

**It's Always About People: How a Crew Mentality Can Serve as a Model for Short-term Faculty-led
Study Abroad Programs**

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of implementing a crew mentality in short-term faculty-led study abroad programs. Using a retrospective survey, I measured the relationships between crew mentality, participant's regard for others, and participant's overall experience. The study found that there is a significant difference in the responses between those who strongly understood and embraced crew mentality to those who did not. Results of the post-trip survey indicated that participants' regard for others and participants' overall experience was significantly higher for those who strongly understood and embraced crew mentality than for those who did not. This study suggests unique insights into study abroad programs and a mentality that can be implemented across other programs and groups. Insights on the crew mentality, recommendations for universities, and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Study abroad, short-term study abroad, short-term faculty-led study abroad, crew mentality, culture, teamwork, team culture, workgroups

Introduction

It's Always About People

Covid-19 has rocked our world. Everyone's life shifted and changed as we socially distanced and shifted much of our interactions with one another into an online space. When this all started, no one could have predicted how far away we would be from each other. As we have had to, and still are, cultivating and creating relationships with other people has become even more important as everything moves virtual and our face-to-face interactions remain limited. This--the importance of people--has become very apparent. We are meant to love, care, and enjoy other people; which makes being separated from others difficult. Looking back, memories are not of what you were doing, it's who you were doing it with. For example, when I think of my favorite classes at CSUSM, it's because of the professor, not necessarily the content. When I think of my favorite athletics team, I think of rafting in Colorado with them, not one of the random games we won. Looking back at experiences, classes, and teams, it's the people and the leaders, professors, coaches, teammates, family, and friends that I remember the most. As much as we love what we are doing when we're doing *it*, for me, it's always been about the people I'm doing *it* with.

Ultimately, there isn't much I can think of that comes close to how important people are; whether that be the person beside you or someone on the other side of the world. This mentality emphasizes caring for other people and improving other people's lives, not just your own. This selfless care is not uncommon; we see it in teams, groups, and organizations. A strong culture of caring for one another drives people further than others and creates higher satisfaction for everyone involved (Schmit, n.d.).

It's always about people, so why not stress the importance of people in everything, including short-term study abroad programs? This is the type of culture my professor, Dr. Bennett Cherry, created through his study abroad program, GBM 440C. This culture is called the "crew mentality".

The "Crew Mentality"

At a basic level, a crew is another word for a group, team, community, or family. Within a crew, members look out and support each other, accept their role as a part of a bigger group, and include each

other. This is all very important and prevalent in groups and teams including study abroad trips as people are traveling to unfamiliar places and working together. This emphasizes the group to create a better experience for yourself. While this is the base of most groups and teams (don't exclude anyone, make sure everyone is accounted for, etc.), the crew mentality takes it a step further. The crew mentality also places an emphasis on other individuals because ultimately, it's always all about people. My definition of crew mentality involves putting other people first to enhance other people's experiences. It's not just checking off the box to make sure everyone is accounted for, it's about actually caring about them and their experience. I conducted research to see if the mention and repetition of a crew mentality actually produced this culture and to see if the crew mentality overall created a better experience for students in study abroad programs.

I decided to study abroad because I wanted to connect with others from my school and internationally, experience new cultures, explore my interest in global business, and take advantage of my drive to travel. I have participated in two short-term faculty-led study abroad programs through CSUSM. I am incredibly grateful for both experiences as they provided me with different perspectives, personal development, a look into other cultures, and countless memories. While participating in the GBM 440C program in Summer 2019 with Dr. Bennett Cherry, I compared my own experiences with the other study abroad experience I had the summer before in a different faculty-led study abroad experience. From simply knowing everyone's name to feeling comfortable in a foreign country, the crew mentality created an enriching environment for learning in an abroad setting. In my eyes, it is similar to a family or community. I noticed a marked variability but wanted to see if other students also experienced similar reactions and outcomes from their study-abroad programs. Working with Dr. Cherry, we conducted a survey to investigate further. In this study, I set out to see if this "crew mentality" culture made a difference in other students' experiences in short-term faculty-led study abroad programs at CSUSM.

Short-Term Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs

The number of short-term study abroad programs has grown to account for 65% of United States study abroad programs. Short-term study abroad programs are defined by the Institute of International Education (IIE) as programs with durations of eight weeks or less (IIE, 2018).

Faculty-led programs are a specific type of study abroad program that is developed for students by faculty from their university. The faculty develops the course and accompanies the students on the trip. The faculty lead acts as a trip leader, teacher, and mentor to the students throughout their experience abroad. Faculty-led programs also allow for structure, supervision, hands-on learning, safety, convenience, and low-cost study abroad options for both students and faculty (Keese & O'Brien, 2011).

There is a lot of research done about the effectiveness of short-term programs compared to long-term programs. Researchers such as Kehl & Morris (2008) and Davidson (2010) have found better outcomes from longer programs than shorter trips. This research is contrasted with many other findings on the effectiveness of short-term programs (Lee, 2015; Whatley, et al., 2020, Anderson et al., 2006; Ogden, 2015; and Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003). Along with research that says short-term programs can create similar benefits as long-term programs (Anderson et al., 2006 and Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003).

Specifically, Ogden (2015) mentions that the program duration may not be as correlated with learning outcomes as once thought. Short-term programs are appealing to many because of the decreased cost, time away from work, responsibilities, and family while still getting valuable experiences (Whatley, et al., 2020). Some short-term program outcomes for students include an enhanced interest in foreign languages, clearer knowledge of other cultures, transformed perspectives of the world and worldviews, questioning of well-known assumptions (Ogden, 2015), greater intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006), broader international awareness and knowledge (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003), increased global awareness, and change in attitudes (DeLoach et al., 2003).

As the number of participants in short-term programs continues to increase, research on the development of the program and outcomes from the students is increasingly important (Ogden, 2015). Faculty-led programs often require more responsibility as the faculty lead may take on many different

roles throughout the trip. They are also often more complex than other exchange programs and other classes as the university is more involved and there is a lot of approval needed (Keese & O'Brien, 2011). In addition to these bureaucratic hurdles, some faculty may be hesitant to take on the faculty lead role due to reports of the potential for "on-the-ground problems" highlighted by Koernig (2007): keeping track of the group, students arriving late to scheduled departures, and students' overindulgence of alcohol. Despite these, it is undeniable that faculty-led programs are important to the overall catalog of study abroad opportunities provided to students. It is my goal in this research to help faculty leaders understand how they can benefit from developing a crew mentality within their programs and minimize these and other troubles that are often associated with short-term faculty-led study abroad programs.

Studies on short-term study abroad programs focus on executing the program and potential issues during the trip rather than a focus on before the program or the professor. There is not much literature about how to create an impactful trip rather than a sight-seeing vacation (Sjoberg & Shabalina, 2010). This research places an emphasis on continual student development throughout, stemming from the development of the program and the professor.

Research Questions:

RQ 1: Do the students who understand/embrace the crew mentality have a higher regard for others?

RQ 2: Does implementing a crew mentality have an effect on a student's overall experience and takeaways?

Method

It is expected that just about everyone who participates in a study abroad trip had a great experience and knows what it means to be a part of a group. Crew mentality takes experiences and outcomes a step further by emphasizing other people. First, I analyzed the general definition of crew

mentality and elements of my in-depth definition in regards to other people. Next, I analyzed the outcomes and takeaways of the participant's overall experience.

Participants and Procedure

The participants who provided data for this survey (N = 109) are students who participated in one of 19 faculty-led short-term study abroad programs between the summer of 2011 and 2019. All of the programs were offered by faculty in various academic departments at California State University San Marcos. The program's locations included Europe, Asia, South America, Central America, Australia, and Alaska. Each program's length and number of participants also varied.

There were a total of 554 students solicited for their participation in this study. A link to a web-based survey was sent to each participant from a list procured through our Global Programs office at CSUSM. Each student had participated in at least one faculty led study abroad program at CSUSM in the years between 2010 and 2019. In total, 109 students responded to the survey (~20% response rate), with 87 full completed surveys.

Measurement

Each respondent was invited to reflect on their experiences while on a study abroad program that may have been several years in the past. As such, I utilized a retrospective survey. The survey instrument consisted of a total of five open-ended questions, three yes/no questions, and 56 Likert-style scale items from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For the purposes of this project, I utilized two scaled items to create two comparison groups and further utilized scaled items to compare means for the two groups as well as short answer questions.

The two comparison groups were created based on their perceptions of crew mentality on their trips based on each participant's response to two Likert-style statements. These statements served as a way to accurately represent participants who understood and embraced the crew mentality while studying abroad.

Group 1 (n=61) was comprised of participants who strongly agreed (=5) with either of the following statements:

I understood what the “Crew Mentality” was while studying abroad.

or

I embraced the “Crew Mentality” while studying abroad.

Group 2 (n = 48) was comprised of participants who did not strongly agree (>5) on either of the same statements:

I understood what the “Crew Mentality” was while studying abroad.

nor

I embraced the “Crew Mentality” while studying abroad.

In this study, those who strongly understood or embraced the crew mentality provide a strong representation of crew members which includes emphasizing other crew members. Crew mentality was measured through general questions regarding crew mentality and questions regarding others. Those who did not strongly understand or embrace the crew mentality comprised group two.

Results

As a whole, there were significant differences between those who understood/embraced crew mentality (group one) and those who did not (group two). Data were analyzed using two-sample unequal variance t-Tests. There was support for the first research question which asked if students who understood and embraced the crew mentality have a higher regard for others. There was also support for the second research question which asked if implementing a crew mentality has an effect on a student’s overall experience.

Hypothesis 1: Participants in group one will have a deeper understanding of the crew mentality in regards to other people on the trip.

To start, there is a significant difference in the general understanding of crew mentality. Likert statements on important elements relating to crew mentality, found in Appendix A, reported a statistically significant difference between groups one and two with respective means of 4.75 and 4.35, $p < .001$. Next, there is a significant difference in the deeper understanding of crew mentality in regards to other people. Statements regarding others on the trip, found in Appendix B, report a statistically significant difference between groups one and two with respective means of 4.76 and 4.31, $p < .001$. Short answer responses from a question asking about what it means to be a part of a crew also indicated a deeper understanding by group one. Group one mentioned putting others ahead of themselves, encouraging others to participate or speak up, doing things “with one another for one another”, sharing new things with others to help the team grow, and “putting others ahead of themselves.” These selfless answers were not found in group two. Instead, group two used language such as “compromising” and benefits were more likely to focus on themselves rather than the group. Overall, group one’s interpretation of what it means to be a part of a crew is in line with my definition of crew mentality. There is a deeper understanding of the general definition of crew mentality and higher regards for other people by respondents in group one.

Hypothesis 2: Participants in group one will have an overall better experience.

Likert statements on the participant’s overall experience, found in Appendix C, indicated a statistically significant difference between groups one and two with respective means of 4.88 and 4.58, $p < .001$. Another Likert statement asked if the participants kept in contact with anyone from the trip also produced a statistically significant difference with means of 0.72 and 0.54 with a p-value of 0.04. Short answer responses from a question asking about their program’s long-term and short-term impact produced different responses. While all participants noted a great experience and “life-changing” effects, those in group one were more likely to note other people in their experience. Some talked about their teachers, fellow crew members, or people they met abroad. Many people made international connections and

“lifelong” relationships. These were not as prevalent in the responses from group two. There is a difference in the group’s overall experience. See Appendix D for a table of summarized data.

Discussion

Crew mentality places an emphasis on others which ultimately increases participant’s overall experience. This research emphasizes the importance of people and the effects of caring for others. It also emphasizes the importance of leaders and the role they play in each participant’s experience. This study aimed to extend our knowledge of what makes short-term faculty-led study abroad programs effective and provide data and recommendations on possible ways to improve them.

Through our research, it is apparent that embracing a crew mentality creates an emphasis on other people throughout the trip and after. Those who understood and embraced the crew mentality had a higher regard for others and reported a better overall experience. This study shows that improving the experience of other people in a study abroad program ultimately improves one's own experience.

During my third year at CSUSM, the athletics department and our team adopted a culture where we always talked about us being a family. This family culture connected our teammates, teams, and the athletic department in a way that I had not experienced previously. It created unity, fortified values, and enriched our program. To me, the family culture created a positive environment and experience that was better than before. This is similar to my experience in the study abroad programs; the crew mentality enhanced my experience, personal development, and outcomes. The concept, it’s all about people, is so simple but also so often overlooked. This mentality can be implemented to groups, teams, and programs to enhance experiences and culture.

Implications

This is not specific to study abroad programs; this translates to other groups, teams, and crews. Although this mentality could form naturally over time, making it known and expressing goals will get everyone involved. Crew mentality emphasizes people and putting others ahead of themselves which

ultimately increases their experience and can be used in everyday life and situations. This may take a leader to stand up and start this mentality. Leadership has been determined to be one of the most important aspects impacting team performance (Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2010). Further research shows that leader humility positively influences team humility. Team humility differs from individual humility and includes admitting weaknesses and mistakes, deflecting praise to others, highlighting follower strength, and being open to feedback, ideas, and advice (Arménio et al., 2017). This shows the influence the leader can have on a group. People follow those who lead by example and one person's mentality will rub off on another. Everything starts with someone, why not you?

How to Create a Crew Mentality

Creating a crew mentality starts with the individual crew members. For study abroad programs, this starts with the faculty lead. The students involved are nervous, anxious, and probably not even sure what they signed up for. The development of a crew member starts before they even sign up for the trip and continually gets stronger. The faculty lead already has a crew mentality and starts by implementing it into the design of the program. The mentality is shown in the marketing materials, info sessions, and pre-trip classes. This continues while on the trip and is continually talked about. The faculty lead uses the crew member imagery in discussions and lessons. Participants are called crew members before they fully understand what this means to create crew member imagery. It creates an idea of what it takes to be a crew member and keeps participants an active part of the crew. This mentality starts with the leader and the design of the program and continues until each and every one of the participants feels a part of the crew.

Recommendations for Universities

Based on this research, it is recommended that universities look into the development of their short-term faculty-led programs and train their faculty on this mentality. Understanding the effects of the leader on the group and their overall experience is important when choosing and preparing faculty leads.

The importance of people in the crew mentality could potentially create better experiences and encourage people to study abroad.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this research. First, the survey was a post-trip evaluation and there was no pre-trip survey. Another limitation is that the amount of time since the trip for the participants varied and ranged up to several years.

Further Research

Further research could entail using a pre-trip survey to compare to a post-trip survey for future study abroad trips. Additionally, further research could investigate the student's benefits and development through short-term programs that specifically focus on the program model instead of comparing it to long-term programs. As well as the different variations and durations of faculty-led programs (Ogden, 2015). Further research could include applying the crew mentality to other groups such as sport teams and workgroups. These groups could vary in size and duration. The crew mentality could also be researched as a universal leadership style or group mentality.

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Appendix A

Important Elements of the Crew Mentality Scale Items

Please indicate the extent to which you would consider each of the following statements to be important elements of the “Crew Mentality”

1. To consider other crew members' feelings or perspectives when making decisions during the study abroad program.
2. To look out for one another's safety during the study abroad program.
3. To make sure everyone feels like they are involved and matter.
4. To seek involvement from all students, even the shy ones.
5. To recognize that we are part of one big group and one person's actions can positively (or negatively) affect everyone else.
6. To invite another crew member to do something with me or with the people I was already with.
7. To help other students learn, see, and do new and different things to enhance their experience.
8. To be part of something bigger than myself.
9. To recognize that we are representing each other when we are visiting sites, organizations, and tours.

Appendix B

Regard for Others Scale Items

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding your interactions with other participants of your study abroad program.

1. I wanted to help others experience new and different things.
2. I looked out for others while traveling abroad.
3. I knew the name of everyone in my study abroad program.

Appendix C**Overall Experience Scale Items**

Now that your study abroad experience is over, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following summary questions.

1. All things considered, I am satisfied with my study abroad experience.
2. I have a greater sense of responsibility to other people as a result of my study abroad experience.
3. If I had to do it all over again, I would choose to participate in this study abroad program.
4. I am happy that I chose this study abroad program.

Appendix D**Table 1***Data Summarized*

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

Alpha: 0.05

| | Group One | Group Two | <i>p</i> |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | |
| Important Elements of the Crew Mentality | 4.75 | 4.35 | 9.64E-14 |
| Regard for Others | 4.76 | 4.31 | 4.01E-07 |
| Overall Experience | 4.88 | 4.58 | 4.45E-06 |
| Do you keep in contact with anyone? | 0.72 | 0.54 | 0.04 |