As novices in directing a field course, we felt that our trip, while immensely successful and enjoyable, yielded a number of lessons to be shared with others.
for both books and the students’ visas. Our trip included all expenses including meals. We did advance research to cost out accommodation and airfare. Lectures and local transport were arranged and sometimes negotiated with the university. For other costs, such as meals and rail to Beijing, we could “triangulate” using guidebooks, online sources, and local knowledge. For everything, we took the most conservative estimates for our quality category, and added a 20 percent safety fee. This paid for unanticipated costs and allowed us to flexibly upgrade some of our arrangements.

**Interact Instead of Insulate**

We regret not doing more of this. As much as possible, we interact instead of insulate. One evening we hosted a dinner for students from East China Normal University. Everyone enjoyed the food and the company. The students interacted well, and, had they been given more opportunity, would have formed stronger bonds with their peers. These opportunities need not be confined to social events. Interviewing students, joint group projects, and shared fieldwork activities would provide both interaction and topical learning opportunities. Along these same lines, we hosted two banquet-style meals for the foreign exchange director, associate director, and staff to show our appreciation.

**Use the Participation Portions of Evaluation as “Heavy Leverage”**

A field study course takes a tremendous amount of energy to arrange but is easily deflated if participation in activities wanes. To be sure it did not, we assigned 25 percent of the course grade as participation and informed the students, verbally and on the syllabus, that this included participation at all meals, field trips, and events. There were no problems with this policy, and once things were moving along, students appeared to understand the value of participation. Even when it meant getting up earlier than one would want for breakfast!

If rare cases, grade leverage may not be enough to deter a miscreant. When developing your syllabus, investigate sanctions you may employ beyond the grade itself. Depending on the seriousness of a transgression, you may be able to have the student suspended from the university. Some universities have a point system of transgressions that lead to suspension once a certain threshold is reached.

**Acknowledge that Mistakes will be Made**

Mistakes will be made. Missteps will occur. We had several, the most notable during our overnight rail trip to Beijing from Shanghai. We did not realize that travelers in China must show their tickets to exit the station. We were stuck purchasing two full-fare tickets. Now we know.

**Implement a Daily Briefing Session**

A daily briefing session is helpful and may even be integrated into a lesson with grading implications. Sensory overload characterized much of the trip. Although the itinerary was generally clear, we found it necessary under the pretext of a daily language lesson to update everyone on the day’s activities. Sometimes our program changed, too, so this was a format for announcing those changes. Repetition is simple and advisable in a setting where everything is or seems to be extraordinarily dynamic.
Need More Recruits?  
Consider a Wider Pool of Eligibility

One constant challenge for many field study programs is recruiting a minimum number of students. Most post-secondary institutions have a required minimum enrollment. Reaching our required threshold was a challenge, though we had a supportive administration.

You may cast a wider recruitment net when you consider in-service teachers (who may have continuing education requirements), students at nearby or sister universities, or even non-traditional students via extended studies programs. You may even recruit from your alumni! Consider when these people can travel (those teaching have the school year to keep in mind), and investigate how the course may be configured to comply with any program requirements this other audience may have. For example, when prospective students need graduate credit, consider cross-listing your course as both a graduate and undergraduate course. Work with extended studies program officers and registrar to enable these potential travelers.

Learning from Fellow Students is Important, Too

A diverse group of travelers provides a mix of life and work experiences that, in many cases, allows for intellectual and personal growth beyond any envisioned within the traditional course parameters.

Final Comment

Whether you are novice or an old hand at teaching field courses, you likely know that there is no one recipe to follow. However we hope these pointers, practicalities, and examples of our pitfalls will assist your planning.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Some of these sources are helpful with the minutiae of planning a field course abroad, and others are of value for issues larger in scope.


Peterson’s/Thomson Learning. Summer Study Abroad, 2002.


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