CURQ Vignettes

Integrating Undergraduate Research and Study Abroad in an International Studies Curriculum

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The new undergraduate curriculum of the School of International Service (SIS) offers multiple pathways for American University students to integrate research into international experiences. The curriculum provides a framework that allows students to explore their intellectual interests at AU and around the globe, as well as to connect these research experiences to a liberal arts international studies curriculum at SIS. Key elements of the model include an early match of students interested in pursuing systematic research with faculty mentors; a structured advising process via academic advisers, the SIS undergraduate research coordinator, and faculty members to connect coursework, research, and study abroad; a two-semester research methods and methodology course sequence that prepares students to conduct independent research; an institutional support structure for undergraduate research at home and abroad; structured pathways for students to pursue research beyond the classroom; and curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to present and/or publish research.

A typical SIS undergraduate follows a pathway that begins with the exploration of the complexity and diversity of perspectives on a problem or issue in a first-year seminar class. Second-year students complete a two-semester methods and methodology course sequence that introduces students to a range of research methodologies (neo-positivist and non-positivist) and guides them through the completion of an original research project. This course sequence serves as a springboard to subsequent research opportunities, including independent mentored research with SIS faculty members or—more commonly—independent research conducted while studying abroad during the third year. Students then may apply for research grants (such as the American University Summer Scholars Research Award, which provides support for structured, mentor-supervised research during the summer between the third and fourth years). Recent Summer Scholars awards recipients have researched the lived experience of refugees from Myanmar in Malaysia, studied the integration of Latino immigrants in Spanish urban centers, and analyzed the growth of anti-establishment parties in established democracies. These scaffolded research experiences culminate with a senior capstone or SIS honors capstone course and project together with the presentation of student research at the SIS Undergraduate Research Symposium and/or the National Conference on Undergraduate Research.

In addition to the standard four-year BA degree the SIS Global Scholars Program, a three-year living-learning community BA program, offers another pathway that integrates undergraduate research and study abroad. Global Scholars complete the same two-semester methods and methodology sequence. However, the second course, Advanced International Studies Research, is

taken over the summer as part of an integrated study abroad program held at one or more of American University's partner institutions (such as the AU Abroad Centers in Brussels and Madrid). Students research their chosen topics in an international environment that offers interaction with faculty experts from partner institutions, ongoing intellectual exchanges with international students, and rich opportunities for original fieldwork.

Overall, undergraduate research as part of a study abroad program or international experience is becoming the norm for SIS students, given the ways in which a pluralistic understanding of research and a holistic understanding of global learning have been integrated into the curriculum, followed by a range of mechanisms for supporting students in their research endeavors.

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Frontiers in STEM Study Abroad Undergraduate Research: A New Zealand Case Study

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The structure and short length of study abroad programs (SAPs) are often an impediment to achieving optimal undergraduate research experiences outside the home country. Frontiers Abroad (FA) has met the challenge with innovative programing that embeds the concepts of *academic integration* and *longitudinal learning* into its model. Together, these two concepts foster research collaboration between the student and faculty member at both the home and host institutions.

Conventional SAPs are either delivered by a host institution in another country or led by faculty from a home institution that visit the host nation with their students. For STEM SAPs, academic content is either based on a campus of a higher education institution in the host country or delivered from a more remote “field” location. If an undergraduate research experience is meant to be a primary learning goal and/or achievement of the program, this can be difficult to deliver in conventional SAPs, as there is little incentive for host universities to deliver meaningful research experiences for visiting short-term students, and field-based programs may lack appropriate resources (e.g., laboratories). FA has broken SAP convention and established a hybrid model for earth and environmental science programs in New Zealand whereby both field and campus-based learning are combined. Research forms the educational core of FA programs, running from the beginning of a five-week intensive field camp and extending longitudinally to the end of a campus semester. The first four weeks of field camp are designed to incrementally introduce and develop field skills and research techniques. During the final field week, students work with faculty mentors and collect field and/or laboratory data that, via a seamless transition, they carry with them into the campus part of the program.

Their research forms the basis for a semester-long course offered only to FA students, which minimizes the effect of large, domestic-course enrollments. Students are provided with the requisite skills as well as analytical and computational equipment (e.g., geochemical, microscopy, drone, GIS) needed to develop their research from the proposal stage through the experimental/methods stage to ultimately interpret and present their results within the context of published literature. The results are written in a journal manuscript format and presented as a poster display at a formal research symposium hosted by the host university.

The success of this longitudinal learning model is underpinned by curricular and pedagogical integration between the students' home institutions and FA. FA has promoted trans-Pacific academic integration from the concept stage of program development and has continued with one to three U.S. faculty members joining the New Zealand programs as teachers and/or research mentors every year. Such integration has not only ensured confidence in FA as a leader in STEM education abroad but also, more unexpectedly, research collaborations have organically sprouted with many FA students continuing their New Zealand-based research at their home institution as undergraduate theses. Thus it can be argued that academic integration has extended the longitudinal learning model beyond the abroad program and has led to three peer-reviewed journal publications with students as first author, more than 50 student presentations at the Geological Society of America conference, two collaborative research grants, two students returning to New Zealand as Fulbright Fellows, and one PhD scholarship student continuing her FA research that she started as an undergraduate.

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"Community" and "Collaboration" in Undergraduate Language Documentation Research: A Case Study from Nepal and a U.S. University

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A typical image of endangered language documentation is that of the lone-wolf scholar, devoting years to singlehandedly describing, analyzing, and preserving a vulnerable language and taking sole credit for these efforts. However, this "single-author" model is changing now, with the rise of team-structure documentation projects and with community-oriented materials designed by faculty, students, and community members. The Documenting the Languages of Manang, Nepal Project (<https://mananglanguages.isg.siue.edu>) is an example of a next step in the evolution of collaborative documentation and preservation. It demonstrates how faculty and undergraduate students in the Midwest's Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) can gain greater awareness and appreciation of—as well as have a positive impact on—endangered and undervalued languages spoken in another part of the world: Nepal.

With more than 100 languages and a similarly high number of

ethnic groupings, Nepal is a country of undisputed ethno-linguistic diversity. It also faces increasingly rapid cultural, political, and economic change with ensuing language displacement. The goals of this NSF-funded project (BCS-DEL 1149639) are to investigate the structure, social functions, and prospects of four languages spoken in the Manang District. Featuring a large-scale design, the methods involve multiple participants at all levels of design and implementation.

The approach embraced by the principal investigator, faculty collaborators, and student researchers is simultaneously "top-down" and "bottom-up," in that research questions, methodologies, data collection, and outputs are co-constructed and evaluated across all levels. It also involves community-valued outputs. Discussed below are some of the most significant activities as conceived and orchestrated by the undergraduate students recruited through the SIUE program Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA).

First is the creation of an interactive, multimedia digital archive of narratives recorded from speakers of the languages, which is now housed for free public access at the University of Virginia (UVA). One example may be found at <https://audio-video.shanti.virginia.edu/collection/gyalsumdo-project>. URCA students edited narratives in ELAN, an audio-video annotation and translation program. They also uploaded videos and transcripts to the UVA archive and added meta-data about recording location/time/participants and subject keywords for searchability in the library's database.

Second is the analysis of sociolinguistic interviews carried out in Nepal with the goal of a coauthored academic journal publication. URCA students assisted with sorting open-ended interview responses into Likert-type categories for quantitative analysis, and they assisted with visualization of response types.

Third is the construction of a word corpus to study tone in these languages. URCA students and graduate research assistants worked together to organize sound files; perform acoustic analysis with Praat software; and prepare data for statistical analysis in programs such as Excel, R, and Vassarstats. Their methods and results were presented at the fourth annual USA Science and Engineering Festival in Washington, DC, in April 2015.

Fourth is the construction of a community dictionary (*Gyalsumdo: A Community-Based Dictionary, with Nepali and English Indices*). Two SIUE URCA students and one graduate assistant assembled and edited the dictionary with Toolbox software. The final version was published by the Center for Nepal and Asian Study at Nepal's Tribhuvan University, with 500 copies issued to the Gyalsumdo community free of charge, and was distributed to local primary schools in March 2017.

These activities illustrate the local and international impact of student-generated research that is also truly community-based: it is conducted on, for, and with the community.

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