

WanderMore: The study abroad student's guide - An online instructional solution

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Introduction

Preparing to study abroad can feel overwhelming and intimidating, especially for students traveling internationally for the first time. *WanderMore*, an online travel course, is designed to help college students plan and prepare for successful academic and cultural experiences abroad with confidence! Many students experience stress and uncertainty when preparing to travel outside of the United States, facing common challenges such as passports and visa confusion, language barriers, over- or underpacking, and balancing academic and personal plans. This online course addresses these issues by providing guidance, resources, and strategies to help students feel prepared and excited for their journey abroad.

Problem statement

Many college students preparing to study abroad lack the knowledge and skills to adequately prepare for international travel and extended stays, which can lead to delays, stress, and poorly planned itineraries. Common issues are difficulties obtaining student visas, not understanding cultural norms, language barriers, overpacking or underpacking for long stays, failure to create a realistic plan for academic and personal life. These challenges develop from lack of preparation and knowledge. A structured instructional program can help students feel confident and ready.

Distance Learning Solution Evidence

An online course is the right solution for students because, as their departure date approaches, having a course accessible at all times can provide valuable tips and help build confidence. It is also scalable for many students across different programs and destinations. An

asynchronous online course is ideal because students can access the material at their own pace, aligned with their specific trip timeline. Research shows that asynchronous learning supports flexibility and learner autonomy, which are essential for busy students with diverse schedules (Hrastinski, 2008).

Learners Analysis

The primary audience for this course is undergraduate and graduate students, ages 18-25, who are preparing to study abroad through a university. Most students are first-time international travelers with limited experience living in another culture. They are motivated by the opportunity for personal and academic growth, but may feel anxious or uncertain about the logistics and cultural differences they will encounter. Students are generally tech-savvy and comfortable using online learning platforms, making an asynchronous, self-paced course an appropriate solution. This course is designed to meet their needs by providing clear, actionable guidance to build their confidence and readiness for the experience ahead.

Contextual Analysis

This course will be available for students to access through the university's learning management system (LMS). It is for students preparing for their study abroad program as part of their pre-departure process to ensure that they have completed the tasks necessary for leaving their home country and arriving in their host country.

Students will have to pass skills and knowledge checks before their departure to ensure that they have retained the knowledge they received. While abroad, students will have further

knowledge checks during the first few weeks of their visit. They will still be able to access the LMS to refer back to if they need a refresher as their international study progresses.

Task Analysis

The tasks that the students will be faced with during this asynchronous course are designed to prepare them for their international school travel. In addition to this learning module, students will be encouraged to participate in simulations to further reinforce their lessons. (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007) Before leaving for their trips, students will be able to:

1. Apply for a student visa and understand documentation requirements
2. Prepare for social and cultural differences (e.g., etiquette, social cues, and common terms/phrases)
3. Pack appropriately for a long-term stay and academic needs
4. Plan an itinerary that balances academics and personal/free time while abroad

Constraints

Some constraints that students may face are technological, time-based, and institutional. Technological constraints that can occur are a lack of reliable internet access and basic digital literacy. Students having to balance work, classes, and this course can create a time constraint. If the course content doesn't align with the university's policies and guidelines, there can be an institutional constraint.

Instructional Design Model

ADDIE best fits this instructional guide because it will provide a systematic approach that is flexible to meet both the students' needs and the goals of the course. During the analysis phase, a needs analysis will be conducted to determine the needs of the students and constraints that may occur. The design phase is when objectives are defined and assessment strategies are created. Determining the best method of delivery will also happen during this phase. Modules and activities will be created during the development phase. The modules and activities will be designed for asynchronous learning. The course will be integrated into the Canvas LMS for students to access and begin their course during the implementation phase. Feedback will be collected from students and faculty during the evaluation phase to determine what content can remain as is and what content needs to be improved upon. (Durak and Ataizi, 2016)

Conclusion

Studying abroad can be a life-changing experience for students. Having the knowledge of how to plan classes, pack, apply for visas, and understand cultural norms can make the experience easier to navigate. This asynchronous course will address difficulties that students may face and alleviate some of their fears, preparing them for a semester like they have never had before. The benefits of this course will keep students aware and prepared during their educational adventure.

References

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