Overcoming Challenges from Running a Faculty-Led Short-term Study experience in sub-Saharan Africa: Case Study Uganda

ABSTRACT

As curricular internationalization becomes a norm at institutions of higher education across the U.S., faculty and international programs offices are unsurprisingly faced with the challenge of providing students opportunities for immersion in non-traditional destinations. Based on an nine-year experience of providing a short-term study opportunity in the sub-Saharan African country of Uganda, this paper explores the unique challenges of this destination and offers portable suggestions to help overcome these challenges. The commentary and illustrations are useful to those designing or revising short term faculty-led immersion experiences in the sub-Saharan Africa region.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first time I ever really stepped back from my culture and tried to picture what it must look like to other people. … I see now that I should try to be more open to looking at and understanding other peoples’ perspectives. … It’s interesting that we grow up in a culture where children are constantly told that they can be anything they want but our dreams are logical and limited. Whereas, Ugandan children grow up with few comforts, experiencing firsthand the cruel realities of the world but their capacity to envision a brighter future knows no bounds. … I am not under the illusion that our system and our government are flawless and without corruption. But I feel I can finally grasp the magnitude of success that our political system experiences every day … Today, I was finally able to say all is well with my soul, because I no longer felt that I was the ‘special white guest’ in Africa. I feel that I stand beside them as we are all equal … I’m really going to take back with me (or try) a more relaxed mindset, and if I can’t jam everything into one day, great, and just wait for the next sunrise. (Student Reflections)

KEYWORDS | Theory-method intersection, curriculum internationalization, Africa, cross-cultural design, best practices, faculty-led short-term study abroad
These student testimonies affirm the life-changing, perception-altering, culture-challenging value of a study abroad experience to a non-traditional destination. Given what students learn about themselves and others, it is no wonder that the number of U.S. students studying abroad continues to increase year by year. For example in 2010, 88% more students participated in study abroad programs than had done so in 2000. And in 2009/10, the number of students studying abroad rose to 270,604 (Open Doors, 2010). Over the past two decades, U.S. colleges and universities have reoriented their mission/vision statements to reflect on global understanding and increased efforts to integrate this part of their mission/vision as a central theme in their strategic plans (Amey, 2010). This is happening in part because universities in the United States are rapidly internationalizing their curriculum and student experiences. Clearly, there have been increased efforts to globalize the U.S. student’s university experience with study abroad experiences as a key component.

However, most study abroad experiences continue to take place in traditional formats to traditional destinations. The majority of programs are less than 8 weeks, the top seven destinations attract over 50% of study-abroad students and none is in Africa. The only sub-Saharan African (SSA) country among the top 25 destinations is South Africa. It is ranked at number thirteen attracting only 1.6% of students studying abroad. (Open Doors, 2010). It is apparent then that few students learn and grow from an experience in a non-traditional destination such as sub-Saharan Africa. While there are significant benefits to U.S. and western students from immersion in a distinctly different political, cultural, and socio-economic situation such as found in sub-Saharan Africa, the complexities of organizing and running the experience, as well as the volatility and unwelcome perceptions of the area deter faculty and students from considering this region for study abroad experiences. If students are truly to benefit from the “global ecology of learning” that leads to global competence and expertise, then non-traditional destinations like Uganda should increasingly become the norm (Spariosu, 2004).

Designing and administering a sustainable study abroad immersion experience to a non-traditional destination such as Uganda brings with it challenges not faced by more popular locations. Reflection on the challenges and their impact on the development of the seminar provide an array of useful information that will help in the development of similar experiences. While our setting is Uganda, there are significant parallels that can be extrapolated to other less traditional locations. This paper provides an account of how a team of four faculty has implemented strategic decisions to overcome challenges while leading a short-term study abroad experience to Uganda each of the last seven years. The paper begins with background establishing the context of the course, and then continues with an explanation of the challenges in development and sustainment of the program. A detailed review of the strategic recommendations then follows and precedes a conclusion providing a list of critical success factors.
Figure 1

Course Development Flow Diagram
This diagram illustrates the course progression over the eight years beginning with course concept followed by course implementation and addressing key improvements over the past six years.
BACKGROUND
For each of the last seven years students from Drake University, a mid-sized liberal arts university in Des Moines, Iowa, U.S.A., and Makerere University Business School (MUBS), in Kampala, Uganda, have joined forces during a three week study seminar focusing on sustainable economic development in Uganda. The initial three week seminar in Uganda was the result of two years of planning that required overcoming multiple administrative and perceptional challenges on the Drake campus and among the potential participants. The current success of the program is the result of a series of strategic decisions in the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of the seminar. While some components of the seminar have remained constant over the seven years, many have evolved to a form much different than the first year. A summary of the program’s evolution is shown in Figure 1.

From the first year, the course has been split into three major components: pre-departure, in-country, and post-return. This design allows students to increase their academic knowledge of Uganda prior to being in-country, immerse when in-country,

Figure 2
Learning Wheel
Beginning with a theme of sustainable development, the course incorporates numerous experiential and service learning opportunities as illustrated in the wheel. The outcomes of global understanding and engaged citizens support the Drake University mission.
and reflect upon the experience after returning to the U.S. (Castaneda & Zirger, 2011) (Koernig, 2007). Research by Kruse and Brubaker (2007) define study abroad as a process rather than an event requiring all three components for successful immersion.

The pre-departure component is important for preparing the students academically and familiarizing them with the logistics of travel. Typically, five to six sessions (usually two to three hours each) are held during the spring semester. In these sessions the conceptual framework is built for the course by discussing the concept of sustainable development, addressing the historical background of the country, and helping each student develop a topic for either a research paper or service learning project that they will do in Uganda. Instead of a traditional reading list, student teams are assigned a topic to research and present to the class. Typical topics include: education, healthcare, government, and infrastructure. These sessions provide a wide base of knowledge for the students to enable them to put their in-country experience in context. Additionally, the sessions are used to inform students about logistical arrangements, travel preparation, and administrative details.

The in-country portion of the course runs for approximately three weeks in May and June. The schedule is filled with multiple learning events and/or service learning activities each day. Students are joined throughout the in-country portion by peers from Drake’s Ugandan partner, MUBS. This structure provides a true “immersion experience” as defined by Kruse and Brubaker (2007). The learning wheel depicted in Figure 2 illustrates how sustainable development is a unifying theme for curriculum design, logistics implementation, and student learning. While in-country, students complete a daily reflective journal, gather data for an individual research paper, and/or develop a service learning project. Additionally, each student leads a discussion of one of the events on a class blog (located at http://mubs-drake-seminar.blogspot.com). On the first day, Drake and MUBS students are formed into teams and assigned questions related to a broad topic which spans multiple learning events. Over the course of the study abroad seminar the teams discuss responses to their question(s) and present their findings in a travel-ending seminar. The presentations occur at a community forum in which the in-country partners that facilitated learning events are invited to join faculty and students for discussion and reflection.

Once back in the U.S., the Drake students are required to prepare their final project or research report and submit it for evaluation. Additionally, the students meet for a group debrief and reflection. Students are now given the option of furthering their community service projects through a one-credit service learning course that meets weekly during the fall semester. The course’s purpose is to facilitate the continuation of the community service projects.

While the current version of the study seminar receives accolades on both campuses, the road to its initial development and its evolution has faced significant challenges. The list of challenges is large and ranges from gaining broad institutional support to the detailed minutia related to daily life while in-country. Addressing these challenges can be taxing on faculty time, but the value added to student learning is certainly
worth the effort.

CHALLENGES OF SSA AS A STUDY DESTINATION

The SSA region is broadly defined as all African countries located south of the Sahara desert. Often in the U.S. this area is considered to be homogeneous, but nothing could be further from the truth. With approximately 48 countries in the region, there is wide variation among the governments of the region as well as a multitude of peoples who speak different languages with distinct ethnic and cultural identities. The misperception of homogeneity is in part based upon some material similarities in the political, economic, and social state of affairs of the countries. Governance structures, much of the transport and educational infrastructure, official languages, and currencies are all residuals of the colonial infrastructure that preceded many of these nations’ independence in the first half of the 20th century. The historical influence of colonial powers such as Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal on the socio-economic culture is a key ingredient in grasping the current efforts of the region to develop. These material similarities mean that our Uganda experiences can provide a basic toolkit for planning study abroad courses in a majority of the SSA destinations. We identify the challenges of organizing a seminar in this region of the world on the basis of the following points: destination perception, course design, logistics, destination relationships, in-country execution, and effort and reward for faculty.

Destination Perception

Since gaining her independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has seen multiple governments, including the eight-year reign of Idi Amin. The current administration of President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986. While providing a period of relative stability, the administration has also had its struggles. Uganda shares borders with or is somehow linked to the four least safe countries in Africa: Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic (CAR) (Global Peace Index, 2012). Uganda has the largest contingent of African forces fighting Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab under the African Union Missions in Somalia (AMISOM). This has been a source of terror activity within Uganda especially in its largest city Kampala over the last five years. Uganda’s 20-year old war with warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has been a continual source of strife with neighboring Sudan, DRC and the CAR where it is believed that Kony is in hiding. Moreover, beginning over ten years ago, Uganda has been involved in civil wars in the DRC in an attempt to thwart rebel overthrow attempts on Uganda’s government. In sum, the safety perception created by these issues undermines Uganda’s credibility as a safe destination for American students.

These perceptions are reinforced by the U.S. State Department. During the fall of 2008 while recruiting students for May 2009 seminar, the following warning was provided by the State Department on Uganda:
“U.S. citizens living in or planning to visit Uganda should be aware of threats to their safety from insurgent groups, particularly in the northern region near the border with Sudan, along the western border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in the southwest near the border with Rwanda.” (US State Department, 2008)

When choosing among study abroad offerings on campus, a warning like the one above can create a significant impediment to a prospective student selecting the course to Uganda.

University administrators monitor potential study abroad locations for safety and share many of the same perceptions of SSA as the public. For instance, the course at one point faced difficult human rights questions from the campus community. Recently Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill was resuscitated in the legislature. This bill would have criminalized homosexual activity and imposed penalties for not reporting the practice (Shalini, 2011) (Lloyd, 2011). While the bill was not passed, it did raise human rights issues counter to Drake’s mission and values and also signaled possible safety issues for students while in-country. These concerns were enough to cause some faculty to oppose the continuation of this course. The negative perception of this region is perhaps the biggest constraint in converting student interest in the course into enrollment.

Course Design

Often there is a campus belief that short term programs are not as effective as long term immersion experiences such as semesters abroad (Castaneda & Zirger, 2011) (Sachau, Brasher, & Fee, 2010). Short term study abroad programs have had the reputation of being more ‘holiday’ than academically focused. This raises the challenge of putting together a course curriculum that has comparable rigor, contact hours and depth as a ‘normal’ semester course that offers equivalent credit hours. A typical question raised by colleagues is “how do you deliver and assess six hours of content in a three week course?” On the Drake campus, approval had to be sought in the undergraduate committees of two different academic units. This was followed by a faculty vote in both of the units. Additionally the curriculum was considered for approval to satisfy three different broad areas of inquiry on campus, each with a separate approval process.

In addition to such problems associated with perception, the development of a meaningful experience in Uganda posed challenges as well. In Uganda, as in many non-traditional destinations, the challenge is identifying and establishing relationships and obtaining access to in-country experts and organizations. Moreover, the development of meaningful in-country experiences for such programs relies enormously on the in-country knowledge and understanding of those designing the course. This knowledge is vital for linking the in-country experiences to the learning objectives of the course.
Logistics

Making local arrangements with such a distance barrier proved initially to be one of the big challenges. Multiple logistical issues arise such as scheduling and cost of travel, identifying appropriate lodging facilities in-country, providing a mix and balance of food choices, and securing budget-conscious, insured local transportation. Another challenge is that SSA economies are typically the cash-based economies. Electronic payments at points of sale are quite uncommon which means that both students and faculty have to carry significant amounts of cash to use for payments in-country over the 3-week period. This imposes both safety and convenience constraints as well as a daily cash tracking burden for the teaching faculty.

Student cost is a deterrent for students participating in these short-term experiences (Dewey & Duff, 2009). With airfare costs to sub-Saharan Africa significantly high (about 50% of total cost on average), any potential cost-saving avenues have to be considered. University administrators often favor the use of third-party providers because of the potential to decrease administrative costs, the decreased workload on both staff and faculty, the relatively lower potential liability, and the level of expertise a third-party provider can bring. The use of third-party providers is a commonplace solution, especially if one looks at the conveniences that come along with using one (Herbst, 2011). Drake suggested that the faculty explore third-party providers for the Ugandan experience. At one point third-party providers were located who attempted to price a similar experience, but the cost was prohibitive (over 50% greater) and they could not match the quality of in-country experiences offered by the seminar that was already running. The third party provider option was not feasible therefore, faculty continue to be responsible for the logistical as well as academic components of the course. This is a common occurrence across programs (Harris, Belanger, Loch, Murray, & Urbaczewski, 2011). This commitment comes at the cost of lost productivity in scholarship as compared to traditional course design for the faculty involved.

Destination Relationships

If developed and nurtured, relationships with university, community, and organizational partners are important in delivering a program in a non-traditional destination. Of the three, partnerships with academic institutions are key to the success of the program (Amegago, 2009). However, a frequently ignored but nevertheless important fact is that many foreign universities, African universities included, look toward partnering primarily with prestigious or acclaimed U.S. universities in hopes of obtaining research assistance and perhaps partnering on grants (Kelm, 2009). Partnering also acts as a way of buttressing their profile relative to other institutions in their local market. Brewer points to evidence that in the post-war period, Germany explicitly pursued partnerships with “top level (U.S.) institutions” in hopes of receiving research support. She also cites examples of Chinese universities seeking U.S. university partners that elevate their profile and market advantage (Brewer, 2010). The
challenge this creates for a mid-sized liberal arts college like Drake University cannot be underestimated. This is something that one has to keep in mind when approaching local African universities to seek a partnering hand that will facilitate a study abroad program to be supported by them. Similarly, community and organization partners that support the course learning outcomes are difficult to identify and engage.

In-country Course Execution

Even with the best planning prior to each course offering, the list of things that can go off track once you are in-country is literally endless. Some examples include: student sickness, frequent scheduled event changes and cancellations, language barriers, inflationary costs, unexpected expenses, cultural incongruence, occasional emotional distress within the group, and sudden personnel changes at partner institutions. Of these, in our perception, cultural incongruence has been the most difficult to predict and manage. Examples of these include: differences in personal space, maintaining schedules, and communication gaps. Moreover, one always has to be mindful of local infrastructure constraints like: traffic, eating places/options, wireless internet, and use of pit toilets. Additionally, occasional homesickness, need for reflection time, downtime, and a host of other typically unknowns impact group dynamics.

Effort and Reward

Whereas many U.S. colleges and institutions understand the importance of expanding international programs, they do not back this with institutional commitment and faculty incentives that are crucial to achieving the desired internationalization (Saiya & Hayward, 2003). This work is usually “accomplished through faculty overloads” which puts significant strain on faculty resources and can inhibit career advancement (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Starting and leading a study abroad program requires significant time and patience for faculty involved. It would be wise for a tenure track faculty member to have a clear understanding of the commitment and expectations before embarking on course development, implementation and sustainment.

Flexibility and patience are virtues one learns when running a non-traditional program. From building institutional support to course design to establishing destination relationships, at first the challenges may seem overwhelming. While the obstacles are many, they certainly can be overcome with strategic planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key to developing a successful program is thinking strategically about ways to mitigate the challenges associated with a non-traditional destination. An interdisciplinary theme allows for greater partnerships and program sustainability. Clear course outline, outcomes and assessment methods provide the needed
framework. Strategic in-country partnerships and institutional support form a firm foundation.

**Developing an Interdisciplinary Theme**

The first strategic decision that sets the course on the correct path is choosing a broad-based interdisciplinary theme. The theme of sustainable development, which is at the heart of this experience, incorporates a wide range of topics that permeate the curricular design, in-country experiences, and assessment of student performance [depicted in the learning wheel in Figure 2]. This theme focuses on the intersection of social, environmental, and economic interests (often referred to as people, places and profit). The dynamic interaction of these forces provides a very broad base that opens the curriculum to an almost limitless number of sub-topics. Core to this range of sub-topics is the emphasis placed on delivering experiential learning and involving students in community service projects, both of which overlap. As the learning wheel demonstrates, the goal is to require a deeper investigation than simple exposure to different cultures. Increasing knowledge in this area should enable the ability to engage individuals from those cultures in positive collaborative relationships; critical reflection on one’s own cultural biases and their impact on interactions with those from different cultures; and an understanding of how political, social, and economic history has influenced the current culture.

The choice of the theme addresses multiple challenges, especially course design. The interdisciplinary theme broadens acceptability across different sections on campus but most importantly, satisfies the learning outcomes of the course. Selecting topics based on student interests and areas of study for the seminar must serve to deliver on multiple learning outcomes as well as immerse students in the local culture. Ideally some of these experiences will also enable participation in community service projects. The exact weight of each topic changes each year, but most years the course touches on the role health care, education, politics, the colonial legacy, entrepreneurship, microfinance, journalism, human rights and infrastructure development play in the future sustainable development of Uganda.

The wide range of possible topics consequently allows for a mix of students from across a variety of disciplines on campus, increasing the possibility that often negative perceptions of sub-Saharan African countries and the cost involved could be offset and enough student interest could be generated. In effect, the theme of sustainable development has resulted in students in the course from such diverse disciplines as Pharmacy, Journalism, Biology (often pre-med), Arts and Sciences, Education, Business, and Law. Finally, the broad-based theme enables students to develop a research or project interest that is squarely centered on a personal academic interest – a feature that aids not only the learning process but recruitment as well.

This broad interdisciplinary base was the perfect choice for the faculty developing the seminar and was instrumental in building institutional support. With backgrounds
in African History, Industrial Engineering, Finance, and Economics the faculty all had a different view of sustainable development. With three faculty members from the business school and one from the arts and sciences, the course met two campus initiatives, increasing cross disciplinary research and teaching and increasing global experiences. In summary, the course embodied the Drake culture reflected in its mission statement:

> “Drake’s mission is to provide an exceptional learning environment that prepares for meaningful personal lives, professional accomplishments, and responsible global citizenship. The Drake experience is distinguished by collaborative learning among students, faculty, and staff and by the integration of the liberal arts with professional preparation.” (Drake, 2012)

Building University Partnerships

Establishing a local university partnership proved to be a second strategic decision in addressing many of the challenges especially perceptions and relationships. Additionally, it aids in the sustainability of the course and the depth of learning by students. Establishing these relationships is difficult via a single in-country visit and almost impossible to accomplish without prior on the ground experience. Fortunately, one of our faculty members is a Ugandan native and another studied for a year in Uganda completing part of his dissertation research. Both have deep in-country relationships that brought credibility to discussions with the institutional and community partnerships we established and with local experts who were to be potential speakers. Moreover, this credibility was essential in gaining institutional support at Drake and recruiting students. Thus, it is not unusual that those who end up starting and leading courses like this one have a prior connection to the destination, which they use to formally establish a program.

As shown in Figure 1, prior to the first offering, the course was under development for two years. The development process included two exploratory trips to Uganda one year apart. These trips helped establish a relationship with MUBS, and to sort out the logistics for bringing students to Uganda. The first trip established the university contacts. On the second trip, two of the faculty members solidified the partnership and spent two weeks in Uganda investigating accommodations, food providers, site visits, classroom space, arranging transportation, and meeting with potential guest speakers. Consistent with Ugandan culture, face-to-face contact was invaluable in making arrangements for the first student seminar.

The Drake-MUBS partnership enables us to build a much more educationally integrated program than one a third-party provider would have provided. In addressing logistical challenges, MUBS has proven to be invaluable in arranging local activities and making necessary formal requests. More importantly, as research has shown, the integration of the MUBS students throughout the travel portion of the seminar addresses both destination relationship and course design challenges (Sjoberg...
& Shabalina, 2010). These students help make the trip much safer for the American students, they provide data for our students’ research, they interpret and explain what our students don’t understand, and they help to teach the American students a much richer and nuanced picture of Ugandan life than they could get by being mere observers. But this is not a one-sided relationship. The trip also provides MUBs students with opportunities to meet with Ugandan leaders that they otherwise might not have access to, travel to areas of the country they have not previously visited and Drake students teach the Ugandan students about American life and culture.

The depth of knowledge that the MUBS faculty have, their contacts, and their genuine appreciation for the mutually beneficial collaboration has enabled both Drake and MUBS students to garner a deeper immersion experience than would have been possible otherwise.

Cultivating Institutional Support

Building institutional support, the third strategic pillar, addresses multiple challenges. A non-traditional course faces unique hurdles and success comes through working closely with the university support structure. To illustrate, during the first course offering, it became apparent that University structures for advancing, tracking, and handling cash transactions were lacking. As stated earlier, faculty needed to carry large amounts of cash for the trip. Upon returning from Uganda, the faculty met with international programs, student accounts, and the university accounting office to collaborate on establishing new procedures applicable to non-traditional destinations. The changes outlined in Figure 1 were often discussed with administrators and instituted where appropriate.

By collaborating, the perception of the risks associated with the destination and potential risks also decrease. This is necessary because administrative offices handle contingent risk management for courses during travel, they respond to inquiries from parents, help with promoting the course, and audit faculty-led seminars for congruence with university course guidelines and internationalization objectives.

Over the seven years of the seminar, the Provost, Vice Provost for international programs, Dean of the business school, Dean of arts and sciences, and assistant director for short term programs have all joined the seminar in-country at different times. Additionally, two faculty members from arts and sciences and two from business have also joined the seminar in-country. Support from other faculty is critical as they become program advocates and allow the teaching faculty time in their classes to promote the course. Further, from Drake’s partner institution MUBS, there have been visits by the Chairman of their Board of Regents, their Principal, various Deans, faculty and students to Drake University over the years. These efforts to build institutional support have paid off when safety concerns and human rights concerns were raised by other faculty. The administrators had a much better perspective of how those issues were already addressed in the program. This comfort level made responding to any
Ensuring Open Communication

Open and honest communication with the students helps to foster close relationships that can mitigate numerous challenges. Transparency and candidness are probably the foremost attributes that help with managing the challenges of destination perception. Faculty are upfront about the perception of the destination from the beginning. Students are informed about the state of affairs in Uganda (political, economic, etc.). If current travel warnings from the State Department exist they are discussed in detail. Beyond that, students receive a guidelines sheet that provides help with cash management, dress code, handling valuables, and other useful information.

During the in-country segment, this same rapport is maintained and faculty encourage a “you are your brother’s/sister’s keeper” attitude in the group. The students are encouraged to follow current events in the Ugandan newspapers prior to travel and while in-country. For example, at two different points in time there was an outbreak of Ebola hemorrhagic fever in the country. In each case the severity of the epidemic was discussed in detail as well as an overview of preventive measures taken to mitigate potential exposure. Program flexibility in-country is key in dealing with these types of incidents.

Ability for parents, guardians, and administrators to contact faculty during the in-country segment is important to offsetting negative perceptions. Students are encouraged to give in-country faculty contact information to parents and guardians. Parents are also invited to attend the pre-travel meetings. The Drake security office has the in-country contact information of the faculty and serves as a twenty-four hour point of contact for parents and guardians. Additionally, the blog completed by the students allows parents, guardians and administrators to follow the events of the seminar daily.

Students are asked to voluntarily disclose to faculty any issues, medical or otherwise, that may create safety issues while in-country. They can talk personally with any of the faculty or record the information on a paper and seal it in an envelope that will only be opened in the case of an in-country emergency. Emergencies have ranged from mild to serious including one case where a student had to be flown back mid-trip due to an illness. During this incident faculty were in frequent contact with parents and administrators. Successfully handling these situations has built credibility and institutional support for the seminar.

While transparency and open communication do not completely eliminate perception problems, they go a long way in building confidence among prospects, enrollees, parents and guardians, and increases institutional support among university administrators.

Embedding Ongoing Course Improvement

Continuous improvement has resulted in key strategic course development decisions that address all the challenges mentioned above.

Immediately after the first seminar it was evident from student journals, evaluations, and
debriefs that the formal in-class course design did not fully achieve the desired learning outcomes of experiential engagement and service learning. Experiential engagement requires immersion in the local culture in a manner that places students in everyday situations revealing the essence of sustainable development. A sample of recent experiences includes: studying prison rehabilitation programs at Luzira, talking with HIV/AIDS patients at The AIDS Support Organization (TASO), reviewing health care practices at Uganda’s main referral hospital in Mulago, attending loan group meetings of microfinance borrowers, visiting schools to discuss educational challenges with both students and teachers, and discussing efforts to end corruption with Uganda’s Inspector General of Government. Not only do these interactions impact student learning, they immerse the students in the local infrastructure of housing, roads, traffic, and markets. Further immersion experiences include learning tribal dances at a cultural center, visiting a large open air market and attending national sporting events. In addition, all of these events are bathed in a continual conversation between Drake students and those from MUBS.

One hallmark of the students’ experience has been a visit to the homes of rural farmers or “the rural visit.” Each year the students spend a day in a rural village a few hours outside of Kampala. The students get to experience the lifestyle of rural Ugandans. This experience provides students with a sense of the differences in agriculture that exist between the American Midwest (where Drake is located) and Uganda. This visit provides the ideal opportunity for immersion and service learning.

In the beginning, the rural visit consisted of tours of farms, the village, the trading center and a lunch hosted by the village elders. While this experience gave students crucial immersion, and as the relationship with the rural community grew, there developed the need to connect further through community service projects in this and other communities. In efforts to realign the course, Drake has lately partnered with local communities on service projects that have immersed students further into this fundamentally different culture while providing community support.

The first community service project for the seminar involved painting a school building at an elementary school. The next project was in the rural village and involved painting the local community center. With both projects, faculty worked in concert with the beneficiaries to identify needs that our students could help meet. The need to paint these structures was identified and so students and faculty raised funds to procure the necessary painting materials and together with the community painted the structures. Faculty continue to identify service projects in this fashion. For example, the rural community identified putting up a health clinic as a dire need for the area. In pursuit of realizing this goal, Drake and MUBs students worked in teams to interview sixty-five community members for their input regarding a health clinic facility design in the summer of 2012. As a follow up, some Drake students have selected to continue their experience via an optional semester service-learning course that focuses on the execution of the projects developed. Drake students have taken this project on with
Figure 3
Sample from the Student Guided Journal

TOPIC: The AIDS Support Organization (TASO)

Background:
The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) is the largest indigenous AIDS related NGO in Uganda. It has provided support to over 200,000 clients since its founding in 1987. The organization works to provide drugs to HIV positive individuals and also counsels their clients on how to overcome the social stigma associated with being HIV positive. We will tour the organization and then see a presentation by their performance troupe or by one or more of their clients. The performance troupe is one of the primary fund raisers for the organization. All of their performance materials are original and relate to the participant’s struggles.

Questions for the presentors (please write down at least two questions prior to the visit – you may also add questions that come up during the visit)
1)
2)
3)

Conversation Starters: Thus far, what has been your level of interaction with people living with HIV/AIDS? If you have never had such an interaction, how have you perceived people living with HIV/AIDS? Describe some societal perceptions about HIV/AIDS. Do you think the youth today are open to the idea of voluntary HIV testing? To what extent has society embraced people living with HIV / AIDS?

Questions for reflection: (you do not need to answer each question directly – these questions help you reflect upon / critically analyze the events of the day).
How does access to quality health care impact the economic development of a country?
How do social values and cultural differences in a country impact the ability of the economy to develop?
How do the experiences of TASO’s clients differ from an HIV positive individual in the U.S.? – Are there similar social stigmas / cultural issues that exist in the U.S.?
In this case the organization was founded by citizens of the country to address an issue viewed as being unjust. Would your thoughts be different if an international NGO founded the organization and attempted to change the social / cultural norms of the country? When is it appropriate for an international organization to attempt to influence the culture of a country, when is it not appropriate?
What role do international NGOs play in the economy? Are there some circumstances where NGOs potentially create unintended consequences that may slow the progress toward sustainable development (dependence on donations for example) – if so, is this an example of such an instance or is this an example where international NGOs are necessary?

Reflection on TASO
full vigor planning fundraising efforts, incorporating design suggestions, etc. At the
time of writing, this and other projects are paving the way for the next evolution of the
course, developing sustainable community service projects.

While students often pick the rural visit as the event highlight of the course, the
component of the course design often cited as most valuable are the relationships the
Drake students develop with the MUBS students. The role of the MUBS students has
changed over the years. Initially, they were part of the course more as guides and
confidants. The MUBS students now follow the same curriculum and do the same
evaluative exercises as the American students; something that has made this course
much more of a partnership than it was at the beginning and has improved course
design, the efficacy of in-country events, the relationship with MUBS and recruitment
of new students each year, all of which enhance the learning experience for all.

Assessing Student Learning

Designing a multidimensional student course evaluation system strategically
addresses issues related to course design and academic rigor. The three part curriculum
design with multiple assessment points in each phase provides ample opportunity to
affirm that academic rigor is present. Primary evaluation tools include journals, blogs,
presentations, and written reports.

During the pre-travel portion of the seminar, students are evaluated on the
broadness of their discovery process and depth of knowledge in Uganda’s cultural,
political, and colonial history, degree of economic development, availability of social
services, current political culture, and democratic processes.

During the in-country portion of the course, students are expected to critically reflect
on a wide range of experiences in the context of sustainable development. The ability
to synthesize the array of elements that form culture and its relation to history, values,
politics, communication styles, economy, beliefs and practices is critical. Students
should also be able to identify the political, economic, and cultural factors and the
constraints that the global economy and its agents place on sustainable development
in Uganda. The key goal of the evaluation of the journal, blog, and discussions is to
determine how well students reflect upon the formation of both one’s own and other’s
rules and biases and how they influence alternative efforts designed to promote
sustainable development in Uganda.

The evolution of the journal illustrates the continuous improvement of the assessment
process. Initially, the students were asked to record very broad thoughts related to each
activity. After reviewing the journals it was decided that they needed more guidance
in shaping their reflections. The current version of the journal is organized by event
and provides a short background on the event. Following the background on each
event are two sets of questions. The first set promotes deeper discussion among the
students from both universities. The second set asks students to record thoughts in
the journal based upon their impression of the event and their discussions, linking the
experience back to sustainable development. Figure 3 illustrates the structure of the journal for one event.

Post-travel evaluation also focuses on the ability to synthesize the critical reflection of the travel portion with academic background to develop either a research paper or service learning project proposal. The key difference is the focus on a deeper analysis of a specific topic or project versus the broader perspective illustrated by the blogs and journals.

The strategic recommendations elaborated on above played out in a unified way to mitigate and broadly to overcome the challenges to a short-term study in SSA. The spirit of these recommendations is readily replicable at other institutions as faculty who lead such experiences delve into offering students unique non-traditional study abroad educational experiences or as they seek to improve existing course offerings.

**CONCLUSION**

There are numerous factors that help overcome challenges associated with developing a study seminar to a non-traditional destination. Looking back through the challenges and the strategic recommendations, the following critical success factors have been instrumental.

- Faculty Champions - a core that is cohesive and passionate about the course and related activities
- Partnerships - committed in-country university and community partners
- Institutional Support - deans, provosts, administrative staff and the international center
- Experiential Learning - designing broad-ranged curriculum focused on in-country immersion
- Flexibility and Patience - intercultural understanding and openness to alternative viewpoints
- Transparency - open and timely communication with all stakeholders
- Continuous Improvement - in all aspects of the course, relationships and activities

Can this same amazing opportunity happen on another campus? Drake University is not much different than many great schools across the globe, large and small. Each year the course has improved and partnerships have deepened. The result: engaged citizens with a global understanding.
REFERENCES


Brewer, E. (2010). Leveraging Partnership to Internationalize the Liberal Arts College: Campus Internationalization and the Faculty. Directions for Higher Education (Summer), 83-96.


ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Dr. Jimmy Senteza is an Associate Professor in Finance in the College of Business and Public Administration at Drake University since Fall 2000. He completed his doctoral work at Washington State University. Jimmy teaches several courses in finance including introductory finance, personal finance, corporate finance, international finance, investment analysis, and portfolio management, both in class, online and via correspondence. Together with other colleagues at Drake University, he created and has led a short-term study seminar on Sustainable Development to his native country of Uganda since 2007. Jimmy’s academic manuscripts have been published in the Journal of Real Estate Research, Journal of Applied Business Research, Financial Decisions, Journal of the Academy of Business Education, Journal of College Teaching and Learning and others. He is a member of the Financial Management Association International and the Midwest Finance Association and the Iowa Society of Chartered Financial Analysts.

Dr. Glenn McKnight is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Drake University in Des Moines, IA. He has published a number of articles that contextualize development theory and practice historically. He is currently working on a project with a Ugandan colleague assessing the potential for the reconstruction of farmers’ cooperatives in Uganda. He is also involved, with colleagues from Drake and Makerere University Business School, in leading a student exchange programme that combines Drake and MUBS students on small-scale development projects for service learning.

Dr. Thomas Root holds four degrees including a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Kansas, which he obtained in 1998. Dr. Root has taught in the area of finance in the College of Business and Public Administration at Drake University since 1999. During this time he has demonstrated success as an instructor and scholar by earning the CBPA Graduate Teaching Award, and the CBPA Harry Wolk Research Award. Dr. Root has been published in numerous academic journals and served
as a presenter and session chair at annual meetings of the Financial Management Association, the Midwest Finance Association, and the Financial Education Association. Additionally, he maintains a close connection to the private sector through consulting and teaching professional education classes through Drake’s Center for Professional Studies. Dr. Root has served the College and University as Graduate Curriculum Committee chair in the College of Business each of the last eight years.

Dr. Debra Bishop received a doctorate in Industrial and Manufacturing Systems Engineering with a concentration in operations research from Iowa State University in 1996. She has been at Drake University since 1996 and holds the position of Director of the Buchanan Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership as well as the Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship Outreach. She is an Associate Professor of Practice in Management teaching primarily operations management. Dr. Bishop has taught courses in entrepreneurship, process improvement, procurement and operations to business professionals. She has been the recipient of the Brooks Faculty Excellence Award as well as the David B. Lawrence Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award. Additionally, Dr. Bishop is a visiting professor at Makerere University Business School and has brought students to Uganda for six summers to study sustainable development issues. Her research interests include: inventory management, student perspectives on management and sub-Saharan entrepreneurship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
With gratitude we would like to thank and honor those in Uganda who have made this amazing venture sustainable. Partnering with our friends at Makerere University Business School (MUBS) and the host of community and business leaders that have sacrificially given of their time and resources we have been able to provide a life-changing experience for over two hundred Drake and MUBS students.