

BREAKFAST ROUNDTABLE # 4

Technology: Hindrance or asset to learning abroad?

Facilitator: Darren Kelly

Participants: Rachel Ellett, Ron Manning, Carlton Rounds, David Statman

1. What kinds of technology are students using in their daily lives? What are they using it for?

The use of technology used by those in attendance included:

Ron Manning uses technology in the language lab. In one particular case his students, in the form of a pen-pal system, chat with students in a partner institution in Brazil via Skype, which has been beneficial for all concerned.

Rachel Ellett uses Skype for students in different locations to take a class in Beloit, which adds to the class tremendously, as illustrated in her panel presentation.

David Statman uses technology in the science lab and uses the internet for on-line journals and other information sources. The use of (portable) internet access is valuable for communicating with his students during their time spent in Hungary.

Darren Kelly uses Google maps to facilitate students' understanding of the history of Dublin as well as their engagement with the contemporary city.

2. How can technology increase the educational value of study abroad rather than take away from the experience?

In general, there was a consensus that technology was beneficial for teaching students and communicating with them, particularly when abroad. Rather than using the word hindrance to discuss technology the terms used were use and misuse. It was felt that many students are ahead of faculty in terms of computer literacy and as such, faculty need to up-skill, and in many cases harness students' technology abilities... technology should be educational as well as entertaining.

3. What do we need to teach students so that they can use technology to engage more effectively with their study abroad host countries and their own learning?

The overarching concern for all was the misuse or overuse of social network sites such as Facebook by students when studying abroad (and on the home campus). Darren Kelly discussed his research which tracked the internet usage of American students in Dublin in 2008. The research found that most students communicated with family and friends daily and that the time spent ranged from an average of more than an hour to several hours per day.

The roundtable group felt that over use of the internet could dilute the students' study abroad experiences if they become cocooned in their bedrooms using the internet.

4. How can technology be used before and after study abroad to better prepare students and integrate learning abroad into the home campus upon return?

The use of the internet to communicate with students in terms of distance learning was recommended. The ease and use of the internet as pertaining to health and safety issues was also valued.

5. How do we train faculty and staff to facilitate better use of technology as it relates to study abroad and education in general? To what extent can the students' experience with technology be harnessed to teach the faculty and staff?

The group discussed the value of science students studying abroad in light of the relative availability of on-line journals in a common language and the possible confinement of students to a laptop when abroad. It was a belief by all that science students, as well as language students who spend time in the lab, value greatly from study abroad in terms of understanding the cultural context of knowledge and language.