

## **Case Study: Evaluation and Planning in the Belk International Program**

This case study illustrates the on-going process of evaluation and planning undertaken by the John Belk International Program (formerly the International Experience Program) in order to consistently provide Queens students with a variety of attractive, effectively-delivered, quality programs that support the international aspects of the mission of the college. This international program offers all students in the College of Arts and Sciences the unique opportunity to have an international experience included in their comprehensive academic program at little additional cost to themselves.

*The Goals of the Program and the Mission of the College.* The overall goal of the John Belk International Program is to encourage students to develop a broadened perspective and deeper understanding of the world through an international learning experience. More specific goals are to prepare students to appreciate the complexity of the world, the variety of different forces that shape it, the significance of context, and the importance of culture and cultural differences; to value the opportunity to learn from the varied perspectives and experiences of others in foreign parts; to develop both a curiosity and an imagination about the world that enhance not only their understanding of the world but also of their own culture and of themselves; and to develop an awareness of globalization, its complex forces, consequences, and influence.

These goals directly support the mission of the college by helping students to gain the breadth of perspective and depth of understanding to live nobly, productively, and responsibly within the "changing global community." The students' international experience can contribute to the development of a personal philosophy that is tolerant, open to different perspectives and ways, adaptive to change, appreciative of cultural differences, and aware of the global nature of our society. Learning about and experiencing "the world outside" is an important part of the comprehensive learning process of this liberal arts college.

*The Evolution and Scope of the Program.* Conceived in 1987 and begun in the 1988-1989 academic year, the international program developed organically from two "pilot" study tours in January 1989, through various stages, into a program offering multiple three- and four-week study tours led by Queens faculty (from 1990), summer-long foreign internships (from 1993), four- and five-week language immersion programs (from 1995), junior year and semester study abroad exchanges in Hong Kong and Ireland (1998), and a special month-long environmental studies program in Yap in Micronesia (2001).

*Concerns and Objectives Specific to the Five International Program Options.* Among the major concerns and objectives specific to the five types of programs listed above are the following:

- >to offer every year a *variety of attractive* international programs that encourage the largest possible number of eligible students to take the opportunity to have an international experience;
- >to respond to the *needs and interests of the largest number of students* by offering language immersion programs that are affordable and flexible, international internships that are distinctive and highly regarded, semester and/or junior-year abroad exchange programs that are attractive and affordable and convenient, an outstanding Yap program that is unlike anything to be found

here or elsewhere, and faculty-led study tours that are not only financially feasible but also consistently successful, well proven with faculty, and in popular demand by students;

>to insure the *quality* of the programs by regularly evaluating the itineraries, the travel arrangements, the faculty leadership, the effectiveness of the participants' academic preparation for the experience, the success of the language instruction, and, most importantly, the significance and value of the individual international experiences.

>to insure the *safety and security* of the participants by thoroughly preparing them for the experience, by reviewing procedures and scheduled activities, and by monitoring global conditions for risk assessment in areas in which Queens students will be traveling.

*The Development of Evaluation and Planning.* Virtually from the international program's inception thirteen years ago, the director and his staff have tried to conduct regular effective evaluations focused on student and faculty experiences and interests so as to make desirable changes in the established programs and to add and delete programs according to their merits and perceived student demand. This approach is based upon the Belk Program's fundamental assumption that every one of the international programs can always be improved, and consequently, that there need to be all kinds of feed back, formal and informal. Among the Belk Program's most important sources of information and means of evaluation are the following.

>We welcome student requests for specific new programs, and we annually solicit faculty proposals for new or revised programs.

>Before any new programs are included in the Belk international offerings and implemented, they are first considered and refined by the Belk Program faculty committee, then submitted to curriculum committee and finally to the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences for approval.

>We send an evaluation instrument to all participants in the John Belk International Program and use the information collected to assess what we do; the form is usually about five pages in length, depending on the program being evaluated.

>The director has productive individual debriefing sessions (normally 25 to 45 minutes in length) with many of the student participants.

>We require various kinds of written work (essays, reports, journals) from all participants so as to measure the depth of their involvement and the worth of their experience in their program.

>We have valuable extensive debriefing sessions with all of the faculty involved in the programs in order to assess all aspects of the programs and to make necessary changes.

>We have meetings with involved faculty to discuss policy, procedures, programs, objectives, and virtually any issue or question concerning the international program.

>In matters regarding the safety and security of our programs, we mainly rely upon outside sources of information -- warnings and analyses from professional contacts and travel organizations, State Department warnings and alerts, and information and analyses from international security services.

>With certain programs -- international internships, for example -- we get extensive evaluations of the suitability and performance of the participants from the organizations with which they worked.

>We get indications of levels of student satisfaction from institutional surveys and from ordinary lines of campus communication.

*Limiting Factors in the Development of Programs and in Planning.* In utilizing the evaluative information to make significant changes in the international program offerings, or to add new programs, there are at least five primary factors that have an important bearing on what can be done: the program's budget; the reservoir of faculty expertise and experience; the scope and nature of the curriculum; student interests; and safety and security issues.

Budget constraints are necessarily ubiquitous. Today the college annually allocates \$1700 for total program expenses per eligible participant. (To put this in historical perspective: for the first three years, when the program took place during the January term, the amount was \$1600 per participant; with the abolition of the January term and consequent move to May in 1991-92, the amount was increased to \$2000 per participant; in 1992-93, as a result of financial pressures, the amount was lowered to \$1800, at which it remained for seven years, until 1999-2000, when it was further lowered to \$1700 per eligible participant.) Any proposed changes, or new programs, however imperative or desirable, must be attainable within the limitations imposed by the budget. This may necessarily limit the quality of the travel arrangements, the activities affordable by the program, the areas of the world that are within reach, the outward limits of the time available for a program, and so forth. There are, of course, Belk programs that slightly exceed in expense the \$1700 allocated per participant; for these, the participants may be charged a supplement. As a rule of thumb, the larger the supplement (usually anything over \$300), the less likely a program is to get sufficient enrollment; thus, even with the possibility of utilizing supplements, budget constraints ordinarily place more expensive international programs, or expensive changes in programs, beyond the reach of the Belk program. As an illustration of this, on several occasions we have had students request that we offer a program to Australia; it is the size of the supplement for such a program that is the deterrent to getting sufficient enrollment, when, in all other respects, it is quite doable. In some existing programs, budgetary constraints sometimes make it impossible to implement worthwhile faculty proposals for increased spending for theater and concert tickets and meals for the student participants.

Since a high percentage of the Belk programs are led by our faculty, the breadth and variety of the faculty's experience and expertise is another necessarily limiting factor in the kinds of programs that we can offer and the areas of the world into which we are likely to develop programs. By the same token, the scope of our curriculum (in some ways, merely the other side of the coin of faculty expertise) is a similar limiting factor; and student interests -- although they may, of course, issue from influences outside the college -- are also directly related to faculty expertise and to the scope and nature of our curriculum. To use several recent situations as illustrations, we have lately been offered opportunities to develop programs in Rumania and in Moldova; in both cases, we lack not only faculty expertise in these areas but also curricular support and sufficient student interest. We have developed faculty-led programs in China and in Yap because we have faculty with the necessary expertise, sufficient curricular support, and abundant student interest.

The last of the five primary factors -- safety and security issues -- must necessarily be of primary consideration in every international program. From the beginning, the director, with the support of the administration, has consciously adopted the policy that the international program would not offer any program that knowingly subjected any participant to significant risk. The director's

point of view is: "we cannot put our students in harm's way; in considering the adoption or continuation of any program, if I would not send my own child there, I won't send anyone else's." This has, over the life of the program, resulted in a cautious approach to program development.

In identifying and assessing risk, the Belk program relies upon the usual sources of information: reports in the news media, information supplied by professional study abroad organizations and by professional contacts, the personal knowledge and experience of faculty and friends of the college, local contacts in the areas in question, Congressional sources, information available from the Center for Disease Control, State Department warnings and alerts, and warnings in travel publications. The Belk Program is also fortunate in having access to Bank of America's International Corporate Security Services personnel, who have provided valuable information and analysis.

In summary then, we cannot offer programs that are beyond our budget or in areas in which we do not have faculty expertise and curriculum support; it would be futile to offer programs in areas in which there is no potential student interest; and we cannot offer programs in regions in which there is significant risk to the participants. Within these limitations, the international program has, for twelve years, provided a good variety of successful and effective international experiences for a large number -- almost fourteen hundred -- Queens students. Consistent evaluation and planning has been an important part of this.

*Twelve Years of Evaluation and Planning in the International Program.* Now in its thirteenth year, the international program has enjoyed popularity with Queens students, the approval and confidence of the faculty, and a good reputation for effectiveness and quality. Among the most prominent factors in this success is that of regular effective evaluation and planning. Because the international program has been functioning effectively for more than twelve years, the changes in the program tend to be incremental and subtle rather than abrupt and drastic. A few brief examples of evaluation and planning in the Belk Program will illustrate this point.

>As a result of student evaluations and faculty debriefings, we have made a number changes in the itinerary for the Italian study tour: we have dropped the sometimes unsatisfactory day-trip to Paestum in favor of a day-trip to Herculaneum and the National Archaeological Museum in Naples; we have resumed the visit to Assisi; we have dropped the unproductive/ineffective visits to Montepulciano and Cortona; we have added a two-day stop-over on the Cinque Terre and rerouted the study tour from Siena to Monterosso to Venice to Florence; we have changed the departure city from Munich to Florence, grounding the program more firmly in Italy and providing better travel arrangements and an altogether improved "finale" for the end of the Italian study tour.

>As a result of student evaluations and debriefings and Belk Program Office concerns, we will move our Spanish immersion program from the institute formerly employed in San José, Costa Rica, to another in the same location. (The problems and concerns were practical and administrative rather than academic.) In finding the new language school, we will follow established procedure of evaluating academic reputations and standards, contacting professional colleagues, and conducting site visits.

>As a result of student debriefings and language faculty consultations, we will not permit students who have no previous experience in the foreign language to participate in the language immersion programs, even though the language institutes permit the enrollment of beginners, and, in theory, there should be no impediment to the beginners' immersion.

>As a result of information and analyses received from the State Department, from Bank of America's International Corporate Security Services, and from various other sources, we have -- for reasons of safety and security at the time -- cancelled the part of one study tour that included Paris, a study tour to Russia, and our participation in a program in South Africa. On the other hand, some of the same authoritative sources provided information that helped us to decide to go ahead with our programs in Europe at the time of the Gulf War, albeit with special precautions for our groups.

>Earlier this year, we secured information and analyses on the potentially unsafe situation in Greece. Although we are expecting to go ahead with our May program there, we are continuing to rely upon the same sources of information to monitor the Greek situation. The consideration of safety and security issues is a regular part of the on-going evaluation of all Belk International Programs.

>As a result of a regular faculty proposal (solicited annually), we will in May begin our unusual environmental studies program in Yap. The Belk Program has responded creatively to take advantage of this unique opportunity, to establish an outstanding program that we expect to continue indefinitely and to bring added distinction to the college. The Yap program was a product of the established system to promote the development of new programs; it received the required faculty approval, thorough Belk Office planning, and firm institutional support.

There is, in the Belk Program Office, the basic assumption that "we can always do it better"; there is also an established tradition of close (some may think obsessive) attention to detail. The Belk International Program does not hesitate to make major changes when they are required, or to plan major new programs when they are desirable, but much of the change that it implements is, by its very nature, incremental and subtle. In fact, the nature of some of the change implemented is such that the programs might have continued as they were without the changes and without serious immediate problems. Perhaps it is because the evaluation and planning has been regular that the program has been able to avoid any substantial amount of change that is abrupt and drastic. Established regular evaluation and planning has served the international program well.