

The Quest for Innovation and Internationalization in the Middle East: Reflections on an Ultra-Short-Term Study Abroad Program in Europe and its possible transferability to Middle Eastern Universities

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Abstract: The present qualitative research paper explores the development of an integrated ultra-short-term study abroad program in Europe and discusses its potentials and its limitations from a conceptual point of view. In addition, it attempts to provide insights into some operational issues of this emerging type of study abroad program.

Because the primarily intended audience of this paper is educators and administrators of Middle Eastern Universities, the paper also discusses ways to implement and design similar programs in that aspiring region.

The author makes the case that with some light adaptations such a program could also be implemented in the context of Middle Eastern higher education institutions. Also, the author argues that although the study took place in the area of Business and Management / Marketing Management, the main features of this concept could well be transferred to other academic fields.

Keywords: Study abroad program, internationalization of curriculum, student exchange program.

1. Preliminary remarks

In January 2011 the concept of a specific short-term study abroad program in Europe was presented at the International Conference and Exhibition on Knowledge-Based Business, Industry and Education (KBIE) at the University College of Bahrain. The paper on which the presentation was based on was published in the KBIE conference proceedings (Schwald, 2011). A more advanced version of this paper was eventually published in the Review of European Studies (Schwald, 2012).

In October 2012 the author was invited to submit an extended version of the conference proceedings paper to the International Journal of Pedagogical Innovations (IJPI). What you are reading now is this extended version that in essence continues where the earlier paper had stopped. That means, in addition to some relevant basic facts from the original document it mostly analyzes the development since January 2011. Also, as the title indicates, the paper will explore possibilities for transferring this specific type of program to Middle Eastern universities.

2. Introduction

This study presents some findings of an ultra-short term study abroad program in Europe. It describes how the program was conceived, how it evolved and it discusses its merits and drawbacks. The participants of several consecutive ultra-short term study abroad programs responded at the end of each program to questionnaires that were designed to explore their personal perceptions about this type of program. The findings from their answers as well as the experiences of the program's administrator are included in this paper and can serve colleagues from other academic institutions as a starting point for designing, modifying or developing their own programs.

Previous studies on the effects of study abroad have come to the conclusion that students that spent some time abroad have improved to a small to moderate degree their intercultural sensitivity (Patterson, 2006). General opinion though is that the longer students study abroad the more useful and beneficial the experience will be with respect to the student's cultural, academic and personal development (Dwyer, 2004).

Though various types of student exchange programs exist and while obviously many summer schools and other short-term programs take place around the world, only few scholars have investigated them from a conceptual point of view. The purpose of the present study therefore is to present a yet not so common type of short-term student exchange program to the interested reader and to advance this underrepresented field of research in general.

3. Study abroad

One could possibly identify numerous reasons why a student might want to study abroad. Reasons that are typically mentioned are for example learning a new language or improving some existing foreign language skills, meeting new people and interacting with people from other cultures, developing new skills in the student's specific field of study, traveling and sightseeing, improving the CV or résumé to enhance one's job perspectives and so on. Students seem to have recognized how important it is to become global citizens and to know more about other countries and their cultures (Brodin, 2009).

Depending on the student's main motivation or motivations for studying abroad he or she will then – ideally – select the appropriate program. A simple Internet search using a search engine such as Google will already result in numerous options. In addition to that there are also dedicated websites, such as www.summerschoolsineurope.eu, where interested students can find a list of programs categorized by country and subject.

But not only students, also universities and other institutions of higher, academic education have an interest in the concept of study abroad simply because of the necessity to internationalize their curriculum. The effects of globalization and the concerns of accrediting bodies may have been contributing factors of this trend (Thibadoux & Helms, 1989).

Traditional study abroad programs have durations ranging from one semester to one or several years. That means in classic study abroad programs a student completes a whole semester or even a whole year at a foreign university. For some students this might be a very long time away from home and might even stop them from studying abroad at all. In the US for example, only about 4% of undergraduate students study abroad (Vistawide, 2012). Table 1 gives an overview of different types of study abroad programs based on the length of the stay abroad:

Length of study abroad:	1 - 2 days	1 - 2 weeks	1 semester	More than 2 semesters
Type of program:	Workshops	Ultra-short-term programs	Semester abroad programs	For-degree programs

Countries where a large number of their students study abroad include China, India, South Korea, and Germany. Looking at Germany for example, about 8% of students of that country study abroad sometime during their university level studies. Spain, France, and the UK are the most attractive destination countries for German students. Three quarters of the German students who go abroad receive some financial support from their families. The percentage of students that come from upper class families that study abroad is almost twice as high as that of students that come from lower income households.

International students that study in Germany are supported by their families, by stipends and by engaging in some kind of gainful employment. One of their biggest difficulties they encounter in Germany, besides the complicated education system they say is the lack of contact to their German fellow students (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010).

For German university students for example, the average number of study abroad months is seven. And the percentage of German students abroad who have stayed six months or less at a university abroad was 63% in 2009 while in 2003 that figure was only 45% (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010). A trend toward shorter stays is easily recognizable.

4. The steps toward a new concept of international cooperation

The trigger to integrate parts of a Bachelor level Marketing course across European borders came in the spring of 2009 when several business students, researchers and lecturers from a relatively small German university (with around 3,000 enrolled students) and a similarly sized university from France met for a weeklong seminar on the subject of doing business in European border regions at an international conference center near the Franco-German border. The program was jointly organized by the two universities involved as well as a non-profit organization that teaches and does research on the European integration process. The content of the seminar circled around the general theme of economic issues in European border regions such as regional cooperation, cross-border employment issues and the benefits and the challenges of doing business in European border regions.

At this seminar, the mostly 3rd year French and German business students listened to lectures on international and interregional issues and they also visited several companies and other organizations in the French-German border region to learn more about their specific points of view regarding doing business in border regions.

Beforehand it was agreed upon that both universities could send up to 12 students to this seminar. Financing of the seminar was organized by the professor in charge of

the event and a substantial part of the total budget consisted of contributions provided by non-profit organizations with a mission to invigorate and stimulate the European integration process.

Both universities selected their participants based on different criteria. The German university emphasized the motivational aspects while the French university made language skills a primary precondition for participation.

One specific characteristic of this seminar was that - unlike for example regular summer schools - it took place during (actually in the middle of) the spring / summer semester term though the seminar was not part of a regular course module that means it took place outside of the regular curricula of the two universities.

Also, similar to other summer school type of events, no grading took place and the students didn't receive any credit points for their participation. Therefore the in the end 21 students from France and Germany - simply put - volunteered to take part in this program outside of the curriculum knowing that they would miss classes at home, that they would have to make up for missed presentations, write-ups and similar and that they would neither receive a grade nor any credit points for participating in the seminar.

It was therefore unsurprisingly very difficult to find enough volunteer students that were willing to take part in this event even though they didn't even have to pay for travel and accommodation costs on their own. Only after intensive advertising and promotion efforts was it possible to fill the seminar with enough students from Germany. In the end, most of the students who decided to take part already have had some previous international experience such as language courses abroad and some participants even had already worked abroad. This higher affinity toward international topics seemed to have played a substantial role in the students' decision to participate. All of the French students have had some previous experiences abroad, including internships and similar.

The two universities had not cooperated before the seminar. However there had been previous contacts between members of the two institutions that acted as promoters of a possible, more intensive cooperation.

One of the goals of this seminar therefore was to find out whether further projects would make sense or not. The students had to work in bi-national teams on several of the seminar's topics while the administrative and research staff observed their interactions. Toward the end of the seminar it became clear that a continuation of the bi-university cooperation would make sense and therefore the representatives from both universities retreated to a conference room to discuss possibilities for future cooperation and student-centered events. One of the main outcomes was that the German students could take part in a weeklong, marketing-themed seminar at the French institution while the German university promised to install

a similar, so-called "International Marketing-Week" (IMW) at their institution in the following semester.

Of course at that time it was not quite clear whether the concept would work or not. The difficulty in finding enough volunteers to travel to the seminar at the conference center near the Franco-German border, located only about 4 hours of travel time (by car for the German and by train for the French participants) away from both universities, showed that it would have to be designed so that it would attract enough students to make it worthwhile. Therefore it was mutually decided to award every successful participant from the respectively other institution 3 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) points for successfully completing the Marketing seminar. Success or not would be decided by the module leaders based on a final written project and a final presentation in front of the other participants.

For the spring event in France in 2010 several business students from the German university successfully applied for the "International Marketing Week" in France and some were granted financial aid to travel to France based on criteria defined by the university's international office. A majority of the German participants already took part in the seminar a year earlier and therefore were somewhat familiar with some of the characteristics of the French university. It is perhaps particularly import to mention that it was a big advantage for the German students to have already known several of their French co-students. This facilitated their stay in France very much. For one the French students who already knew their German counterparts showed them around and made them familiar with the local particularities. And - at least as important - most of the German students could also stay at the apartment or other place of residence of the French students for free or for only a very nominal fee. This proved to be advantageous from a financial as well as from a socio-cultural viewpoint.

The French took the Germans "under their wings" and spent most of the free time with them. At the end of the International Marketing Week in France an assessment of the students' performance was done and it was decided by the French faculty members to award them the 3 ECTS points as well as a certificate of participation.

The results were very encouraging in every way. For example even months after the Marketing Week had ended the students remained in contact with each other and some even visited each other. Social media sites such as Facebook greatly helped them to maintain contact.

About one week after the end of the event in France, the returning German students were interviewed about their experiences. Generally speaking, the outcome was very positive. The students evaluated the course in France positively and pointed out for example that the quality of the lectures and the lecturers were more or less on par with the courses they've had in Germany so far. Also they liked the concept of the Marketing Week in general and

didn't show any serious concern for having missed a week of classes back home in Germany. Other indicators were also positive and therefore it was agreed to install this concept for good on a mutual basis. That meant the IMW would take place in the spring for the summer semester term in France and in the fall for the winter semesters at the German university. It was also determined that the IMW would take place very early in the semester if possible, for instance in the first or second week. The reason behind that was that it was assumed that in the first couple of weeks students would be more willing to miss some classes than later on, especially toward the exam period.

One problem the organizers had to tackle with was that the exam periods of the two universities differ greatly. In France, the exam period was only shortly before the start of the IMW. For the German students it was the other way around as exams in German universities usually take place at the end of the semester with long breaks between semesters. Also, midterms are not common in Germany. So in essence, the first half of a semester is characterized by a relatively large amount of disposable time at the German university while from around midway through a semester the students increasingly start to prepare for the exams that are taking place for two weeks at the end of every semester and it would have been less likely that they would have decided to go to France for a whole week.

The specific theme of the Marketing Week in France was "Services Marketing" while the German university focused on "Marketing Communication". The course schedule for the Marketing Weeks of the two institutions was similar but there were also some differences. The following two tables give an overview of the structure of the seminar in Germany versus the one in France.

Table 2. Structure of the Marketing Week in France.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
M1	Ar-ri-val	Int.	GL	Lec.	Lec.	GP	De-Par-ture
M2		Lec.	GL	Lec.	Lec.	GP	
A1		Lec.	GL	Lec.	Lec.	CL	
A2		Lec.	GL	Lec.	Lec.		

Classes in France start at 8:30 am and end at 6:30 pm.

Table 3. Structure of the Marketing Week in Germany.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
M1	Ar-ri-val	Int.	Lec.	FT	GL	Lec.	GP
M2		Lec.	Lec.	FT	GL	Lec.	GP
A1		Lec.	Lec.	FT	GL	Lec.	CL
A2		Lec.	Lec.	FT	GL		

Classes in Germany start at 8:00 am and end at 7:00 pm.

Legend:

CL = closing event / results

FT = field trip to local companies

GL = Guest lecturer from other university

GP = Group presentations

Int. = introduction

Lec. = lecture

M1, M2 Morning session 1, morning session 2

A1, A2: Afternoon session 1, afternoon session 2

Several observations can be made from these two tables. For one, there are some similarities and also a few differences noticeable. One obvious essential difference is that the German university included a whole day in its program that was dedicated to a field trip to one or more local companies. In order to reduce travel time the companies that were visited were located at a maximum of 2 hours away from the university. The companies were selected based on the specific topic of the seminar in Germany, namely marketing communication, and whether a visit would enhance and expand the students' (and lecturers') knowledge in this field. Also, specifics of the French university that amongst other things focuses in some of its programs on luxury marketing were taken into account. For example an haute couture company located near the German university was visited. The French students were pleased with this visit and to learn more about this type of marketing in Germany.

Another company that was visited was a Franco-German joint venture in the aerospace industry. One can conclude that the organizers paid attention to these and other details and tried to align the company visits with the seminar's educational and pedagogic goals in general.

The company visits served several purposes. For one they made the whole experience more interesting and variable. Also, the seminar participants could see how concepts learned during the seminar were managed and applied in reality. Another purpose was to interrupt the more theoretical parts of the seminar for a while and to expand its more social aspects.

Since regular classes in Germany start at 8 am and end at 7 pm, those field trips were seen as a more relaxed part of the program by the participants. The seminar and its more theoretical parts therefore were loosened up for one day by means of the mentioned company visits.

Usually a bus was chartered by the organizers of the IMW in Germany to bring the students quickly to the company's location. The transportation costs incurred for the company visits were absorbed by the host university.

Judging from their reactions, this practical element of the seminar was seen positively by all students, the host as well as the guest students.

The French university's program doesn't include any field trip to a company or similar. But as the program in France is one day shorter (from Monday to Friday and not from Monday until Saturday as it is the case for the program in Germany) it would be problematic to incorporate a day outside of classes. Especially with respect to transferring credit transfer points to guest students, a fixed matter for the two programs, it would be problematic to further shorten the already ultra-short-term study abroad program even more. Therefore it is comprehensible that the French university doesn't include excursions in the program. In addition to that, the German guest students tend to arrive one or two days earlier than originally planned to the event in France and therefore have enough free time for some sightseeing and similar

activities. They therefore didn't complain about a missing field trip or similar during their stay in France.

With respect to the lecturers, in both programs there is one day reserved for a guest lecturer from the respectively other university. This guest lecturer was integrated in order to complete the international aspects of the seminar. That means not only should the students travel to the other country but also members of the respectively other country should be part of the seminar. The module leader of the program in Germany and another colleague from the German university are giving lectures in France. For various operational reasons the French university decided to send different lecturers to the different events in Germany so far.

These lectures, in line with almost all activities in that program, were held in the English language even though some of the guest lecturers on both sides were reasonably fluent in the respectively other language so that (with a bit of preparation at least) a lecture in the local language would have been possible. However, to emphasize the international character and also perhaps to deemphasize the in reality strong bi-national character of the seminar, it was decided beforehand to conduct all communication, including lectures, in the most international of all languages, especially in the field of business, that means in English.

Otherwise the programs are very similar. Elements that are included in both programs, the one in France as well as the one in Germany, include an introductory lecture where the guest students are welcomed and where the concept of the seminar is explained. Also, the requirements for a successful participation in the seminar are being explained.

After the introduction session, both programs start off with explaining the participants the basic principles of the specific Marketing topic that the seminar focuses on, i.e. for example the basics of services marketing in France or marketing communication in Germany.

To intensify the contacts between the domestic and the international students, the participants until the end of the seminar have to work on smaller exercises and tasks in mixed groups. Also, at the end of the seminar the students have to present their final project to all the other participants. At the French university there's one group member that presents all the findings while at the German university all group members, usually 4 persons, are required to present. This rather small difference can largely be explained with the personal preferences of the respective module leaders as for example in other modules at the German university it's also often the case that just one group member is doing the whole presentation.

And finally, also an important social program part at both institutions was the inclusion of one or two joint meals with the guest students, the lecturers and some host university students that were particularly involved in the

preparation of the seminar or the mentoring of the guest students during their stay. Because entertainment expenses are difficult to justify and recover at both universities and because the participants don't have to pay any fee for the programs, these meals are of standard quality only, i.e., there is no gala dinner or similar included in the program. But the rather basic catering was never criticized by the participants. On the contrary: in the questionnaires they were rated positively or even very positively.

The length of the program at both institutions is basically one week, hence the program name "Marketing Week". For the reasons explained further above, the program in Germany however is one day longer, i.e., six not five days as in France. However, the first seminars in France and Germany each started on the Friday of the previous week. That means, the students arrived on Thursday, were introduced to the seminar on Friday, then had two days, Saturday and Sunday, without classes before continuing with the program on Monday again. Over the weekend, the German students that traveled to France did some sightseeing on their own while the French students that came to Germany were invited to take part in an excursion to a museum and a local festival on Saturday and for visiting a local landmark on Sunday afternoon. In other words, the week-end program in Germany was organized and planned almost to the detail while there was no organized week-end program in France. After the seminar the guest students were asked whether they were satisfied with the week-end and though both groups indeed were happy they mentioned that they had preferred to travel to the other university on Sunday with the real program beginning on Monday. For this reason the Marketing Week now takes place from Monday to Friday or Saturday, respectively. Though the organizers of this seminar would have preferred to have the foreign guests stay longer in their country, they had to relent to the wishes of the participating students. One negative effect of cutting down on the length of stay for the participants was that the cultural aspects of the study abroad program were almost automatically reduced to a bare minimum. As classes were held full time throughout the seminar days, it was difficult for the guest students to gain more insights in the lives of people of the host country.

The first regular Marketing Week in Germany took place in October 2010, the as of writing (February 2013) so far latest one in October 2012. The first regular Marketing Week in France in cooperation with the German university took place in March 2010, the latest in March 2012 which means that three events so far took place in Germany and the same number in France. Adding to this the first weeklong seminar on doing business in the European border regions which took place in April 2009 the author can look back at a total of seven ultra-short-term study abroad business programs. In the following the

author will highlight some of the benefits and some of the drawbacks of this type of program.

5. Lessons learned

There are several lessons that we have learned from the various editions of the IMW. Among the positive points that can be highlighted is that the exposure of students to this program contributes to their growing involvement with international aspects of business, cooperation and organization.

Another positive aspect to be pointed out is that – after some adjustments had been made - the length of the program suited the majority of the outgoing students very well. However, the program should allow for some time for social and cultural activities. One French group that arrived on Monday only to leave on Sunday morning again for example complained that they didn't have enough time for sightseeing. Therefore, a program that contains some cultural elements is preferred over one that doesn't. But then again, in contrast to summer schools and similar programs, one has to be careful not to include too many extracurricular items on the agenda. The content of the program has to clearly superimpose leisure activities.

The participants were asked whether they felt that the seminar improved their intercultural competence including their communication skills in an international context. The majority held the view that the seminar did improve these skills. Of course it is nearly impossible to confirm with absolute certainty the validity of this response. Observations of the students' behavior made at the start of the seminar and again at the end of the seminar suggest that the students' self-assessment is correct. How enduring and lasting this effect really is however is uncertain as the students were neither interviewed nor asked to fill out questionnaires a year or later after the end of the seminar and it is also not currently planned to do this.

The module leader for this program at the German university explained to the researcher-author of this paper that for the remainder of the semester, the students that took part in the IMW generally speaking performed better than previous course participants when the IMW was not yet introduced.

Of course at many universities worldwide there are foreign students studying along with their local classmates. Those international students often study for a degree, which means they are taking part in integrated long-term study abroad programs. One implication is that those international students probably already have been acculturated to the local environment, at least to a certain degree, and are not that authentic as a student just arriving from his home country and just staying a week or so at the host country university. For that reason an ultra-short-term study abroad program can potentially bring about

more realistic and authentic intercultural experiences than classic long-term study abroad programs.

Another argument in favor of ultra-short-term study abroad programs is that not all universities in the world do have a large international student body. Especially smaller universities and universities in countries where English is not an official language tends to have fewer international full-term students. Therefore, especially for those universities ultra-short-term programs can be a good means to introduce international experiences to their classrooms.

The seminar had positive effects for the German university as even lecturers that usually teach subjects other than marketing management asked to be included in the program. This can be interpreted as an indication of the attractiveness of this program also for the faculty members. Also, the program was highlighted several times on the German university's internet pages and thus for example could be seen by students and potential applicants. In a sense the international seminar also served as a Marketing tool to attract future students with an interest in international issues.

Trust is one of the factors that played a major role especially during the first phase of the cooperation. As the time and effort for both sides was relatively high especially considering the short duration of the seminar, it was important that the two sides would be fully committed to the bilateral event. For any potential future project of this kind the organizers are determined to first check the dependability and reliability of the partner university before committing their time and effort.

An observation that was made and confirmed through the analysis of completed questionnaires is that the event was better received by the outgoing students (i.e. the guest students) than the host students. One possible explanation for this observable fact can lie in the intensity of the program which is considerably higher, especially at the beginning of the semester, than is the case for more traditional, regular classes. An implication of this could be to limit the amount of course work and mandatory lectures to the minimum that is possible to be able to award 3 ECTS credit points. Generally speaking, overloading the students should be avoided. With overloading I mean an excess of content as well as an excess of study hours. The organizers should attempt to strike a good balance between lectures, group work and social activities.

Some other challenging points of this program also need to be discussed. One central problem was to attract enough students for this event. This was true for both universities as for most external events the upper limit of students were not attained. The two universities set a limit of ten students that could be sent to the respectively other university. Only on two occasions was that limit reached, or, in one case, exceeded. One recurring problem experienced at the German university was that students that applied for the external event often rescinded to participate in the program. Reasons for their rescissions were manifold but usually were connected to either

financial motives or it had something to do with their private schedules. In order to attract more interested students to make up for possible rescissions, the universities need to make sure that they have a good program homepage that details the event and that includes images of past events if possible. Also, the students should be given all the necessary information beforehand, if possible long before the start of the seminar. Also, if possible, the organizers should make sure that financial support is available so that financially not so well off students can participate. An important point to consider when attracting participants is to point out the social and fun activities of the seminar as this will appeal to more students than if one just highlights the operational side of the seminar and its content.

6. Suggestions for a project in the Middle East

In this section I will shortly assess whether such a program could make sense in the Middle East as well and what parts of the program would potentially need to be adapted to fit local conditions.

Before discussing possibilities for such a project in other regions I must emphasize that the suggestions and recommendations are based on a single case study. Therefore the recommendations should be seen largely in that light.

When it comes to the duration of the program, one has to take into account that the travel time for the students to get to the host university shouldn't be too excessive. Travel time depends not only on the distance but also on the availability of adequate means of transport. In the Franco-German program described earlier that meant for example using high-speed trains to get to the respectively other university in a matter of a few hours. In the Middle East where rail service is much more limited the organizers would have to find alternative solutions. If there are regular flights performed for example by low-cost airlines between airports located relatively close to the universities that want to cooperate with each other, that would undoubtedly be a good option for many potential participants. If low-cost air travel is a possible choice then even a relatively long geographic distance might not be a hindrance to a successful event.

If however the universities are not strategically located near international airports then the guest students would have to rely on other means of transport such as cars and public or chartered buses. In those cases the geographic distance between the cooperating universities shouldn't be too large. As a rule of thumb, the travel time should not exceed 10 hours (one way) for an ultra-short-term program with a duration of only five or six days.

Also, the cooperating universities should consider the composition of their student body with respect to their financial means. If the student body comes largely from a modest to middle-income background, it is advisable to provide some financial assistance to the interested students. From our experience it is advisable to make that financial sponsorship dependent on the academic attainments of the students and perhaps provide scholarships to the, say, five best applicants only. Scholarships could be all-inclusive, that means would cover all extra expenses (transportation, accommodation) or just part of the expenses. Which of the two should actually be preferred is dependent on such things as (other) incentives and on the financial means available to the cooperating universities.

Also, as an alternative option, the cooperating universities could stipulate that, for example, the sending institution would pay for the transportation cost while the host university would take care of the expenses for accommodation in dormitories / student halls. Students that don't want to stay there but rather in a hotel would then be asked to cover those costs on their own.

Another recommendation for the first-time establishment of a similar program in the Middle East would be to do a trial run under more than excellent conditions. That could include scholarships for all volunteers. Such a trial run has several advantages. One benefit is that the commitment level will be lowered and the universities are more likely to experiment at first, which could result in valuable new ideas.

Also, instead of looking for a completely unfamiliar university, it would be easier to set up such a program first with a partner university that is already known within the own, initiating organization already. After the successful launch of such a program with a familiar university it should be simpler to bring a new university in as one has already gained experience organizing such an event.

Geographic consideration should also play a major role in the deliberations of the initiators. In the Franco-German example, the two universities came from neighboring nations. The reason is simply that this type of ultra-short-term study abroad program makes sense when the international partner universities are geographically located within the same general area. For a German university that would be for example western and central Europe. Reason is that there should be a sound relation between seminar time and travel time.

Therefore, a similar project among universities from the Arabian subcontinent for example would be one possibility. Universities from the GCC countries are already cooperating with each other and therefore it would be reasonably easy to establish joint ultra-short-term

programs there. For inclusion of universities from other Arab nations, the Association of Arab Universities (AARU) could play a coordinating or at least a mediating role. The Association of Arab and European Universities (AEUA) on the other hand could play a leading role in bringing interested universities from Europe and the Middle East together. If potential initiators would like to seek partner universities from other regions, they should particularly consider the longer travel time and the potentially greater differences in the curricula of the universities involved.

Potential initiators should also consider in what subject area this program should be set up. The general subject area of the program described earlier in this paper was "Business and Management" and within that area particularly "Marketing Management". Within the Marketing Management specialization the theme was "Marketing Communication". Of course similar programs don't have to be confined to the field of Business and Management. In addition, the academic units of the universities don't necessarily have to come from the same area. It is absolutely thinkable for instance that a sociology department cooperates with an engineering department in a common subject of interest such as, just to mention one example "globalization". There just has to be some common ground otherwise this certainly wouldn't make sense.

One way to modify this program is to do it in a virtual environment. Never before have students been more computer literate and attached to the internet. It therefore makes sense to reflect on possibilities to cooperate on the class room level via the internet. As we have seen, despite being a relatively low-cost experience for many students, there are still a number of students that have decided not to take part in this program because of the costs involved. To also reach these students, it might be helpful to offer virtual courses. The author is currently doing research on a bi-national program in cooperation with a Dutch university to find out to what degree such virtual projects can enhance the international character of modules and curricula in general.

While there are numerous ways for students to find international short-term study abroad programs on the Web, it is more complicated for a university to easily find international partners outside of their usual international cooperation networks. Those international cooperation networks are often very regionally focused (for example university networks in Europe) and it's difficult for universities from outside that region to gain access to relevant information on cooperation in the area of short-term study abroad programs.

I think there is a great need of a cooperation platform for universities seeking contacts with likeminded international institutions. I therefore suggest creating an internet based forum or website where universities from around the world can post their cooperation interests in a

structured way. They could specify what they are looking for in that international cooperation, and what they have to offer and can bring to the table. In order to attract as many possible offers and requests for short-term study abroad cooperation projects, the website has to be at least in English if possible with the option to select other relevant languages and the website would have to be made widely known via the relevant list servers for example.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the advancement of an ultra-short-term study abroad program in the field of Business and Management in Europe. It has analyzed the main segments of the program and has made attempts to evaluate its usefulness for other institutions. The main limitation of the paper, which is that it investigates a single project, was also mentioned.

A motivating question in particular was to contemplate how the introduction of an ultra-short-term study abroad program in the context of the Middle Eastern higher education system could look like.

The paper adds to the discussion of cross-border cooperation of universities and other higher education institutions as a mechanism to strengthen the international orientation of such bodies.

One conclusion by analyzing the Franco-German project is that in its core it is transferable to other academic units in other geographic and cultural settings. Reason for its transferability is that the amount of cultural idiosyncrasies contained is very limited and even then should be adaptable to other cultural contexts without too much effort.

The introduction of such a project implies that there must be some commonalities from where to start cooperating. That means the universities must have similar goals on their internationalization agenda. Also, the level of internationalization should be similar in order to ensure a balanced relationship. If on the other hand one of the partner universities is in a clearly more advanced stage in its internationalization process it could and probably should take the lead role in a possible cooperation. The other partner university then would consciously and voluntarily take on the role of a junior partner. Whether such an arrangement could work is impossible to say yet judging solely from the applied research project described in this paper.

Finally, university administrators must make informed decisions about the introduction of new concepts of internationalization. The author hopes that this applied study has stimulated the thought process in this respect and will generate discussions among university administrators and scholars alike.

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* The limit for references for this manuscript was twenty. However, there are naturally more relevant articles on study abroad. Interested readers can contact the author for more studies on this topic.