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# Going to Taiwan in Fraught Times: Affordability, Learning Productivity, and Positive Student Experiences

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## Abstract

This study adopted a participant observation method and reflected on planning and operating a nine-week nine-credit Taiwanese culture and Mandarin study abroad program. The program ran successfully in the face of surging COVID-19 cases in Kaohsiung and increased political tension associated with Nancy Pelosi's visit in Taiwan during the summer of 2022. This program resulted from a new international partnership between West Virginia University (WVU) in the United States and National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan (NSYSU) through the Taiwan's Huayu Bilingual Exchanges of Selected Talent (BEST) initiative funded by Taiwan's Ministry of Education in 2021. This paper discusses how the administrative and pedagogical collaboration between WVU and NSYSU has made the study abroad programs affordable and accessible for students and productive for WVU student and faculty participants alike. The primary objective of the paper is twofold. First, the faculty lead's experience is shared to offer insights for higher education institutions in the U.S. and Taiwan interested in taking part in BEST or other grant-funded programs as they evaluate their options for developing study abroad programs. Second, administrators and faculty who have completed their study abroad programs can reflect on the feedback from both students and the faculty lead in the study as they assess their programs.

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**Introduction**

In the past three decades, the number of study abroad students has multiplied by approximately four and a half times, although the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a steep decline by 53% from 347,099 to 162,633 U.S. students receiving credits during the academic year of 2019-2020 (Opendoors, 2021). Many college language programs promote study abroad opportunities, and second language (L2) learners typically also enjoy learning through direct engagement with languages and cultures abroad. According to Kinginger (2009), study abroad is beneficial in enhancing L2 learners' pragmatic abilities (e.g., to perform speech acts and start and end conversations) and sociopragmatic skills (e.g., to be aware of social conventions and use language forms in a culturally appropriate manner). In addition to tangible gains in linguistic and cultural competencies, research suggests that study abroad participants generally found their study abroad experiences to be academically and personally fulfilling in terms that connect with their future study and career plans (e.g., Allen, 2013; Wolcott, 2013). Moreover, study abroad experiences encourage participants to earn graduate degrees and work abroad (e.g., Franklin, 2010) and are found to be the most influential undergraduate experiences for a majority of study abroad participants (e.g., Paige et al., 2009). Study abroad programs impact participants' personal, social, and professional growth and foster interpersonal and problem-solving skills, empathy, independence, and self-confidence; these qualities can enhance the global awareness and global mobility of participants (e.g., Drum et al., 2022; Okken et al., 2019), as will be seen in the participants' reflections on their study abroad experiences in this study.

Notwithstanding these positive outcomes, less than 11 percent of US undergraduates participate in study abroad programs (Redden, 2019). Many factors contribute to students' and faculty's decisions to engage in a program and their experiences within such programs. Factors include but are not limited to financial considerations, family circumstances, religious considerations, program structures, learning styles, institutional support, and local cultures and laws. Among the available opportunities, study abroad programs yield varying degrees of success in academic outcomes and student satisfaction. In light of these challenges and the reality that faculty play a pivotal role in initiating such

education abroad opportunities at an institution, this study attempts to identify what faculty leads can do to make study abroad programs more affordable, productive, positive, and impactful so more students can have access to study abroad opportunities and find their experiences abroad valuable. Program satisfaction perceived by participants differs from their academic growth (e.g., language proficiency gains on a standardized test), and this study aims to discuss the former. To this end, the paper analyzes a nine-week, nine-credit Taiwanese culture and Mandarin study abroad program resulting from a new international partnership partially funded by a grant and an endowment. The quantitative results of the institutional student evaluations of teaching and the post-program questionnaire conducted by the Office of Global Office at the home institution revealed that the study abroad program in question was rated five out of five across the question items (e.g., the communication was clear, course content was thought-provoking, the course materials were useful to course objectives, the instructor fostered a positive learning environment and well-organized, students would recommend this program to others, and the program was cost-effective). Moreover, the post-program assessments administered by the researcher also indicated that the participants, the host university, and the faculty lead considered the program a positive experience despite the fraught times filled with uncertainties caused by the pandemic and political tensions between Taiwan and China when Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. To explore the elements in the program operation that contributed to the program's affordability, learning productivity, and positive student experiences, the researcher, who served as the faculty lead in the program, reflected on her observations of and students' and staff's comments on the cross-institutional administration, pedagogy, and collaboration. This study aims to share the experiences with readers who are interested in seeking international joint efforts to enrich their study abroad programs.

## Context

West Virginia University (WVU) offers study abroad programs with a selection of destinations across disciplines in varying formats, such as a faculty-led summer program in Taiwan and a semester-long experience in a partner university in Hungary. In 2021, WVU in the United States and National Sun Yat-Sen University (NSYSU) in Taiwan established a new international partnership. Part of the institutional agreement offers scholarships to support WVU students in studying Mandarin and other subjects as full-time students at NSYSU for

varying lengths of time. This initiative aims to promote Mandarin learning and intercultural exchanges between students in the U.S. and Taiwan, and the scholarship awards are channeled through the Taiwan's Huayu Bilingual Exchanges of Selected Talent (BEST) grant project funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan.

The Chinese Studies Program (CSP) in the Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at WVU is the point of contact between the two institutions and works closely with the study abroad offices on both sides for recruitment, selection, visa applications, logistical arrangement, alignment for course equivalency between WVU and NSYSU, and program designs, implementations, as well as evaluations. In the calendar year of 2022, CSP has supported 13 WVU students to study abroad at NSYSU for durations ranging from nine weeks to 12 months. The program has two models. The faculty-led model offers nine WVU credits during the summer, and a CSP faculty member serves as the instructor of record, organizes the program, and travels with the students. On the other hand, the second model consists of semester- or year-long experiences and provides students credit from NSYSU that will be transferred to WVU via the Admissions at WVU. This paper will focus on the faculty-led model that ran from June to August 2022 for nine weeks.

## **Faculty Lead, Selection Process, and Participants**

Dr. Wu was the faculty lead of the program, and she was also the researcher of this study. Dr. Wu was the J. Vance and Florence Johnson Endowed Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and directed both the Chinese Studies and Japanese Programs at WVU at the time of the study. She originated from Taiwan and earned her bachelor's degree from NSYSU. As a result, she was familiar with the people, culture, and logistics in Taiwan and at NSYSU. Dr. Wu took the lead in establishing the institutional partnership between WVU and NSYSU in 2021. Hence, she fully understood the details of the signed agreement and was able to utilize the resources provided by both campuses to develop her study abroad program. During the nine-week study abroad program, in her role of the faculty lead, Dr. Wu was the instructor of record for all the three classes, traveled with the students, and served as the medium between students, WVU, and NSYSU throughout the program.

Dr. Wu's teaching duty during the nine-week program included delivering in-class instruction for approximately twenty hours per week,

leading three to four cultural field trips on a weekly basis, grading assignments, and being available and present whenever needs arose during the entirety of the program. On the other hand, the administrative responsibility required Dr. Wu to communicate without delay to NSYSU constantly and consistently, keep an accurate record of expenses, arrange logistics for field trips, and document the program with photographs and videos. In her role as the researcher, Dr. Wu observed the program operation and student participation, collected data, and took detailed notes of events. Dr. Wu's multiple roles in this project, her involvement in this new institutional partnership, and her background in education abroad as a faculty lead on several programs provided varied perspectives in interpreting the findings.

The study abroad program was approved for five participants based on the proposed budget, and nine applications were received in the fall of 2021. CSP at WVU is a tight-knit community, and Dr. Wu's roles as the program coordinator and a faculty member gave her the opportunity to know individual students in the program well. Knowledge about the applicants in terms of their academic aspirations, character, maturity, and adaptability aided the selection process. In contrast to the United States, the COVID-19-related policies in Taiwan during the spring of 2022 required international travelers to be quarantined for 14 days in a government-approved quarantine hotel and mandated that masks be worn in public spaces such as subways and classrooms. Taking into consideration these government requirements and the nature of the program (e.g., the length of the program, the curriculum rigor, the hot weather in southern Taiwan, and domestic-student residence halls), Dr. Wu interviewed the applicants and selected five participants whom she believed would most benefit from this particular program, represent WVU and the United States well, and make contributions to the collaborative learning of the group.

Five WVU student participants traveled to Taiwan with Dr. Wu on the WVU faculty-led program in June 2022. The students were Ava, Mia, Sophia, Oliver, and Ben (all pseudonyms). Ava was a rising sophomore double majoring in Chinese Studies and Forensic Examiner; Mia was a rising senior double majoring in Chinese Studies and Art Education; Sophia was a rising senior double majoring in Music and English and minoring in Chinese Studies; Oliver was a rising junior majoring in Aerospace Engineering and minoring in Chinese Studies; Ben was a rising senior double majoring in Criminology and History

who had taken Chinese language courses with the program for four semesters prior to the study abroad program.

While in Taiwan, the students typically had their classes in the morning, had group lunch and field trips and cultural activities with the faculty lead and guest lecturers in the afternoon and on some weekends, and enjoyed independent explorations of the city and reviewed their class work in the evening and on the weekend. Upon completion of the study abroad program, the students received a total of nine credits from WVU for the three courses they completed during the nine-week program overseas: Intensive Mandarin II, Taiwanese Culture, and Chinese Cinema. Student participants were asked by the researcher to share their ongoing feedback during the program and then complete a post-program evaluation to discuss their experiences pertaining to administration, curriculum, communication, and learning outcomes four weeks after their return to WVU.

## **Study Significance and Objective**

US-Taiwan institutional partnerships in higher education that are required by BEST and the BEST grant program itself are new initiatives, which launched in 2021. Hence, studies on BEST-associated implementations or outcomes have not yet been available. Nevertheless, the BEST funding and administrative support were integral to the success of the WVU nine-week study abroad program in Taiwan in the summer 2022. Therefore, it is significant to share the experience that this pioneer group had with study abroad researchers and practitioners. This paper discusses how the collaboration between WVU and NSYSU through the BEST grant program has made the study abroad programs affordable and accessible for students and productive for WVU student and faculty participants alike. Based on the outcomes of and feedback on the nine-week language and cultural study abroad program in Taiwan, the researcher reflects on the institutional collaboration from administrative and pedagogical perspectives. Student voices are integrated to contextualize and support the analyses. The purpose of the paper is to offer experiential insights from students, faculty lead, and staff for the U.S. and Taiwan higher education institutions who are interested in taking part in BEST or other grant-funded programs. The considerations discussed can increase program affordability, learning productivity, and positive student experiences, and readers can evaluate their options in creating and developing study abroad programs and reflect on the programs that they have completed.

## Methods and Data Collection

This study design used participant observation as the research method; the researcher was immersed in the day-to-day activities with the five student participants in a nine-week study abroad program in Taiwan. This methodology allowed the researcher to observe the student participants and events in as many scenarios as possible during the program (e.g., formal and informal exchanges; in a classroom setting and on a field trip). Through participation in the program in addition to observations, the researcher studied the program and its participants by comparing specific activities with student feedback in a variety of settings over nine weeks. The observations were conducted based on the three primary ethnographic principles (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). First, observations are contextualized both in the immediate setting, where behavior is observed, and in the relevant context, which provides the background to understand the goal and outcome of the observed behavior. Second, judgement on the importance of the event to the study is deferred until the field study has been completed. As noted by Jurasek et al. (1996), ethnography is naturalistic, as most of the topics under investigation cannot be predetermined nor are self-evident at the outset. Instead, research questions and directions emerge as the study progresses and the researcher becomes more familiar with the setting. Hence, hypotheses emerge as the study continues. Third, chains of events are observed more than once in an attempt to establish the reliability of observations.

Following the three aforementioned principles, the researcher, who played multiple roles in the program, was regularly engaged in a memo-ing and reflection process throughout the program. This process is considered important for data processing in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). Memo-ing focused on documenting information of each student as a case report (e.g., academic background, learning goals and outcomes, and reflection); describing emerging events, solutions, and decisions; and analyzing and reflecting on the data to provide a more comprehensive view of individual incidents. With the approval from the Institutional Review Board at WVU, the reflections in this article are based on the following data sources: materials from the orientation and meetings; field notes of the faculty lead that documented her observations of events and verbal interactions among participants; emails, student assignments, written and oral feedback from students and staff on both campuses; images and videos clips taken during the program; class notes from

discussions and reflections; institutional student evaluations of teaching; and post-program assessments. These data served as evidence and supporting narratives to provide contexts and illustrate points.

That the researcher studied the program as a participant made her an instrument throughout the data collection. The validity of the data was addressed primarily through the following two strategies. Triangulation was adopted to approach data from diverse perspectives (Patton, 2002) so a phenomenon could be verified and analyzed multidimensionally. In addition, participants were offered the member-check opportunity to review the data, examine the trustworthiness of the findings, and reflect on the analyses. The concept of reliability in qualitative research, on the other hand, concerns the extent to which the replication of the current study can be achieved (Merriam, 1998). Since the participants' behaviors in the study and the thought process of the researcher as a data collection instrument were both dynamic, the reliability can appear problematic (Simpson, 2017). Nevertheless, the implementation of triangulation, multiple observations of similar events, and member checks could improve the dependability and consistency of the findings in this study. Moreover, this study examined a particular program in a specific grant cycle and in a specific geographic location. That is, the research purpose is not to attain generalizability of the findings. Rather, the study is intended to report findings that readers might consider for their own study abroad sites with their parameters factored in. Hence, as emphasized by Loughran and Northfield (1998), if a finding contributes to a better understanding or improves the researcher' and readers' situations, then readers are "accepting the account as reliable and valid for personal purposes" (p. 4).

## **Complexity of Using Reflection as a Research Method**

Data in this study were primarily collected through the researcher's observations and reflection, the participants' self-reports, and the staff's comments. Reflection is a very important mental process both in personal and professional lives (Mortari, 2015). As a research method, critical reflection is a crucial cognitive practice of self-inquiry that helps the researcher become "the subject of his or her experience" (p. 1). Through reflection, the researcher of this study investigated her own pedagogical and administrative considerations and actions in relation to the curriculum and program participants, constructed her



practical knowledge out of the experiences and introspection, and aimed to improve her study abroad administration and teaching based on the newly generated knowledge. Other advantages of collecting participants' self-reporting data in this study include the details in narratives, data validity (e.g., the respondents directly shared their opinions, instead of making inferences), easy accessibility to the data, time and cost efficiency in data collection, and multiple opportunities for the researcher to verify data accuracy (e.g., triangulation and member checks). However, self-reports and reflection can be subject to limitations. Memory bias can be a factor; as Pekrun (2020) observes, "self-report is lagging behind the phenomena it captures" (p. 187). In this study, some data were reported through a retrospective process at a later point, such as the institutional student evaluations of teaching and the post-program survey. As a result, memory bias can affect the data accuracy. Social desirability bias could also occur when the researcher, participants, and staff members believed certain answers were preferred and thus provided socially desirable responses through exaggeration, understatement, or omission. In addition, the individual respondents in this study had varying levels of introspective ability in assessing their experiences, and such ability could have an impact on the depth, breadth, and accuracy of their reflection and self-reports. While reflection and self-reporting data are subject to limitations, self-report and reflectiveness are considered "indispensable" (Pekrun, 2020, p. 186) in assessing the mental processes (e.g., motivation, decisions, and strategies) of learners, including students and educators (Brookfield, 1995). Reflection in this study allowed the researcher to identify, inquire, examine, refine, evaluate, and share the teaching and administrative practices for readers to consider.

## Reflections

Reflections are focused on the considerations that the faculty lead regards as critical in relation to study abroad program affordability, learning productivity, and positive student experiences in this cross-institutional context.

### Identifying Financial Resources

It can be an exciting challenge for faculty to plan, market, implement, and assess study abroad programs. For a program that receives varied funding sources and joint efforts from two partner institutions, the lead faculty's role is particularly crucial. This individual serves as the hub that connects available financial, pedagogical, and administrative resources and builds a community

for students, faculty, and staff to enjoy the learning activities in an intentional, safe, and fun manner. Being the hub, the faculty lead can expect to spend a considerable amount of time working with different institutional entities to establish and maintain the program. In addition, as Medora et al. (2022) note, the faculty lead should enjoy being around students at all times and “being their tour guide, instructors, mother hen, and disciplinarian” (p. 164). This statement is supported by Mia’s description of her faculty lead in the study abroad program in question: “During those two months, she was not only our professor, but also our advocate, tour guide, and –at times– stand-in parent.” Mia also described her faculty lead as a “lifeline” for the duration of the program overseas.

For the program reviewed in this article, both WVU and NSYSU were equal stakeholders. In a program with dual systems, one of the first tasks during the planning stage was for the faculty lead to straighten out what financial, administrative, and pedagogical resources were available and who was responsible for what on both home and host campuses to ensure direct and effective communication consistently throughout the planning, execution, and post-program evaluation phases. For example, affordability is often one of the first considerations that students have when choosing a program. Hence, the faculty lead needs to research what resources can be garnered to lower the student cost without affecting the program quality. The program in question was an WVU faculty-led program that carried credits and was taught by an WVU faculty member. The program’s nature qualified it to receive a generous subsidy from the J endowment at WVU, and the per student cost was significantly reduced as a result. Moreover, the institutional partnership with NSYSU, the length of the program (over two months), and the number of Mandarin instructional hours (beyond 120 hours) made the program eligible for the BEST grant from the MOE in Taiwan. As a result, the student cost for the program received an additional reduction. In an effort to further lower the student cost, the faculty lead applied for an institutional humanities grant for pedagogy innovation, and the award was able to cover a portion of activity expenses. With all the three funding sources established, the faculty lead was able to market the program at a more attractive price. As Sophia commented on the financial aspect of the program, “the program was extremely affordable for the length of time we stayed and amount of activities we participated in.”

Moreover, as soon as the student participants were enrolled in the program in February 2022, the faculty lead began preparing them to apply for a variety of institutional and nationally competitive scholarships to help support their program costs. For most students in the program, applying for scholarships to alleviate their financial responsibility was an unfamiliar process. In addition, some students considered it to be difficult, if not impossible, to get a scholarship. As such, the faculty lead organized a list of applicable scholarships, explained the application processes, emphasized the importance and benefits of seeking the awards, cultivated the mindset that scholarships were attainable, encouraged students to apply, helped them with their application essays, wrote letters of recommendation on their behalf, and ensured that they met the application deadlines. To incentivize students, the faculty lead used a small portion of the CSP's fund as seed money to help students get started with their scholarship application processes. On behalf of CSP, the faculty lead offered students a small CSP study abroad scholarship to those who had submitted two institutional or external scholarship applications, with the amount doubled for students who were awarded at least one scholarship. This strategy successfully led all five students in the group to submit at least two scholarship applications and thus make the program more affordable. Fortunately, all of the students received one or more awards in addition to the CSP's scholarship. When asked about how she paid for the program, Mia shared with pride and excitement that "[m]ost of my program fee was covered using the awards that I received."

The outcomes of the financial aspects of the program were generally positive; however, there were a few challenges. For example, securing the grants and scholarships, confirming the edibility of the program and students for each funding source (e.g., restrictions on citizenship and program length), verifying the funding applicability (e.g., restrictions of forms of spending and limits on funding duration), and directing the awarded funds into the right university accounts was a long process. This process required multiple proposal revisions and frequent communication with students and responsible offices. A lack of information clarity or timely responses could delay the process and cause frustration. In addition, two students were unable to pay for the program in full due to scholarship application rejections. Responding to those disappointments required encouragement but also solutions, such as conversations with the family, discussions with the financial aid office, and

exploration of additional funding resources from individual campus offices (e.g., the Dean's and Provost's Offices).

This section introduced strategies to help students afford their study abroad experiences. While challenges arose during the process, assisting students in attaining scholarships not only helped students reduce their expenses but also gain confidence and a sense of independence. Furthermore, the grant writing process also helped the faculty lead to grow professionally.

### Coordinate Pedagogical Resources

To enhance the program outcome and productivity, the faculty lead evaluated the available pedagogical resources and utilized the support across campuses to enrich the study abroad program with varying activities. Specifically, in addition to the grant, the institutional partnership also introduced opportunities for students to engage in guest lectures and hands-on activities on topics related to language and culture on NSYSU campus. To integrate these learning components into the three study abroad courses with WVU, align the two sets of learning objectives respectively from WVU and NSYSU, and reflect students' level of participation in the guest-led sessions on the syllabi, the faculty lead needed to coordinate the learning contents, pedagogies, and grading between WVU and NSYSU. The coordination was an ongoing process from the pre-program planning (e.g., syllabus design) to post-program assessment stages (e.g., final grade submissions). There were several guest teachers that the faculty lead was unable to meet individually prior to their teaching on the host campus. Therefore, the faculty lead had to rely on the information provided by the Chinese Language Center (CLC) Director at NSYSU, who supervised the faculty and oversaw the curriculum on that end. In this circumstance, clear, consistent, and timely communication between the faculty lead and the CLC director for the expectations and adjustments became central to the program's success. NSYSU offered varied pedagogical resources ranging from materials (e.g., technology to teach pronunciation) as well as subject experts (e.g., film editor, surf coach, and folk artist) to contacts in educational travel agencies. To maximize the utility of these pedagogical resources, the faculty lead worked closely with the CLC director to identify available, workable, and cost-efficient pedagogical elements and staffing plans and then weave them into the curriculum to enrich and balance students' experiences.

Cross-institutional collaboration is typically encouraged in higher education. The ongoing coordination process described above yielded a program that engaged the student participants and met the institutional requirements on both ends, but the result was not attained without challenges. The CLC Director shared that she appreciated the opportunity for institutional collaboration with regard to pedagogy and guest lecturer staffing plan; however, the program operation would have been administratively and pedagogically easier had all the three courses been delivered in Mandarin only (e.g., the instructional languages for the Cinema and Taiwanese Culture courses were a mix of English and Chinese) and had the CLC instructors have been the primary instructors, as opposed to the guest lecturers. The CLC Director expressed concern that the CLC instructors who served as the guest lecturers had to remain on campus during the summer break without being offered a full salary due to their part-time status within the WVU program, in which the faculty lead taught the majority of the class sessions. Another concern of the CLC Director was related to the instructional language. The Chinese proficiency of the five student participants was approximately at the Intermediate-Mid level based on the ACTFL proficiency guideline (2012), and as a result, both the Cinema and Taiwanese Culture courses required the instructor to be able to deliver the lecture partially in English. CLC instructors were not trained to teach in English; consequently, this instructional reality limited the involvement of the CLC instructors. Finally, the CLC Director and the faculty lead both felt unsure how the pedagogy of teaching Chinese as a second language delivered by CLC instructors would be perceived by the student participants, who were used to learning Chinese as a foreign language. For example, in a Chinese as a second language class delivered by a CLC guest lecturer, the instructional language was 100% Chinese, English was not used, and vocabulary words were immediately related to authentic local cultures and artifacts that were unfamiliar to the student participants. In contrast, in a Chinese as a foreign language class at WVU, English can be used to facilitate students' comprehension, and Mandarin dialogues in the textbook use general vocabulary words.

Despite the concerns described above, when commenting on the pedagogical resources offered by NSYSU, Ben shared that "the online tool the NSYSU teacher used to help me with the tones was effective. I also enjoyed the cultural activities, especially the water sports and Chinese checkers with the instructors from NSYSU." In addition, Ava noted how the language practice

sessions led by the guest teacher and the Cinema course taught by the faculty lead balanced each other and enhanced her learning outcome as follows:

I liked how we learned in the language class were conversation skills centered around life in Taiwan, so it was easy to practice what we learned in the real world. Also, the movie class was cool because we could practice applying our language skills related to the movies in a more in-depth way.

In the following passage, Sophia also shared her learning experience with the three distinctive courses that integrated joint teaching resources from both sides and thus enhanced her learning outcome and the curriculum productivity.

I enjoyed all three of the classes, especially taking them together. I felt that the classes built on each other, and each course offered a different focus. I also appreciate that the structure of each class was different, which made them feel a little less like classes and more like an extended field trip.

When asked to share thoughts on lodging and the travel component as parts of her learning experience abroad, Mia expressed the following:

Having the freedom in living on campus, being able to walk about the city, and interacting with locals was very helpful in immersing myself in the culture. Also, the activities we did were great as well. We explored Kaohsiung as well as other cities, learned about Taiwanese history, and interacted with different cultural elements. I really liked the mix of small excursions and activities during our week mixed with the Friday excursions where we would visit outside Kaohsiung to different areas of Taiwan. We always had a lot of fun in every instance. Also, spending a final week in Taipei was amazing. We went in many different trips around northern Taipei that week, and it offered more well-rounded view of the country.

The students' feedback illustrates their satisfaction with the curriculum, activities, and learning productivity—an outcome that resulted from the coordinated efforts between WVU and NSYSU. Nevertheless, it is important to note that student satisfaction with the curriculum and activities reported here is not an objective measurement of their academic gains in language proficiency or cultural knowledge. An administration of pre- and post-program tests would have been able to assess academic growth.

## Work with Administration Offices

In addition to financial and pedagogical resources, the faculty lead needed to work closely with administration units from both home and host campuses and be proactive in navigating the dual administrative processes. One example is the collaboration between the faculty lead and the Office of Global Affairs at WVU for the pre-trip budget planning, in-trip expense documentation, and post-trip charge reconciliation. During the pre-trip budget meetings, the faculty lead gathered information regarding cash withdrawal and use policies in the host country, institutional credit cards (e.g., emergency contact if the card does not work), and forms required to record different types of charges, such as cash use without receipts (e.g., street food vendors). When the faculty lead had questions, the Office of Global Affairs always promptly clarified the situation and offered assistance, which made the faculty lead feel confident that she had everything she needed to document the expenses once the program started.

For the nine-week program, accurate documentation of expenses while traveling was a challenging but important task to complete on a daily basis. WVU accepted receipts in a digital photo format, which made the documentation process easy. The challenge, however, lay in organizing the receipts systematically while the group was constantly on the go and documenting them following the instruction given by the university at the end of busy days. Nevertheless, daily efforts in book-keeping by the Office of Global Affairs' standards ensured success for the faculty lead when the post-trip reconciliation took place. All the charges were lined up in an Excel spreadsheet by the date, content, payment type, and justification; thus, the reconciliation for this nine-week program was approved at the institutional level in a relatively short time. A perspective from the Office of Global Affairs from WVU on the charge reconciliation process is included here to help faculty consider ways that can make the work easier for colleagues who support study abroad programs.

I think for these longer programs sending receipts regularly and doing multiple reports worked very well. One thing I really loved that you did is that you named your PDFs of the receipts to include the date, amount, and the description in the title. That was a tremendous help in finding and organizing our records to do the reconciliation. I appreciate that you were so organized. The cash use log that you created was great as well. It helped me to see if I had everything or if something was missing. I could also

checkmark what I used for each report and figure out what receipts there were remaining.

For study abroad programs to run successfully and for all the involved individuals to enjoy the experience of instituting a program from the ground up, support from varied entities was critical, and the study abroad office was certainly one critical partner during the process. The comment above serves as an example of positive interaction between faculty and an administrative office. The faculty lead in this study believed the efficient, courteous work relationship with the Office of Global Affairs from WVU and CLC from NSYSU greatly contributed to the program's success, increased her positive experience with the process, and motivated her to organize a program for the next year. She recognized that the nine-week program would have been very different, if made at all, had these administrative units and individuals not been as supportive as they were. The implication in this section is to encourage program leads to determine the work culture of their partners and their offices, work closely with them, and foster a trustworthy professional relationship with the collegiality necessary to sustain long-term partnerships, especially for annual study abroad programs.

### Communication With All the Involved Parties

Going on a study abroad program is a big financial, academic, and emotional investment for students, their parents, faculty, and institutions, and there are expectations, worries, questions, and processes to consider in preparing. In an effort for the community to progress through the process smoothly and enjoy the experience either as students or in supportive roles, it is important for the faculty lead to initiate and encourage prompt communication consistently and be proactive in identifying potential inquires and addressing them preemptively when appropriate. For the nine-week program in question, communication came in different forms, including regular email updates for students, parents, and study abroad staff on both campuses, orientation, course syllabi, detailed day-to-day itinerary, written policies, institutional learning management systems (e.g., Canvas and Blackboard), group and individual meetings, messages through a local instant communication app (e.g., Line), phone calls, and photo and video sharing on institutional social media. Timely communication helped the community members from both WVU and NSYSU stay informed, answer questions, lower anxiety, minimize confusion, and build a sense of inclusiveness. Inclusiveness



and positive bonding in study abroad communities can subsequently enhance student learning outcomes and personal development (e.g., Drum et al., 2022; Paige et al., 2009).

While in Taiwan, the faculty and students continued to use the institutional learning management system (i.e., eCampus), for material depository and retrieval, assignment submissions, test administration, announcements, and grading and feedback. The use of eCampus reduced the need for physical copies of the materials and the need to carry them around while travelling. In addition, since students were already familiar with the system, coursework-related communication through eCampus was centralized, convenient, effective, and recorded. In his comment on accessibility to course information, Ben noted that “the courses were through eCampus and easy to understand.” The faculty lead also affirmed that keeping course-related information streamlined on eCampus enhanced students’ access to materials and formalized communication. Having clear distinctions between formal and informal communication while abroad is particularly important. As the frequency of informal interaction between the faculty and students increases during the study abroad program, miscommunication can occur, and students can perceive informal interactions as an easing of academic rigor, which could potentially affect student learning outcomes. Hence, it is crucial to keep course-related information accessible, centralized, and formalized.

The following incident demonstrates the consequences when clear communication is absent. When the group was processed after deplaning in Taiwan, the students saw the airport authority talking with a college student from a peer institution in the United States. The student missed an important document that was mandatory during the pandemic in Taiwan. The student could not leave the arrival gate and had to be detained and repatriated on the next flight. When the group reflected on the incident, Oliver and Ben commented that they became appreciative of all the emails that reminded them of the documents necessary to pass through customs and immigration successfully at the airport. Sophia also noted in her post-program assessment that the faculty lead guided the group “through every step of the somewhat difficult process of obtaining our visas and the documents needed to enter Taiwan by sending consistent, yet not overbearing, reminders of when certain paperwork was due.” At the end of the program when the group reflected on the impact of the study abroad program on their academic and professional choices,

this unfortunate event was brought up again. The students agreed that if they had been sent back to the United States for the same reason that could have been easily avoided with effective communication, they would have been demoralized and would have been reluctant to participate study abroad programs in the future. The event and the students' reactions to it show the impact of good communication on students' experiences.

Open communication is critical not only for practical reasons but also for emotional support. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the United States visited Taiwan during the group's last week in Taipei, Taiwan. The long-standing political tension between China and Taiwan was intensified by Pelosi's visit. Leading up to Pelosi's arrival, the group and the faculty lead talked about the event, discussed the historical background of the political tensions, and shared worries for student safety from their family and friends in the United States. The group was scheduled to depart two days after Pelosi's visit, and according to the media, the immediate concerns for those traveling around Pelosi's visit were flight cancellations and possible military actions. During the dialogue with students over the dinner the night when Pelosi landed in Taipei, the faculty lead noted that she was paying close attention to the situation, was in touch with WVU, and would contact U.S. State Department if tensions escalated and evacuation became necessary. The open communication helped the group talk through the anxiety and view Pelosi's visit as an opportunity to see politics in action. Ben shared that he watched the events on the news with Oliver, and they both felt "surreal and excited" about being so close to Pelosi, the crowd, and the event, though they were worried about flight cancellations. Sophia shared their anxiety about the flights but was glad the group had the chance to address the situation. Mia reflected on this event as follows.

During the last half of my visit to Taiwan, there was a lot of talk in the news about whether or not Nancy Pelosi would make a visit to the island. Pelosi arrived during my final week while I was in Taipei. This time gave me very first-hand insight into what Taiwanese thought of America and the tensions between Taiwan and China. It felt a bit surreal to watch on the news as my country's House Speaker stepped foot on Taiwan and stayed just a few miles away.

The students' feedback above illustrates that open communication encouraged the group to understand the historical background, put the event in perspective, appreciate the experience, and ease anxieties.

Another aspect in relation to communication concerns potential miscommunication with students receiving information from individuals across two institutions. The study abroad program considered here took place during the pandemic. Travelling during the pandemic required additional steps to obtain visas, enter the host country, arrange quarantine accommodation, and return to the home country. During the orientation, the students, the faculty lead, and the staff from both the Office of Global Affairs at WVU and CLC at NSYSU assembled virtually for the first time and had the chance to get to know one another. While the faculty lead remained the information hub and the point of the contact for all the parties involved during the entirety of the program, students were encouraged to reach out to different staff members on both campuses for specific questions. For instance, any questions related to federal financial aid, international travel insurance, and passports needed to be directed to the Office of Global Affairs at WVU, whereas inquiries regarding quarantine meals, recommendations for local events, or on-campus gym access should be addressed to the CLC staff members. Nevertheless, there were questions that needed to be answered by multiple offices or individuals. Therefore, to minimize discrepancies or insufficiencies in information exchanges, the faculty lead asked to be copied on email communication among students, Office of Global Affairs at WVU, and CLC at NSYSU throughout the program. This strategy inevitably resulted in a large volume of messages in the faculty lead's inbox. However, the transparent communication allowed the faculty lead to stay informed and make timely interventions when necessary and appropriate.

With regard to information exchange via email, Ben described his visa application experience to support why he thought the communication between the two institutions and the Taiwan's consulate office in Washington D.C. was "well-coordinated and efficient." According to him, Ben did not understand the reason for "copying" someone on an email until he realized all the relevant individuals who had been copied on all the messages knew the details of his situation and were ready to step in and help him with his visa application even if those contacts copied on the emails had been just quiet recipients. Ben said that he was "surprised" by the effectiveness of the communication network that

connected different individuals, supported the program's operation, and made many things easier on his end. Mia also wrote about her communication experience working with the two institutions:

The coordination was great. I never had to wonder what was going on. There was a clear schedule that was always clearly revised on the rare occasions that there were any changes. My WVU professor and the NSYSU administrators had good communication with each other, so there was never confusion between parties. The process for getting our documents was also always made very clear by WVU, the study abroad office, and NSYSU. They were very sure to make sure we had everything we needed and were always up to date on documents.

The students' comments in this section indicate that the coordinated communication between the parties could affect many aspects of students' study abroad experiences, ranging from their entry to the host country to their access to the learning materials, their emotions, receipt of the timely assistance they needed, and information transparency and delivery.

### Structured With Flexibility

One common feedback from the post-program assessment shared by the five students was that the program offered a structured learning environment with a satisfying amount of free time for students to explore places on their own. Ben noted it was "intimidating" to be around so many unknowns in Kaohsiung, but the schedule offered a structure that helped him find consistency among uncertainties. Ava shared that "I liked that they gave us a lot of free time so we weren't busy with activities and classes all day every day and could have time on our own to relax or explore." Mia added that "We also had lots of designated time on scheduled tours, trips, and activities that helped us learn more about Taiwan, improve our language abilities, and see the country." When asked to elaborate on structured activities, Sophia expressed the following:

Students were provided with a schedule at the beginning of the program in which due dates and requirements for assignments were provided in advance. The professor had organized educational activities throughout the trip at a variety of locations, including both off-campus field trips and on-campus cultural activities. She made sure to include a range of activities that covered a broad spectrum of interests to appeal to all students at different points. Each of our trips and activities were well

scheduled and planned and were both interesting and educational. The professor even included time in which we could do things outside of the group. Everything during the trip, including all the meals that were provided and places of residence for the entirety of our time in Taiwan, was detailed in a schedule given to us before the trip.

The student feedback reveals that they enjoyed independent exploration during unstructured time, but the careful planning of structured time was appreciated by students as well.

Notwithstanding, allowing flexibility with contingency plans is equally critical to program operation. An example of students' understanding and flexibility in working with the faculty lead can be seen in changes in the government's quarantine policy and the subsequent confusion. A short time before the group's arrival in Taiwan, the government relaxed their quarantine policy but was unclear about the revised regulations. For instance, it was unclear whether public transportation and gatherings of more than five were allowed during the seven-day self-management period, which began immediately after the seven-day quarantine period upon travelers' arrival in Taiwan. As soon as the new quarantine policy was in effect and before the group arrived in Taiwan, the faculty lead called The Taiwan Centers for Disease Control to verify the information and learned that riding public transportation and having classes were permitted during the seven days of self-management. Thus, the group planned accordingly to start in-person activities and excursions, beginning on the eighth day after entering Taiwan. However, after arriving in the country, the faculty lead noticed that the news media disseminated varied versions of the revised policies for the self-management period. Therefore, she called different government offices, including police stations, to clarify the policies but received inconsistent answers. As Taiwan transitioned to a new phase of quarantine policies, the details were confusing. To err on the side of caution, the faculty lead made the difficult but necessary decision to continue virtual learning from the students' hotel rooms, though students were permitted to explore the neighborhood in groups of no more than three. Consequently, all the scheduled group activities during that period had to be cancelled and replaced with individual or pair explorations of the city within walking or biking distance. Students showed a high level of maturity when encountering disappointments and challenges. In response to the changes in the plan, Oliver shared that although he felt disappointed, he would make the best of the self-

management period by taking time to visit places nearby that he probably would not have visited otherwise.

It is worth noting that free exploration time during the program was one of students' favorite elements in the curriculum. Oliver and Ava shared that they had great time joining parties with other international students on an island one weekend. Sophia, Ben, and Mia became friends with a street food vendor from Turkey in a night market. The students believed their experiences with other international people in the area would not have taken place had the program not included enough free time to foster their friendships with others. Students expressed that making new friends was an unexpected outcome, and they were grateful for the opportunities to meet people from other places through the organized group activities (e.g., conversation practice with local college students, the 4th of July celebration party with students from peer American institutions, and field trips with international students from Europe) and independent excursions (e.g., having meals and visiting museums with new friends). Mia further noted that through independent activities, she became more confident in navigating Taiwanese culture and more proficient in using Mandarin without the faculty lead's assistance. This observation supports the study of Modera et al. (2022) that significant learning takes place during free time.

Unstructured time and independent explorations created exciting and varied experiences for students; However, student safety was always a program priority and a source of concern for the faculty lead when students traveled on their own. Thus, balancing students' excitement and the faculty lead's worries was crucial in the faculty lead's decisions. To ensure student safety during unstructured cultural immersion in unfamiliar areas without the faculty lead present, students were required to travel in pairs or groups. In addition, students had to share their itineraries in advance and remain in contact through an instant message app when they went on an excursion without the faculty lead. Furthermore, students needed to return to their residence halls before 11 o'clock at night. Students were reliable and respected the system that intended to keep them safe, and the CLC Director and staff were supportive and proactive whenever the need arose.

The system worked in terms of providing students with flexibility in their schedule, keeping the community safe, and rendering timely assistance, as shown in the following incident. One night Mia and Sofia took a light rail train

to visit a scenic place about 25 minutes away from the NSYSU campus on their own. At 10:30 p.m., Mia called the faculty lead and said that she left her entire handbag on a seat in the light rail car as they rushed to get off the light rail train at the campus station. Mia's wallet and passport were among the items in the bag. The faculty lead consoled Mia and then contacted the light rail office immediately. Before midnight, the faculty lead was informed that the handbag had been located and ready for pick-up in the light rail office 30 minutes away from the campus. CLC staff escorted Mia to retrieve her belongings at 1:00 a.m. This precarious incident fortunately ended without any loss or harm. When Mia reflected on the incident, she shared her appreciation for the group's instant communication network that helped her quickly recover her personal items. Mia also noted her cultural shock at learning that a handbag with money in it could be recovered intact on a light rail ride in Kaohsiung. The work ethic of the staff at the CLC and in the light rail offices impressed Mia; she was shocked to discover that people in Taiwan were willing to help her instantly late at night.

In short, the student feedback shows that the structured curriculum with flexibility for changes and independent exploration was essential in making the study abroad program "educational, productive, and fun," as Ben put it. The implication of this section lies in balancing the flexibility students enjoy with the potential risk independent excursions in an unfamiliar place can bring. Faculty leads can institute a system and implement mechanisms that work for their particular programs to keep their students safe.

### Critical Reflection as a Pedagogical Mechanism

Research has shown that enhancement in cultural awareness or language proficiency does not happen simply because students are in the host country (e.g., Medora et al., 2022; Ridley et al., 1994). In Allen's (2013) study, one of the participants noted that it took much more than "an atmosphere that is all French all the time" to engage with the local cultures meaningfully and improve the language skills progressively. Curricular components in a study abroad program should be distinct from tourist activities and need to involve cultural exchange, experiential learning, and critical reflection. The faculty lead plays the critical role of cultural and linguistic mentor who provides students with guidance and clarification at levels appropriate given the students' levels of intercultural and interlinguistic proficiency.

In an effort to engage the group in regular cultural reflection during the study abroad program in Taiwan, a travel-reading activity was implemented. As they traveled, students read and discussed a novel, *Interior Chinatown*, in a seminar format. There were four two-hour discussion sessions, and the students took turns leading discussion of the book and relevant cultural connections they discovered as the program continued. Immersion in the local culture contrasted sharply with the stereotyping portrayed in the novel and helped students see how genuine engagement with a culture counters stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans perpetuated in popular media. In the book discussions in a tea shop in Kaohsiung, where the group was received with hospitality and respect, students noted that they were not fully aware of the challenges that Asians and Asian Americans experienced in the U.S. until they read *Interior Chinatown*. When commenting on the roles of lectures and reflection activities in relation to their experiential learning through cultural immersion in Taiwan, Ben expressed the following:

Prior to reading this book I never really considered how Asians are stereotyped and treated in the American social hierarchy. After reading this book and having our discussions, I realized Asians face many hardships and a lot of that includes assimilating into American culture. I can relate to this greatly from this study abroad experience. Stepping out of your comfort zone can be extremely intimidating. I particularly struggled with this at the beginning of this trip, but the longer I have been here, the more I have realized that the only way you can grow as a person is by stepping out of your comfort zone/role.

Ben's comment reveals that his critical reflection might not have taken place had the reading activity and cultural immersion not complemented each other. Moreover, when reflecting on cultural awareness through reading the book and being in the country, Sophia added:

Observing how Taiwanese people live their daily lives heightened our awareness of the inaccuracy of stereotypes and of the importance of authentic representations of Asian and Asian American cultures in American society and media. Hopefully, like Willis Wu in the book, who is capable of learning and growing, we will all learn to overcome the prejudices inherent in our system.



The students' comments display their engagement with the book and self-reflection. When asked to assess the reading activity in relation to their growth as participants in the study abroad program, students responded that they enjoyed the reading seminar, found the discussions thought-provoking, and considered critical reflection important in helping them become more culturally sensitive. After the group returned to the WVU campus, three students and the faculty lead joined a Campus Read event, in which the book's author, Charles Yu, was invited to meet with his readers from WVU. In this event, Oliver and Mia were able to further discuss their questions raised during the study abroad program with Charles Yu in the meeting. Based on the self-reports, Students' active participation and critical inquires seem to suggest that this travel-reading pedagogical component in the study abroad curriculum could contribute to the program's goal pertaining to enhancement in intercultural awareness. As the program progressed, students reported in their class assignments, 1-1 interviews, and post-program assessments that they learned to appreciate differences, examine their beliefs, challenge the stereotypes that they had held about others, empathize with people who are different, and reflect on how the invisibility of certain minorities can affect their consciousness and distort reality in the society.

### Post-Program Support and Assessment

According to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2022), high impact practices refer to teaching techniques and designs that have proven to be beneficial for successful student engagement and learning among students of many backgrounds, and study abroad is one of those practices. Global experiential learning through study abroad programs helps students explore worldviews different from their own, and students' explorations of issues such as racial inequality can often inspire students to be more aware of their communities and augment their experience abroad through continuing their studies and careers in directions that embrace global elements. Hence, study abroad experience should be viewed more as a process than an event that starts and ends on a specific date. To explain what process means in this context, Kruse and Brubaker (2007) note that "[p]reparation should begin much earlier than the departure and that students should be supported after their return" (p. 147). The importance of post-program debriefing is also emphasized in Modora et al.'s study (2022). The learning that takes place during the time abroad is a dynamic and developmental process that continues to play a role in students'

lives after they return to their home countries, as can be seen in the following comments from Ben and Mia. Ben recognized that he has become more confident and culturally more competent as a result of his participation in the study abroad program:

This experience has greatly improved my personal level of independence, planning skills, self-motivation, and overall language proficiency. I can now more confidently speak with others and act more confidently as a leader in work environments. As for cultural aspects, I have learned so much about cultural relativism, different life perspectives, and how to understand and pick up on linguistic meanings on the spot.

Mia believed that the experience abroad has motivated her to pursue international work experiences and expressed her intention as follows.

This program impacted me immensely. I fell in love with Taiwan and am already applying for post-graduation programs to teach abroad, among other things. I learned a lot about the world and myself and was very moved by my experiences. I feel that this experience has affected my life and its path greatly moving forward.

During the fall semester after the group returned to WVU campus, three students respectively requested a meeting with the faculty lead regarding their applications for nationally competitive scholarships and international jobs with the goal of returning to Taiwan for an extended period of time following their graduation. The faculty lead discussed possible pathways with the students and connected them with the institutional scholarship and fellowship office to prepare for their applications. The students demonstrated their determination to pursue international opportunities as graduate students, researchers, or employees. The students' self-reflections and future plans indicate how a study abroad experience can make a personal and professional impact on participants. Students' aspirations highlight the importance of post-program support from the institution and faculty.

In addition to impacts of study abroad programs on students, professional experience that faculty members gain from organizing and leading programs is valuable and can improve their next study abroad program. Assessment is a necessary and essential tool to help faculty evaluate and develop their programs. For new programs like the one in this study, assessment is all

the more crucial. Evaluative information about the program's operation can be collected from formal and informal student feedback and their learning outcomes. Faculty members' observations and reflections can also provide constructive suggestions for program advancement. The assessment data are quantitative, qualitative, or mixed and can be collected at different points in time. In this study, the faculty lead conducted on-going assessment of the program effectiveness, student experiences, and learning outcomes during the program through conversations (e.g., the faculty lead and students discussed how field trips built on the lectures to enhance students' learning of local history and culture), email inquiries (e.g., students were asked to email the faculty lead about their likes and dislikes in the program and what could be done to improve their experience abroad), and analyses of student work (e.g., students' book reflection essays and students' oral Mandarin Chinese skills in their presentations). Moreover, a questionnaire was sent to all the students four weeks after the return when the students had the opportunity to process and reflect on their study abroad experience. During the post-program debriefing, Sophia described her view on assessment in relation to her as a program participant in the following passage.

The professor was able to see assessment as a vital tool for growth. She obviously values student's viewpoints, which she proved in many circumstances. She often asked us about the format of the classes and the trips, and genuinely listened if we suggested another way. Throughout every stage of the trip, she was receptive to different suggestions, making all of us feel as if we were heard. It was obvious that she didn't ask merely to be polite, but because she genuinely wanted to institute the formatting that was the most likely to facilitate our learning. When making suggestions to the professor, we had no doubt that they would be utilized, or at the very least, heavily considered.

Sophia's comment above indicates that students feel valued when they are consulted and their recommendations are considered and utilized. Whenever possible and appropriate, the faculty lead tried to incorporate students' suggestions to refine the curricular activities so that students could fully engage with the learning. In the faculty lead's viewpoint, positive interaction between students and the faculty lead can help build a community based on mutual respect and lay a good foundation for program success. As such, she tried to

create a learning community where communication was transparent, voices were heard, and suggestions were responded to in a timely manner.

Notwithstanding, some student feedback reached the faculty lead only after the program ended, so adjustments were not made during the program. For example, students suggested that the final project that required students to document ten discoveries about Taiwanese culture be broken into two five-item submissions to reduce stress during the final week in Taiwan. In addition, some students did not find traditional art and craft activities as engaging as water sports or martial arts that involved physical movements. Moreover, students preferred the residential halls for international students to the domestic residential halls, where they roomed with local Taiwanese students. Such feedback was valuable and will be integrated into the program planning for the following year. As this manuscript is revised for publication in the spring of 2023, the faculty lead is finalizing the curriculum for the summer 2023 study abroad program in Taiwan. Considering the student comments shared in the post-program assessments and recognizing that learning takes place also during activities that are not necessarily preferred by students, the faculty lead has decided, for example, to keep the same amount of traditional art and craft activities but increase the variety of water sports and expand the geographic areas for coastal activities so students can enjoy both the sandy and rocky shores of Taiwan. In addition, the incoming group will stay in domestic residence halls during the first half of the program and international residence halls during the second half. This approach is intended to enable the group to interact with both local Taiwanese college students and international students who study in Taiwan. Furthermore, the course syllabi have been revised so assignments are spread out more evenly across the program. In this section, the importance of post-program student support, program assessment, and program revisions was addressed and contextualized through student comments.

## Conclusion

The study discussed one of the pioneer study abroad programs that took place in Taiwan during fraught times. The post-program assessments that were conducted respectively by the researcher and the Office of Global Affairs at WVU and the institutional student evaluations of teaching show that the program was positively received. Therefore, the faculty lead reflected on areas in the program operation that she regarded vital to the program's success in

relation to affordability, learning productivity, student experiences, and the program's impacts. The discussions of those areas integrated the students' and staff's feedback as supportive narratives to offer readers multiple perspectives when considering the program in question. The study emphasized the importance of utilizing financial, pedagogical, and administrative resources from both home and host campuses. The significant roles that communication and critical reflection played were also supported by students' comments and the faculty lead's observations. Moreover, the students' and the faculty lead's feedback indicated that the balance between structured and unstructured times was subtle and needed careful planning. Finally, the study abroad experience was a process that required not only careful planning but also on-going assessment during the program and post-program support to ensure that positive impact was sustained. Readers, however, are advised to consider the specific context in which the study took place as they interpret the results and apply the strategies in their own settings. Moreover, the study used self-reported data, and readers need to be aware of the aforementioned biases and limitations the data are subject to, such as participants' subjectivity, selective memory, exaggeration, introspective ability, and honesty.

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