meet. The Spanish professor then corrects these questions and supplies additional topic-specific vocabulary for each student. Once in Costa Rica, the students have these questions to fall back on when they begin to interview locals about their topics.

If students are not staying with local families, they must at least participate in the life of a town and learn from the cross-cultural exchange. One way to accomplish this is by incorporating a community service and experiential learning component. Experiential learning has proven to be an effective if not essential component of environmental education (Rome and Romero 1998) and service learning can allow students to make the connection between the theoretical and the practical (Battistoni 1995). However, such innovative learning has not been traditionally applied to study-abroad pro-

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

grams (Engle 1995). In order to move beyond the "credit for travel" syndrome, we incorporate both an independent research project and experiential learning into our program. The research projects are related to some aspect of environmental and cultural conservation and tend to be interdisciplinary in nature. We tailor our two-week itinerary to our students' chosen topics, providing them opportunities not only to see and learn about the regional habitats and local environmental challenges but also to interview local experts one on one, to visit business sites important to the local economy, and to meet with other young people. Our students also participate in service-oriented programs like a watershed regeneration project and a beach clean-up at a sea-turtle nesting site. If our students knew no Spanish, none of the above activities would mean much. But even with the basic Spanish learned during a couple of semesters of college Spanish—even when several semesters had elapsed since finishing the requirement—students are able to use their language skills and realize that they have gained access to another culture and new perspectives.

Finally, we have established a continual year-long cycle that involves students from the previous year along with the students from the current year. Research suggests that one way to improve the study-abroad experience is to give students opportunities to tie what they have learned abroad to their coursework at home (Goodman 1998; Kramsch "Foreign" 1993). Study abroad should not be an isolated experience with no connection to the home institution's curriculum or to a student's campus opportunities. In our program, students give presentations to the college community on their independent research projects upon returning to campus, thus sparking interest in and providing background information for the new group. Both groups are involved in a fund-raiser to help a local charity in the community where we stay while in Costa Rica. We also encourage their participation in campus lectures or activities related to our course. Finally, if they are not already double majors (in Spanish and a science), we suggest related courses so that students can build upon what they were exposed to in our program (Table 1). Thus, their short-term study-abroad program is only one component of an on-going learning experience.

Costa Rica as Model

Despite having studied aspects of Hispanic culture in their lower-level Spanish classes, most of our students remember very little about the unique characteristics that differentiate one Latin American country from another. There exists a common misconception that Latin America is all the same. "Poverty," "underdevelopment," "illiteracy," "dictatorships," "civil wars," "large indigenous populations"—these are all characteristics of Latin America that our students express at the beginning of our course. By focusing on one country (currently Costa Rica), students begin to understand the diversity of Latin American culture. Costa Rica's atypical nature has turned out to be an excellent tool to break down many of the cultural stereotypes of Latin America that exist in the United States.

Costa Rica has a literacy rate of almost 95% (Chang-Rodríguez 2000). Less than one percent of its population is indigenous (Chang-Rodríguez 2000), and with the elimination of its army in 1949, Costa Rica has enjoyed a solid democratic, pacifist tradition that contrasts so sharply with many of its Central American neighbors. Since there is no army, Costa Rica can afford to allocate a major part of its budget to education (Chang-Rodríguez 2000), thus explaining in part the higher literacy rate. Costa Rica has also developed many progressive and innovative conservation efforts. It has become a model for ecotourism in developing countries around the world (McCarry 2000) and has protected almost 27% of its total land area (Rachowiecki 1997). However, it is not until we arrive in Costa Rica that students begin to understand the ramifications of these statistics and background information.

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Many of our students' misconceptions about Costa Rica are brought to light in their proposals for their independent study projects. One student wanted to study the use of traditional herbal medicines as practiced by the indigenous in Costa Rica. She hoped to interview a shaman about his natural medicinal practices. Most of her preliminary research focused on other countries with rain forests: Peru, Guatemala, Brazil. She assumed that since Costa Rica has rain forests, the comparison was legitimate. When we told her that the indigenous comprise less than one percent of the population in Costa Rica, she began to comprehend the diversity of Latin America and tentatively settled on a comparison between the use of traditional medicines in Guatemala and Costa Rica.

Once in Costa Rica, one of the biggest challenges for our students is reconciling their preconceived notions of Costa Rica with the information they receive from locals. The student mentioned above, for example, interviewed doctors at two local health clinics and learned that herbal medicines can not be prescribed at any of the country's official health clinics or hospitals. Thinking that her original thesis was now useless, she experienced extreme frustration. However, when she began to talk to locals about their health care practices, she learned that especially in small, remote villages where health clinics did not exist until recently, the use of traditional herbal remedies has indeed flourished. Furthermore, locals expressed concern that knowledge and memory of these remedies seem to be decreasing as more health clinics open up in all corners of the country. Until she talked with locals, this student resisted changing her preconceived notions about what she would find in Costa Rica. Although she previously assumed that Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Peru were all the same since they are all in Latin America and have rain forests, this student learned not only how Costa Rica is different but also came up with some very relevant conclusions about the need to record in writing the traditional knowledge of herbal remedies.

Many of our students come with a strong science background and often do not include any mention of culture in their initial research project proposal. One student wanted to study sea-turtle conservation and provided us with an in-depth account of sea-turtle nesting practices and the research that has been carried out in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. When we suggested that she consider the cultural component of her topic, she admitted later on that she did not know what importance culture could possibly have on turtle conservation. What we consistently find is that once we spend time in Costa Rica, the interconnectedness of science, culture, language, and conservation becomes apparent in just about everything we do. About half-way through the trip (after talking with many conservationists and seeing some of their efforts), the same student erroneously concluded that conservationist attitudes are such a strong, traditional component of Costa Rican culture that similar projects could never work in the United States. However, she later discovered that our guide, as well as many other guides in Tortuguero, used to kill sea turtles for a living. The local guides had to learn that in the long run a live turtle is worth more to them than a dead one. Our student learned that often conservation is a result of financial incentive rather than some sort of inherent desire to save the environment. By the end of the trip she realized she could not ignore the "culture" of the town or the country when researching her "scientific" project.

Finally, many students learn that what they consider to be language errors actually turn out to be the result of cultural assumptions. Since most students arrive with little confidence in Spanish, they naturally blame their own language deficiencies when local Costa Ricans do not understand their questions. One year, two students were studying different aspects of the "Americanization" of Costa Rican culture. During their interactions with locals, they would ask, "¿Qué piensa Ud. de la americanización de su cultura?" and would be received with blank stares. After several days of blank stares

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

and vague responses, the students, through trial and error, realized that even though "americanización" is a word in Spanish, its meaning was not clear to those in Costa Rica (nor, they concluded, to those in other parts of the world). When the students began to give examples of what they meant by "americanización," the Costa Ricans overwhelmingly replied that what our students were referring to was not "americanización" but rather "modernización." Many locals expressed that Costa Rica has just as much right as the United States to become "modernized," and indirectly, began to teach our students valuable lessons in the very complex relationship between developed and developing countries.

One might ask why we have titled our course "Environmental and Cultural Conservation in Latin America" when our focus is currently Costa Rica. One explanation is practical in nature: if in the future we decide to go to Ecuador, Honduras, or Peru instead of Costa Rica, the faculty will not have to approve a new course and the Office of the Registrar will not have to create a new course number. However, we also feel that for students with very vague and often stereotypical notions of Latin America, visiting and researching one country helps them to begin to understand the diversity within Latin America. Through both their preliminary research and their conversations with Costa Ricans, our students are confronted with both contrasts and similarities between Costa Rica and other Latin American countries. Costa Rica, by virtue of being atypical, turns out to be very typical.

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Interdepartmental, interdisciplinary collaboration is the key to successful short-term programs. If we are to show the relevance of language use to non-language majors, as well as to our colleagues in other departments, we in foreign languages cannot be the sole creators of short-term study-abroad programs.

There is a wide variety of interdisciplinary programs in Spanish that could be developed, depending on the academic interests of participating faculty. Sample topics that would focus on the relation between Spanish, Hispanic culture, and other disciplines include: Spain's Involvement in the European Union; Women's Issues in Latin America (or Spain); Community Health and Education in Latin America; Indigenous Cultures: Past and Present. All of these topics would allow for interaction with local community groups, schools, local experts, or businesses abroad, and would require the use of Spanish to communicate.

Developing such collaborations requires time and energy. If not already proficient in another language, professors in other departments must make the effort to bring their linguistic abilities up to the level of students finishing the requirement. Likewise, language professors, especially those who are not native speakers (but perhaps even those who are), are suddenly confronted with a discipline-specific vocabulary that might seem foreign to them even in English. They must be willing to learn this vocabulary and its equivalencies in the foreign language. For these reasons, the support of the administration is essential to making such programs a reality. If an institution is committed to internationalizing its curriculum, it must be willing to offer financial support to those embarking on interdisciplinary endeavors.

Many may doubt that there is sufficient interest among students to carry out this sort of interdisciplinary language program. However, it is precisely the interdisciplinary nature of such programs that helps to attract a larger number of potential students. Since Environmental Studies is inherently interdisciplinary, we have been able to attract students not only from obvious departments such as Biology and Environmental Science, but also from Education, Political Science, History, Spanish, Anthropology, and Business. In order to promote the program and to identify qualified students, the participating faculty members automatically begin to interact with and rely on their colleagues in different departments, thus creating or strengthening academic links that

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

might have been weak or nonexistent before. Furthermore, although such interdisciplinary language programs need not be limited to Spanish, the ever-increasing enrollment in Spanish classes in colleges and universities across the country (Brod and Welles 2000) ensures a larger pool of students than in the other language groups.

As is the case for most team-taught, interdisciplinary courses, we as professors lose a little of our control in the "classroom" (especially when the classroom is often a rain forest or community health clinic in Costa Rica). In our case, neither of us is an expert in everything we teach. Many of the students know more about biology and botany than the Spanish professor, and some of the students know more Spanish than the Biology professor. However, it can be extremely meaningful for students to see their Biology professor speaking Spanish and their Spanish professor participating in a discussion of primary and secondary growth rain forests.

How to Initiate Such a Program

A central aspect of our program is a partnership between our college and the small town of Las Juntas de Abangares in Costa Rica. This partnership is facilitated by the Rainforest and Reef Conservation Fund, a nonprofit organization that assists secondary and post-secondary schools in the development of community-based educational programing in primarily tropical, developing countries. Since this organization is nonprofit, we can offer a reasonably priced program to our students and economic opportunities to the local community in Costa Rica. Our ongoing collaboration has allowed us to involve our students in the community in ways that traditional tourism or many other short-term study abroad programs often do not. But how do interested faculty members establish this sort of partnership?

Without a doubt, the biggest challenge facing faculty members who would like to initiate such a program is how to find potential partners, make contacts, and develop a collaboration. Although foreign language faculty might have more experience with study-abroad programs, it is often faculty in other departments who might be aware of potential partners due to their disciplinary research. In our case, it was the biology professor who knew of the non-profit Rainforest and Reef Conservation Fund (rainforest@mail.org) in Michigan and who made the initial contact. It is important not to limit yourselves to resources available on traditional study-abroad programs. Consider your own community: Are there nonprofit organizations that have sites or contacts in foreign countries? Consider organizations that already develop educational travel programs and might be willing to tailor one of their programs to your interests. One such organization is Global Exchange (www.globalexchange.org), but by searching the Web and by making your colleagues aware of your intentions, you will find other potential partners.

Outcomes

Many students enter college with a vague notion of why knowing a foreign language is important. For example, many in lower-level Spanish classes elect Spanish because they see it as a practical language. They might think it will be useful for their careers, or they might see the increasing presence of Spanish speakers in this country and realize that there is the possibility of using the language here without going abroad. However, this notion is usually accompanied by the misconception that they will be fluent at the end of their required language experience (see Rivers 1992). When they see that they are far from fluent at the end of the requirement, they deem the experience a waste of time and pass on negative impressions of language-learning to their peers, faculty advisors, and parents. As time passes and they forget more of their foreign language skills, having studied a foreign language seems increasingly irrelevant to their overall college experience (see Krueger 1993).

However, by connecting what students

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

do in the language classroom to what they do in their majors and minors, and by letting them experience first-hand the interconnectedness of language, culture, and other disciplines, we shift their unrealistic goal from "becoming fluent in two to four semesters" to attaining a level of competence that will allow them entry into other cultures and perspectives.

We have found that this sort of short-term program is ideally suited for first- and second-year college students. Traditionally, students go abroad during their junior year. However, as indicated earlier, many students who are not language majors never even consider studying abroad in a program where English is not the primary language of instruction. By involving younger students in short-term study-abroad programs, we have found they are more likely to find a way to fit a longer-term study-abroad experience in a Spanish-speaking country into their academic career (Table 1). For example, in 1998 half of the first- and second-year students went on to study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. In 1999, all of the first- and second-year students went on to study abroad or have plans to do so. After our 2000 trip, four of the seven first- and second-year students have indicated an interest in study abroad. Based on these outcomes, we recommend the development of more short-term interdisciplinary study-abroad programs in Spanish that target first- and second-year students who are completing the language requirement. Although we welcome students of any year into our program, it is precisely with the first- and second-year students that we have had most success. Not only are they more likely to study abroad in their junior year, they are also more likely to become double majors in science and Spanish (Table 1).

Although we realize that ours is a self-selecting group, there is evidence that this sort of interdisciplinary short-term study-abroad experience can influence the academic interests and attitudes of upper-class students as well. Upon return, many juniors and seniors have enrolled in classes outside their major concentration in courses related to Latin America, the environment, or botany, and a few have even continued with Spanish after having previously discarded the option (Table 1). Even those who have not continued with Spanish report a change of attitude. Many were terrified of the language component of the program before leaving the country, but then found it very satisfying to be able to communicate in Spanish with locals. It was the first time they used Spanish outside the classroom in an authentic environment, and many were surprised that they could actually carry on a conversation. Many of these same students were those who included no mention of culture in their proposal for the independent research project. When we read their final papers (written part in Spanish, part in English upon return to the United States), students invariably connect local Costa Rican culture and environmental conservation, and show a much keener awareness of the diversity of Latin American culture. More quantitative and qualitative research is needed, but initial evidence supports that this type of interdisciplinary short-term study-abroad program can encourage more students to study abroad for an extended period, further develop their interdisciplinary interests, deepen their understanding of Latin American culture and diversity, and alter their attitudes towards language study in general.

Most colleges and universities throughout the country express commitment to internationalization and interdisciplinary programs. However, this commitment has often been more superficial than substantial. The type of interdisciplinary short-term study-abroad program described here is one way to implement these institutional goals, but successful implementation of such programs requires strong support from the faculty and administration of one's institution. Student demand has been high, and in the end, this self-sustaining program costs the university nothing more than the equivalent of salary for a summer school course. Our hope is that as more programs of this sort are created, we will instill new attitudes towards language study and cul-

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

tural awareness. Furthermore, by using language in its cultural context to explore another discipline, academic departments, majors, and graduation requirements cease to be as insular and begin truly to show students what it takes to be prepared for real world problem-solving.

■ Works Cited

Anderson, Keith, Wendy Allen, and León Narváez. 1993. "The Applied Foreign Language Component in the Humanities and the Sciences" in Krueger, 103–113.

Battistoni, Richard. 1995. "Service Learning, Diversity, and the Liberal Arts Curriculum." *Liberal Education* 81: 30–35.

Brod, Richard and Elizabeth B. Welles."Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1998." *ADFL Bulletin* 31 (2000): 22–29.

Chang-Rodríguez, Eugenio. *Latinoamérica: su civilización y su cultura."* Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2000.

Davis, James. *Interdisciplinary Courses and Team Teaching: New Arrangements for Learning*. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education and The Oryx Press, 1995.

Engle, John. "Creating More Rigorous and More Appropriate Study-Abroad Programs." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 41, 27 (1995): A56.

Freed, Barbara F., ed. *Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995.

Goodman, Allan. "Opening Doors and Opening Minds: Why Both Are Needed for the 21st Century." Speech at the USIA/ETS Conference on International Education, Sept 24, 1998. http://www.iie.org/svcs/usiaets.htm.

Janzen, Daniel H. "Biocultural Restoration." *Science* 233 (1988): 243–244.

Jurasek, Richard. "Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum: A Case History from Earlham College and a Generic Rationale" in Krueger, 85–102.

Kramsch, Claire. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. New York: Oxford U P, 1993.

—. "Foreign Languages for a Global Age." *ADFL Bulletin* 25 (1993): 5–12.

Krueger, Merle and Frank Ryan, eds. *Language and Context: Discipline- and Context-Based Approaches to Language Study*. Lexington, MA: D.C.Heath & Co., 1993.

McCarry, John. "Suriname: Can the Rain Forest Save South America's Youngest Nation?" *National Geographic* 197 (2000): 38–55.

Patrikis, Peter C, ed. *Language Learning and Liberal Education*. Chicago Conferences on Liberal Education and the Consortium for Language Teaching and Learning, Proceedings of the April 15–17, 1988 Conference, University of Chicago.

Primack, Richard. "Tropical Community Dynamics and Conservation Biology." *Bioscience* 42 (1992): 818–820.

Rachowiecki, Rob. *Costa Rica*. Oakland, California: Lonely Planet Publications, 1997.

Rivers, Wilga M. *Teaching Languages in College: Curriculum and Content*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co., 1992.

Rome, A. and B. Romero. "Enhancing Conservation Education Opportunities in Tropical Countries: A Case Study of Belize." *Journal of Environmental Education* 30 (1998): 34–39.

Table 1.

Student outcomes after participating in interdisciplinary program *Environmental and Cultural Conservation in Latin America.* Data includes: program year, destination country, number of student participants (with number of first- and second- year students in parentheses), number of students that took courses in science and Spanish upon return, the number of participants with double majors (or major/minor) in science and Spanish, and the number of students that went on to study abroad for a semester or year or applied to the Peace Corps after the completion of the course.

Year	Destination	Participants	Span.&Sci Courses	Double majors	Abroad
1997	Guatemala	2	2	1	1
1998	Costa Rica	10 (4)	3 (1)	2 (1)	3 (2)
1999	Costa Rica	10 (4)	7 (4)	3 (2)	4 (4)
2000	Costa Rica	10 (7)	NA	NA	NA

This content downloaded from 128.248.155.225 on Thu, 31 Dec 2015 13:27:15 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions