

2014

## Appendix: "Study Abroad and Experiential Learning"

Steve Bell  
*Old Dominion University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ourj>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bell, Steve (2014) "Appendix: "Study Abroad and Experiential Learning"," *OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 2 , Article 26.

DOI: 10.25778/716a-3p24

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/ourj/vol2/iss1/26>

This Editorial Material is brought to you for free and open access by ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in OUR Journal: ODU Undergraduate Research Journal by an authorized editor of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

Steve Bell

## Study Abroad as Experiential Learning

The Institute of International Education reported on November 17, 2014, that 289,408 U.S. university students studied abroad for academic credit in academic year 2012-2013, the year preceding Dr. Finley-Croswhite's spring 2014 ODU "Paris/Auschwitz" Study Abroad course/program. 2012-2013 Study Abroad enrollments are a 2.1% increase over the previous academic year, and they are expected to rise in the coming years. Study Abroad enrollments have more than tripled over the past two decades; nevertheless, only 1.5% of U.S. university students studied abroad in 2012-2013. Thus, the ODU students who participated in the 2014 "Paris/Auschwitz" course/program – and all U.S. university students who study abroad – are very much the exception.

I found the students' learning and reflections from the "Paris/Auschwitz" Study Abroad course/program to be gripping, wide-ranging, and deeply meaningful. Various students reflected that visiting Holocaust sites may be construed as 'dark tourism,' and that dark tourism can be both sickening and educationally beneficial. While challenging and uncomfortable at times, Study Abroad presents extraordinary, raw learning experiences whereby students can explore, wrestle with, and come to develop a personal understanding of important questions, issues, decisions, and outcomes *in situ* and first-hand.

Following the spring break 2014 international sojourn to Paris and Auschwitz, the students presented to the ODU campus community their Study Abroad reflections. While listening to the students, I was struck by the passion and conviction in their voices. Individually, students shared passages from their journals on experiences, conversations, or locations that had resonated with them. Fittingly, each student's reflection differed in content, point-of-view, and impression. Yet all reflections were earnest, personal, and meaningful. This event provided students a forum to articulate the complex and conflicting feelings the journey from Norfolk to Paris to Auschwitz had generated in them, feelings that were shared with the campus community and will undoubtedly influence them and others for many years to come.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2008) asserted in their book *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* that Study Abroad is one of a select number of high-impact educational activities. The students' reflections on their experiences and learning on the "Paris/Auschwitz" Study Abroad course/program certainly had a deep, meaningful impact on me. And I pledge to do all I can to develop more high-impact educational Study Abroad activities – like the "Paris/Auschwitz" course/program – for many more ODU students going forward. As mentioned earlier, Study Abroad program enrollments continue to increase annually. Yet, as illustrated in the student reflections published here, the educational impact of Study Abroad is often too valuable to limit to fewer than 2% of the U.S. university student population.

Students often refer to their Study Abroad experiences as life-changing ones; experiential learning that causes intense reflection and insight. The student reflections in this journal as well as the commentary by Dr. Finley-Croswhite and Dr. Bebber unmistakably reveal that the "Paris/Auschwitz" Study Abroad experience was life-changing for our ODU students. The memories of the Study Abroad experience will linger in the way in which our ODU students live out what they learned on the trip over the rest of their lives.