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EUROPEAN SUMMER STUDY PROGRAM: CAN YOU, SHOULD, WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

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ABSTRACT

A description of a first attempt at organizing a three week summer study trip to Europe. The first week of the trip was devoted to ten industrial tours, two weeks were for independent study or vacation. Students received credit for the first week and were required to submit a report. Students could also enroll in an additional course working with any cooperative professor at the college. Whether or not you should operate a foreign study trip depends on many factors including your entrepreneurial spirit, your ability to market your program, your ability to cope with uncertainty, and your rapport with students.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

First, study the options available relative to countries and programs presented in the ABSEL proceedings of this conference. Second, discuss the options with your Dean. Secure his/her support and whatever clearances your school requires. Third, determine the time length and dates that will be best for you and your students. Fourth, plan on the size of your group. Fifteen to twenty should work well. Fifth, select a travel agent. Sixth, plan the specific itinerary. Use direct contacts via personal letter or work through the travel agent. Seventh, promote the program at your college and through professional contacts at other schools. Eighth, obtain your passport and enjoy your trip.

CAN YOU DO IT?

The very first question that you must answer concerns your own interest in such a trip. You will be spending many hours working on this project. You can expect many calls at home, many good intentioned students who will plan on going and then not be able to go, frustrations with the airline representatives and the travel agent. Once you have begun the project you will have to continue as you will have students counting on the credit hours in the summer to graduate.

Success depends significantly on your entrepreneurial spirit. You are, whether you wish to admit it or not, operating a small business. Your profit is the trip itself as well as the new rapport you will achieve with your students and the foreign businesses that you visit.

THE L.I.T. PROGRAM 1980

My decision was made during a dinner meeting with Dr. Ed Spitz of EMG in Oct. 1979. I had been considering such a trip for years. Dr. Spitz had organized several trips and had valuable suggestions. The trip would be for three weeks in August, 1980. We would schedule ten industrial tours for the five business days of the first week and then allow the students to go their own way the second two weeks. This program is significantly different from that offered at other colleges. The typical study tour has the entire group going in lockstep fashion on a planned schedule for three or four weeks with 'free days' scheduled en route. The typical spends two or three days in one city or country and then goes to another city or country for another two or three days. We decided to go to Amsterdam for the first eight days and stay at one motel. We would visit other cities in Holland each day. This decision was based on several factors: a) personal desire, b) a Dutch friend to help write letters, c) most Dutch businessmen speak English, d) Holland is small and almost any Dutch city can be reached by car in 1½ hours

from Amsterdam, and e) the Netherlands is located in Northwest Europe, a true gateway country for both England and the continent.

With these decisions made, the next step was to secure departmental and college approval. In my case this meant discussions with the Business School Dean, the college President, and a meeting with all the Deans of the university. The educational merit of the industrial visits is bound to be questioned by potential critics. Fortunately, I had been visiting local business firms as part of my Logistics Management course for several years. The positive feedback from these visits was significant and allowed me to overcome all objections to the trip.

The arrangement that resulted from these discussions included offering two courses for student credit, International Business and Independent Study. Students could take one or both courses. I was to be paid the normal summer school rate for these two courses.

The next step was to develop the promotional materials with the Public Relations office. These were distributed on campus and by mail to the media.

In January we began to write to the companies that we wanted to visit. The letters were written in Dutch and addressed to the P.R. department. We requested specific days because we wanted to visit certain cities and companies. Three weeks before the trip we made several direct trans-Atlantic phone calls to resolve the schedule. We spent about \$100 in calling and were very happy with the results. We sent confirming letters two weeks before we left and asked to have detailed maps sent to our motel. This process worked quite well.

Students were charged \$1,000 for airfare, 7 nights lodging, breakfasts, local transportation that first week, and the pre-trip meetings. They were allowed to use the car in the evenings. I was able to budget my own airfare and lodging from this charge. The students knew about this. I cannot stress too much the necessity of planning your local transportation before you leave. My Escort camper was \$400 for 2 weeks; it would have been twice that if leased there.

SHOULD YOU PLAN YOUR OWN PROGRAM?

Obviously only you can answer this question. The experience is exhilarating. Its success will bring you many rewards. We have now had our post-trip meeting to reminisce and show our slides. I have never before had a "class" get together a month after finals to talk about their coursework. I expect many will continue to travel and encourage others to broaden their horizon.

Commitment, planning, and the cooperation of many people will be necessary if you are to succeed. You will be faced with many options and choices as you plan your program. In most cases there is not really a best choice, either will work. The nice thing about these programs is that you can try them one way this year and another way next year. Bon voyage.