

Writing and Rhetoric in the Field of Study Abroad Outreach and Advocacy

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Overview

The following report seeks to research and discover the role of writing and rhetoric in the field of international education as it pertains to American study abroad outreach and advocacy. The modern globalized world demands international experience, education, and competency for successful communication and relations between nations and cultures. Efforts are underway to raise the number of Americans enrolled in study abroad programs, but totals remain low. As a result, there is an ever-growing industry-wide need for outreach and advocacy to inform, persuade, and inspire future and potential participants. The diverse nature of modern media and marketing requires the employment of writers skilled as both editors and designers in traditional and digital platforms, with an emphasis on social media, to motivate a larger number of students to step outside their boundaries and discover the world. To obtain conclusions, this research focuses on the career listings of three major industry sectors: Study Abroad Program Providers, Study Abroad Advocacy Organizations, and Study Abroad University Departments.

Introduction

For many, studying abroad is a unique opportunity to step outside of established and familiar comfort zones and see the world from a new perspective. As the planet becomes progressively more globalized and intercultural because of information and travel innovations, it is now essential more students see from these new perspectives. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2016), “study abroad is a learning opportunity that enables students to develop critical skills and that contributes in vital ways to preparing students for the competitive global environment into which they will graduate.”

In recent decades, significant progress has been made in increasing student enrollment, but “despite these increases, fewer than 10 percent of all U.S. college students study abroad at some point during their undergraduate years” (IIE, 2014), an abysmal number considering the potential and benefits gained from the experience. There is still much work to do attracting a larger number of students from a larger number of diverse backgrounds and fields. Studies show “1 in 5 jobs [are] linked to international trade and employers looking for global talent” (IIE, 2016), and the current enrollment percentages suggest not enough properly prepared students are entering the workforce after college.

Additionally, in the sometimes delicate and complicated political climate of today, international exposure benefits not only the individual, but also society as a whole. Tolerance and consideration go a long way in preventing cultural offences and missteps. NAFSA (2016) reports: “International exchanges have often been cited as one of our strongest and most effective public diplomacy tools. International experiences not only enhance understanding and cross-cultural sensitivity, but also give one a new perspective on one's own country.” The final part of the previous statement is perhaps the most important: from the outside looking in, the entire

picture is visible from the perspective of the outsider; you have a stronger basis for judging the world only after seeing how it judges you. Without question, and for our nation's future success on a globalized world, we must encourage and enable more students to study abroad.

With the amount of evidence supporting the positive effects of overseas learning there is now an industry wide movement to persuade all college students to make international experience a priority. Since the frequent definition of rhetoric is “the art of persuasion,” it situates perfectly within this field. Massive campaigns mobilizing alumni into activism, urging potential students “to consider and/or commit to studying abroad by the time they graduate” (IIE, 2016), are underway on social media platforms, due to the “valuable opportunity to connect with both new students and students participating in current programs” (NAFSA, 2016). In the field of writing and rhetoric as it pertains to study abroad, career candidates for writing positions have to be flexible and up to date with trending technology. To be a viable, competitive, and successful player in their discipline, “today’s international education professional must be proficient with a range of social media platforms, develop and deploy messages that resonate with students, and know how to measure that impact” (NAFSA, 2016).

Analysis and Results

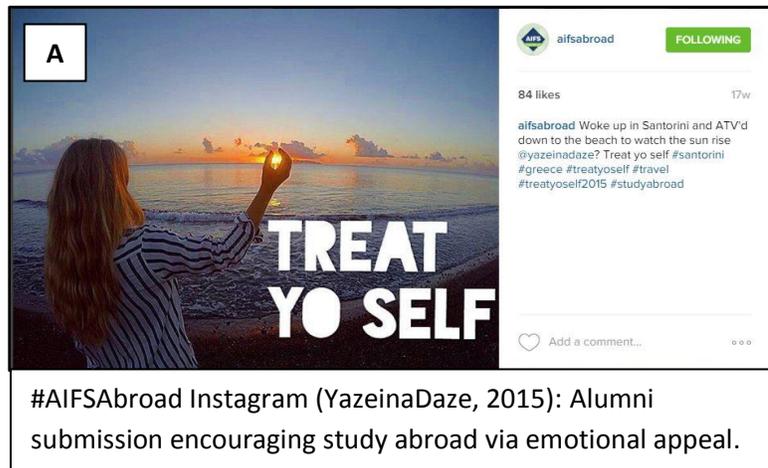
There are three industry sectors of focus in this report: Study Abroad Program Providers, Study Abroad Advocacy Organizations, and Study Abroad University Departments. Each branch plays a major role in the recruitment, procurement, and provision of international education as part of either year long, semester long, or summer long programs in foreign countries. For research purposes, the evaluation and comparisons of current employment listings within each sector and all were located and identified using keyword searches on career websites. The four keywords, writer, writing, outreach, and advocacy, were constant in each search to keep the

selection consistent with the aim of this study's focus. The companies, organizations, and universities chosen evaluated solely for their available positions at the time of this report.

Study Abroad Program Providers are third party companies independent of university and funding organizations offering a variety of educational programs to students. As such, this sector is for-profit and holds has a financial interest in motivating potential participants to study abroad. However, while their outreach and advocacy may be marketing oriented, it is no less effective or crucial in its importance to supporting intercultural education and experience.

In program provider advertising and promotions, there is an extended use of user-generated material from alumni and current students in the form of blogs, Instagram posts, newsletter

articles, etc. to draw in and appeal to potential students' Pathos while simultaneously building Ethos. The stories of their peers, living abroad and loving life, drive student emotions, rooting their own desires to travel and see the world (**Figure**



A). These testimonials serve as self-sustained Provider credibility. Not only does the user material inform, persuade, and inspire potential students to study abroad, but it also informs, persuades, and inspires them to study abroad with their company in particular.

The use of content procured from users does not negate the need for rhetors at the professional level. Rather, program providers seek writers with the ability to develop and maintain leadership practices to keep the student content organized and on point with company standards. In a current posting for a "Social Media Coordinator" by the American Institute for

Foreign Study (AIFS, 2016), a candidate must be “responsible for building, monitoring, responding, and trending all social interactions on AIFS digital channels.” The Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE, 2016) echoes this need in their search for a “Senior Content Manager” to “develop standards, systems and best practices for content creation, distribution, maintenance, content retrieval and content repurposing, cataloging and organizing baseline content inventories both print and digital.” In both instances, the writer needs to utilize their rhetorical skill for higher order content concerns in a larger sense, as it pertains to the entirety of the Study Abroad Program Provider’s message. Each company is also similar in their requirements for writers to possess the creative skill “to handle multiple voices and tones for multiple audiences” (AIFS, 2016) and act as storytellers “by writing compelling, dynamic content that inspires and increases student and participation” (CIEE, 2016) in following with the initiative to draw as many potential students as possible into international education.

Study Abroad Advocacy Organizations are non-profits involved with influencing public policy and establishing scholarships and grants for students with international interests. They work closely with a network of United States Government departments and other non-profit programs dedicated to promoting diversity in higher education by raising funds for those traditionally underrepresented in study abroad due to high costs and financial constraints.

To satisfy objectives, advocacy organizations generate a large amount of content directed at sponsors, donors, and other institutions to raise awareness of the importance and necessity of international education. This material is information heavy and appeals to Logos, using statistical and factual evidence to support their claims and their cause. The supporting citations in the introduction of this paper were from to such organizations, and use percentages and numbers to advocate the need for further support of study abroad experiences and opportunities.

To gain attention for their cause, writers in this sector might expect to compose “compelling pitches that will catch the attention of targeted national media...” (NAFSA, 2015), and also “monitor social and traditional media platforms and provide input on media issues and opportunities to engage and promote policy goals of the association,” as NAFSA (2015) describes in their listing for an “Associate Director of Media Relations and Advocacy.” The career description of a writer in the non-profit sector is similar to the for-profit sector in that they both require content management and oversight of diverse media to produce cohesive and effective campaigns (Figure

B). Not all organization media directs solely at the Logos of investors and officials either, as they also produce material directed at students interested in funding



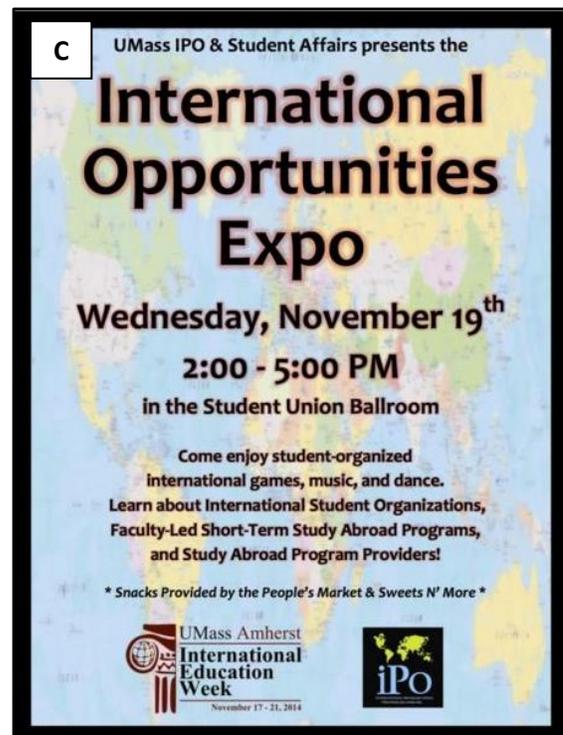
study abroad experiences. One well known foundation sponsored by the IIE is The Fulbright Program (2016), which seeks an “Assistant Director Outreach and Publicity” who is “responsible for the recruitment to the U.S. Student Program, print / digital media and publications, and press for the Fulbright Student program” to attract new students. The “#GoStudyAbroad” campaign is an example of a program developed by the Fulbright Outreach and Publicity Team, targeting alumni to spread the word and recruit prospective students (IIE, 2016). The strategists designed the campaign as a contest enticing alumni participation and garnering Ethos, while also appealing to the Logos of potential students by offering opportunities for financial assistance.

Study Abroad University Departments are located within colleges and universities and work to inform, persuade, and inspire students on their own campuses to study abroad through one of their affiliated programs. This sector also assists students in choosing destinations and course needs, and helps them in the long and sometimes confusing registration and preparation process.

University departments network with both program providers and advocacy organizations to offer their students a wide range of reliable and enthralling international education options with additional access to financial support and guidance. The audience scope of this sector focuses on the needs of the specific university community. Their Ethos is pre-established as representatives of one's trusted home institution, and so content mainly directs at student logic and emotions. There are rational reasons listed in favor of travelling abroad, colorful advertisements entice students to a foreign land.

The close-knit environment of a college campus allows for resurgence in the outreach and advocacy media not available to providers and organizations physically separated from their audiences. For example, a University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMASS, 2015) listing for someone to “take a lead role in devising Education Abroad publicity materials and publications (e.g., event posters, brochures, regional & curricular

advising sheets, etc.)” demonstrates the importance placed on tangible rhetoric distributed during promotional events and available for students on a daily basis (Figure C). However, this is only



Poster (UMASS, 2014): A sample of print media promoting study abroad on

one facet of the UMASS position, titled “Communications and Digital Media Specialist,” because it also involves the overall cohesion between the traditional and the digital to “develop a dynamic and impactful branding and messaging strategy for Education Abroad” (UMASS, 2015). Similar to other study abroad sectors, writers must absorb and oversee the content strategy of all university discourse, as is required of an “Outreach Coordinator” at Michigan State University (MSU, 2015), where one must have “experience working with social media and/or content management systems” while also collaborating with the Communications Department in maintaining the Study Abroad Department’s website.

Conclusions

An understanding of content strategy and social media savvy are necessary skills for aspiring writers in the field of study abroad outreach and advocacy. In all sectors there is a growing need for creators and rhetors to multi-task and maintain multiple platforms in the interest of informing, motivating, and inspiring larger circles of potential students. The requisite for writers to function as content strategists by managing, editing, and overseeing material generated by students and in-house sources for publication and posting is never-ending; platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are only the current trends, and newer options develop constantly. As technology advances, so will social media and the role of writers in the field of international education outreach and advocacy.

Professional Implications: While all the positions researched in this report require a minimum of a Bachelor’s Degree, most express a preference for a Graduate Degree or commensurate experience in team management and networking due to the demands of modern marketing and publishing in global environments. To truly rise and attain success the field of study abroad

outreach and advocacy, one must consider continuing their education beyond the minimum requirements while keeping current with trending social platforms. Furthermore, personal overseas familiarities, from either studying or working abroad, are preconditions for employment in international education.

Personal Implications: My portfolio must represent diversity and skill with all media and audiences, formal to informal and traditional to digital, emphasizing an ability to conceive a bigger picture and cohesive message from various pieces and platforms while simultaneously conveying passions for study abroad and international education. Following graduation from the University of Rhode Island, my immediate employment prospects will likely be entry-level as a smaller part of a creative or outreach team until I gain additional academic and professional experience. Articulating my understanding of personal development as a process and work in progress is essential, making clear my intentions to gain qualified footing while preparing for Graduate School in Communication Studies, hopefully at a university overseas. An extended stay abroad grants me further exposure to cross-cultural immersion, and deeper insight into the importance of it in education. After all, those who lived it create the most effective rhetoric of study abroad outreach and advocacy; there is no Ethos in claims of the inexperienced, no Pathos in urgings of the unaware, and no Logos in the reasoning of the ignorant.

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