International Experiences and Expectations of Students at University of Maryland / Baltimore (UMB)
Student Survey completed April 2013

**Goal:** Survey UMB students (dentistry, law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, social work) on their international experiences of over two weeks, impact of these experiences, perceptions of global opportunities, and expectations about global opportunities while at UMB. Survey sent to 6,300 students, 653 completed survey.

**Main Findings:**
- **Types** of international experience: of students with international experience (333 or 51% of 653 respondents), primary forms of experiences were
  - Academic study abroad
  - Volunteering
  - Research placements
- **Most common experiences were**
  - Attending local cultural events
  - Practicing local language skills
  - Completing courses aboard
  - Working with host country nationals
  - Engaging in guided reflections
- **Impact** of international experience: students indicated that experiences made high impact in shaping their
  - Professional choices and roles
  - International perspectives
  - Personal development
- **Concerns** about choosing international experience: most common concerns were
  - Time
  - Expenses
  - Less noted were content and type of experience and need for global content in curriculum
- **UMB role to encourage international experience:** students suggested
  - Provide more funded opportunities and information about opportunities
  - Expand available opportunities
  - Assist with fundraising

**Measures**
- Zorn International Education Survey (IES) (1996), adapted and updated to reflect more recent studies on international experiences and on inter-cultural sensitivity.
• Qualitative data through open-ended questions.

**Data Analysis**

• Respondent profile:
  o Gender: 21% male, 79% female
  o Home country: 92% US
  o Ethnicity: 65% Caucasian; 19% Asian/Asian American; 8% African American; 4% Hispanic; 4% other
  o Age: average age was 28
  o Degree type: Bachelors 13%; Masters 28%; Doctorate/PhD 57%; post degree certificate .01%

• Types of international experience
  o Academic study abroad, 70%, average 15 wks, satisfaction rank on scale of 5 being most satisfied: 4.7
  o Volunteering/Unpaid Service, 47%, average 25 wks, satisfaction rank: 4.7
  o Professional Paid Work, 18%, average 21 wks, satisfaction rank: 4.5
  o Research project, 12%, average 9 wks, satisfaction rank: 4.5
  o Internship, 11%, average 9 wks, satisfaction rank: 4.4
  o Field placement/practicum, 10%, average 11 wks, satisfaction rank: 4.4
  o Other, 8%,

• Impact of International Experiences (based on modified IES (Zorn, 1996))
  o Professional role (7-point Liker-type scale):
    ▪ Overall professional relevancy: 5.4. Students commented on being culturally responsive, respecting cultural diversity, building cultural awareness and responsiveness, improving language skills, becoming more self-confident and self-aware.
  o International Perspective relevancy: 5.6. Highest impact on international perspectives focusing on intercultural interest and sensitivity.
  o Personal development relevancy: 5.5. Highest impact was on self-confidence, tolerance and awareness of own culture.
  o Global-Local Connect relevancy: 4.29. Students less likely to relate two types of experiences.

• Expectations about Future International Experiences
  o Interest: Majority (55%) across both groups, both with and without previous international experience, expressed interest in future experience, with a higher interest among those with previous experience.
  o Factors influencing interest: Strongest factor was expense, followed closely by time, then relevancy to profession, and then accommodations on the ground. Getting credit was comparatively less important.
Types of programs that have most interest: Professional paid work ranked highest, followed closely by academic study abroad. The least interesting to students was volunteer/unpaid service.

**What Universities can do to support health science graduate student interest**

- Provide more frequent and better available information about possible international experiences.
- Offer experiences that meet schedule time constraints. For example, medical students preferred 4th year electives, nursing students preferred spring semester while law students preferred summer opportunities.
- Create, advertise, and negotiate cost effective experiences (work with campus loan officer, for example)
- Offer discipline specific opportunities, some students suggested experiences exposing them to different practice approaches.
- Ensure quality with focus on organization and academic rigor
- Expand opportunities geographically, including to countries from which many US populations have recently immigrated.
- Add global curriculum into student discipline specific curricula.
- Strengthen global-local connections to better integrate students’ international experiences with local communities in which they will work.

Three quotes from students as part of responses to open-ended questions.

“experiences opened me up to new perspectives on work, helping others and education. I firmly believe everyone pursuing a graduate degree would benefit from international travel or just meeting those from another country”

“I have always had an interest in languages that I have tried to combine with my interest in the medical field in different ways and having the opportunity to live and study abroad has greatly encouraged me to think creatively about ways I can use my degree and training to serve the global population, both from here in the US and abroad. Learning about and living in/experiencing first hand has given me a greater awareness of how to better approach my patients who come from different cultures, and to acknowledge cultural barriers to care and think about ways to help overcome these to deliver the best healthcare experience possible.”

“It has changed the way I am able to empathize as a professional, and that's what creates lasting relationships.”
For a complete report, contact Jody Olsen, PhD, MSW.  jolsen@ssw.umaryland.edu

Study and subsequent report completed by Anusha Chatterjee, MSW, doctoral candidate at School of Social Work, University of Maryland.

Reference: