

Case Study

Title:

Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock- A Case Study from DIT School of Computing

Overview:

Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock that is experienced amongst some students who have returned from a study abroad programme.

Case Study Background/Context:

DIT Computer Science Students have the opportunity to take part in a study abroad programme in their 3rd academic year. They can go for the whole academic year or for just a single semester. Students continue to study relevant Computer Science technical modules alongside language and cultural modules. They must achieve 60 ECTS if they are going abroad for the whole academic year and 30 ECTS if they are going just for the single semester exchange. The destinations available to students to go on the study abroad program include:

- Germany
- Finland
- Spain
- China
- Korea

Over the last number of years, the School of Computing at DIT has noticed that some of the students who returned from the study abroad program find it difficult to settle back into life at DIT. This can have an adverse effect on their performance in their 4th and final year. The 4th and final year is the most important year for the students in regards to their final grade so it is vitally important that problems are addressed straight away.

Common readjustment problems experienced by students include:

- Missing the country and way of life of the host country
- Missing relationships they had made with friends
- Picking back up their life at home,
- Readjusting to everyone again, knowing that their own lives and have changed while they were away.
- Experiencing a big 'slump' on their return

- Difficulty back living with parents after having the experience of freedom while on the study abroad program
- Not having such an independent lifestyle at home compared to the study abroad program
- Readapting to the Irish climate
- Lack of motivation getting back into the DIT academic way of life again.

In order to address some of the above problems the following initiatives have been introduced by the School of Computing:

1. Feedback questionnaire / survey to all returning study abroad students. Questions asked not only focused on their time abroad but also in relation to them settling back into life in Ireland and at DIT as well as the readjusting to friends and family. Responses from these questions would then be looked at to see if there was a common theme amongst students. This would then make it easier to put a plan into place to address these issues.

2. A 'Welcome Back Lunch'. A few weeks into their 1st semester in year 4 a welcome back event was arranged for the students who had completed the study abroad programme in year 3. The welcome back had 3 sections. The first section involved a presentation which covered the following areas:

- Recognition for completing the study abroad program which involved giving the students a certificate of completion.
- Tips for returning students
- Ways to continue their global experience back in Ireland

The 2nd section included the collection of verbal feedback i.e. asking students directly a range of questions on their study abroad experience.

The 3rd part of the welcome back event involved a talk from the Head of Undergraduate Studies for the School of Computing. This talk concentrated on the importance of year 4 and informing the students of the procedures in place to help those students who might be struggling adapting back to life in DIT.

3. The students are asked to take part in a video recording exercise to create a promotional video that will be shown to promote the study abroad program to future DIT students.

4. Lastly, the introduction of a buddy scheme which will allow students who have just returned from the study abroad program to become a buddy to a new international student who is coming to DIT in the coming semester on a study abroad program.

Measuring Success/Outcomes of Case:

The above initiatives have only recently been introduced so at this point in time it is hard to measure the success of them so far and the effect they have had. From informal discussions with the students who have returned, the above initiative's have been certainly welcomed by the students who have found aspects of them very useful and beneficial.

Three tips from your institution for other HEIs:

1. Provide the students with a Certificate of Completion for their time on the study abroad program.
2. Collected feedback from students via questionnaires as well as collect verbal feedback in a group discussion format.
3. Ensure that students are aware of all of the services that are on offer at a School, College and University level to address issues faced with returning to Ireland from a study abroad program i.e. counselling services, career services, student union, international societies etc.