



Benefits of Study Abroad in Nursing

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Editorial

American universities are becoming increasingly committed to the necessity of broadening global perspectives, expanding students' world-views, and of modeling global citizenship. Since cultural competence is required for accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), the need for such efforts is growing exponentially. Exposure to global health experiences through study abroad has become an increasingly important means in providing such opportunities, as part of nursing curricula. These study abroad opportunities have been found to benefit nursing students in many ways by providing students with opportunities to acquire knowledge in a foreign country, thereby gaining diverse cultural perspectives, as well as global competence.

Study abroad also offers nursing students opportunities to meet academic requirements while gaining knowledge in conjunction with personal awareness of culture in another part of the world. Immersion into the culture and the exposure to the host countries' political and economic systems provide students with the ability to discern dissimilarities, thereby gaining appreciation for these differences. While students are engaged in the academic component of the experience many opportunities are provided to students to embrace the people of the host country, their customs, history, and traditions. Students studying in developing countries may gain an understanding of international initiatives being made to improve social equality across the globe and the degree of improved health because of such initiatives. In developing countries, study abroad experience may also assist students in gaining respect for the barriers in the development of health care access, with consideration given to constraints of human capital and access to resources. The exposure to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) provides an example of what successful local agencies have done to improve community health and to provide support services important for community development and sustainability.

While studying abroad, students may gain more than completion of coursework by interacting with people of other cultures and ethnicity. Students may gain an appreciation for the people of the host country and may thus reflect upon the propriety of personal cultural stereotyping. There is also a sense of personal growth experienced by most students that may contribute to increasing their self-confidence and sense of autonomy.

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Studying abroad provides students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in foreign languages, as the exposure to a language in a host country allows many opportunities to initiate conversational influence in a variety of settings. Such immersion may also provide a future career opportunity if there becomes a desire to return to the host country for employment.

Study abroad may offer a particular appreciation for the country to which one would not be exposed in the native country's environment, such as experiencing foods, internal travel, the arts, sports, and music. In developing countries, students may choose to examine major determinants of health such as: sewage, pest control, clean air and water, diet and exercise, as well as determining evaluation of essential medicines to improve health outcomes. Such exposure to variables, not found in the native country, provides occasions for students to gain cultural competence and to understand issues from varied perspectives.

In addition, lasting relationships with international friends is a benefit of study abroad. Over the course of time abroad, interacting with roommates, faculty, and community leaders plays an important part in formulating future networking opportunities with possible engagement in international work as a result of studying abroad. The experience may also enhance one's ability for future graduate studies. Students studying abroad demonstrate a sense of independence and respect for diversity that provides students who wish to participate in graduate studies with a unique perspective related to world views and diversity issues.


Study abroad experiences have had a positive impact on students. The ability to complete course work abroad and experience an immersion in another culture is life changing and should be encouraged by universities, for this allows students to view and respect the world from many perspectives.

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