

**INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE OF PAULINIAN STUDENT GOVERNMENT
LEADERS: ENSUING STUDENTS' READINESS
FOR ASEAN INTEGRATION**

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive research study explored the experiences of Paulinian student-leaders in their international exposures. The study characterized students' exposure as to its nature, place of exposure, frequency of exposure, academic year occurred, and duration of exposure. Furthermore, the study explored on the requirements complied with by the student leaders to qualify them for international exposure, their learning experiences, their encountered difficulties, and their suggestions to intensify students' international exposure. The study considered 26 participants which covered the population of student leaders who went for international exposure for the last five years. Interview and documentary analysis were undertaken to obtain the data. Characterization of students' exposure was presented using the frequency count while the interview responses were analyzed thematically. Results of the study revealed that the student leaders who went for international exposures come from the different departments. Majority of them went for exposure once although 15 of them went more than once. Most of their destinations were in Singapore and Japan. Cultural immersion, cultural exchange, youth assembly and student exchange program were the common themes for their exposures. Majority of their exposure lasted for less than one (1) week and the longest duration was one (1) year. To qualify them for the international exposures, research projects, excellent academic standing, good communication skills and leadership skills were the common requirements. Through the international exposure, the participants claimed that they were able to learn how to deal with people, adapt and respect other cultures, enhanced culture awareness and sensitivity and acquired social values, open-mindedness. They find dealing with non-English speakers difficult brought about by communication barriers. To enhance students' readiness for ASEAN Integration, early exposure of freshmen students to international immersions, the integration of culture awareness in related courses and relevant school activities that promotes cultural awareness were suggested. As an offshoot of the study, a plan of action was formulated to strengthen students' international exposures.

Keywords: *Student exchange, international exposure, cultural immersion, cultural exchange*

INTRODUCTION

In highly globalized society, the competition is so intense that one needs to be highly capable in order to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace. Students must be exposed to a wide range of learning experiences to maximize their full potentials. Many experts believe that going abroad for international exposures can prove to be of immense benefit for students, as these experiences are so dynamic making them better prepared for the corporate world (Singh,2012). The best feature of studying in a global environment is that it helps develop contacts with people of different nationalities and gives an opportunity to build a global network of contacts. In the future, some of these contacts prove to be of great help in ones' career. An international exposure helps one to get familiar with a different kind of academic pattern that would challenge one's skills as a student. This would help a student learn to adapt to new situations and it would certainly encourage them to perform to the best of their abilities. To put it in simpler words, it can be said that an international exposure contributes in the overall development of a student.

As the country embraces the ASEAN integration, it is the principal duty of the different universities like SPUP to provide programs that will propel students to become globally competent and socially responsible citizens of the global society. Educational institutions maximize these international exposures to enable students to have higher levels of self-concept, and educational aspirations as they experience global education.

These international exposures cater to the creation of linkages and lasting connections between universities, the students, partner institutions and organizations, and communities outside the Philippines. Moreover, the international exposures allow students to create their personal global network of leaders, achievers, and professionals. Thus, these student engagements direct students to understand cultural diversity, exposing them to globalized work opportunities that they are likely to face after graduation, preparing them to acquire the needed leadership skills for the next generation of effective leaders, and bringing in them different perspectives and beliefs.

St. Paul University Philippines as an internationally recognized institution dedicated to the formation of globally competent leaders, provides student engagements to students that are designed to help in their holistic development. The Uniwide Paulinian Student Government or PSG Leaders represent the different departments and programs of the University. This research on the international engagements of the PSG Uniwide student leaders aims to present the different international engagements or exposures initiated by the university through the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) and different partner organizations from all over the world. SPUP has been designated as one of the twelve participating schools in the country for the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme in 2014. The university explores all possible opportunities and provides financial support to students in all activities related to international students' exchange. This study aims to document the experiences of students in their international exposures. Results of the investigation serve as basis in improving students' international exposures.

Conceptual Framework

The investigation considered the inputs, processes and outputs as reflected in the figure below.

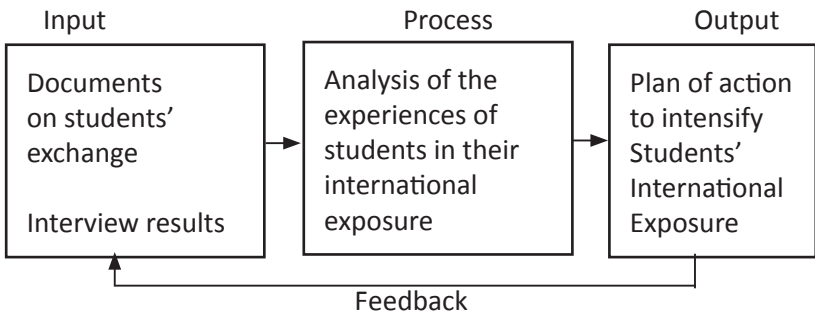


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

The model reflects that the documentary evidences on international students' exchange activities in the University as well as the interview results are the needed inputs for the investigation. Data obtained from the interviews were focused on students' requirements, significant learnings

gained and difficulties encountered in their international exposures. Students' suggestions to intensify students' international exposures were also culled in during the interview phase. Results of the documentary analysis and the interview conducted served as basis in planning for action to intensify students' international exposure.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the experiences of Paulinian student-leaders in their international exposures. Results of this study serve as inputs in planning for action to intensify students' international exposure.

1. What is the profile of the participants in terms of the nature of exposure, place of exposure, frequency of exposure, academic year occurred, and duration of exposure?
2. What requirements did the participants comply with to qualify them for international exposure?
3. What did the participants learn from their international exposure?
4. What are the difficulties encountered by the participants in their international exposure?
5. What are the suggestions offered by the participants to intensify their students' international exposure?
6. What plan of action can be formulated to intensify students' international exposure?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative research approach. Specifically, the descriptive survey research design was used as this described participants' profile with respect to their international

exposure, the requirements they complied with to qualify them for international exposure, the significant learnings they gained, the difficulties they encountered and their suggestions to intensify students' international exposure.

Participants of the Study

The study considered the population of student-leaders of SPUP with international exposures for the past 5 years (N= 26) from the academic year 2010-2011 to academic year 2014-2015.

Data Gathering Methods

Data on the students' profile regarding the nature of their international exposure, place of exposure, frequency of exposure, academic year occurred, and duration of exposure were obtained through documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data on students' requirements to qualify them for international exposure, the significant learnings they obtained, difficulties they encountered and their suggestions to intensify their students' international exposure.

Data Gathering Procedure

In gathering the data, the researchers went to the following procedures:

1. Sought the approval of the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) for the conduct of the study.
2. Upon approval of the ERC, the research sought permission from the University president for the conduct of the study.
3. Obtained the list of students who underwent international exposures for the past 5 years.
4. Sought informed consent from the research participants through mobile phones and social network communication modes.

5. Conducted documentary analysis on students' international exposures.
6. Obtained data on students' experiences in their international engagements.
7. Subjected obtained data through appropriate data analysis methods.

Data Analysis

Characterization of students' exposure was presented using the frequency count while the interview responses were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Profile

As to course profile, 7 or 26.92% of the students with international exposures are Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students, 5 or 19.23% are Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSED) students, and 3 or 11.54% are Bachelor of Science in Public Administration and Bachelor of Science in Legal Management(BSPALM) students. There were two students from each of the courses such as Bachelor of Science in Biology, and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy, and Bachelor of Science in Accountancy who went for international engagements. Courses such as BSPsychology, BSBA and BSHRTM have one student representative for international exposures.

As to frequency of exposure, 20 or 76.92% went for international exposure once, 4 or 15.38% of them went for international visits twice. Only 1 was exposed outside the country thrice. One student was exposed for international activities four times.

Among the international exposures, majority or 68.57% of them were on cultural immersion, 5 or 14.29% were on student or youth camp, 4 or 11.43% were youth assemblies and 2 or 5.71% were focused more on student exchange or mobility programs.

Of the 35 students' exposures, 11 or 31.43% were in Singapore, 9 or 25.71% were in Japan. Furthermore, there were 4 students' exposures in Thailand, 3 student exposures in the Philippines and Taiwan, 2 in South Korea and 1 student exposure in Indonesia, United States of America and China.

There were more students' exposures during the AY 2010-2011 (n= 12), followed by 11 exposures during the AY 2014-2015. There were 6 students' exposures during the AY 2012-2013 while there were two student international exposures during the AY 2011-2012 and AY 2013-2014.

As to time duration, majority or 65.71% of the students' exposures lasted for at most 7 days, 8 or 22.86% were within 8-15 days duration, 3 or 8.06% were within 16-29 days while only one of the exposures was within a duration of one year.

Requirements For International Exposure

Among the requirements which a student has to comply with to qualify for international exposures are as follows: possesses leadership skills; have outstanding academic performance or/ excellent academic standing; good oral communication skills or fluency in English communication both written and oral forms; passed the TOEFL IBT; must be globally competitive; must have good personality; must be a Philippine Passport Holder; must be mentally and physically fit; must be financially capable; must be a member of a school or community-based organization; must be actively engaged in socio-civic involvements/community-based exposures; and must have expertise in developing project proposals, research projects.

Significant Learnings Gained from the International Exposures

The following were among the significant learnings gained from the international exposures: (1) Use of modern technologies in the delivery of services (i.e. health care); (2) Strategies in dealing with people with diverse personalities and culture; (3) Techniques in dealing with people (people smart); (4) Ability to adapt, appreciate and respect other cultures;

(5) Learned more about the country's history; (6) Enhanced culture awareness and sensitivity; (7) Acquired social values and value of open-mindedness; (8) Enhanced public relations skills; (9) More inputs about the field of discipline; (10) Independence; (11) Empathize with others even with other nationalities and (12) Deepened love for the country.

Difficulties Encountered by the Students during their International Immersions

During the entire duration of the international immersion, the students encountered problems such as: language barrier since some participants are non-English speakers; lesser sleep time brought about by the hectic schedules; adjustment in time zones, climate and country's cuisine; financial difficulties; going beyond cultural borders and communication barriers; Homesickness and Cultural adjustments.

Suggestions to Improve Students' International Exposures

Based on their experiences in the international immersions, the students offered the following suggestions to intensify: (1) The school must explore more opportunities for international engagements; (2) To enhance students' readiness for ASEAN Integration, early exposure of freshmen students to international immersions, the integration of culture awareness in related courses and relevant school activities that promote cultural awareness were suggested; (3) Echo seminar must be conducted to allow students who went for international exposure to share their rich experiences; (4) More exposure of students especially in their freshmen year; and (5) Calendar of activities must be prepared by the internationalization office to prompt students' application and deadlines for submission for application forms.

Action Plan

Based on the results of the investigation, an Action Plan was formulated in partnership with the Student Affairs and Services (SAS) Unit for eventual implementation to enhance students' international exposure. The activities involved in the plan of action were based on the following specific objectives:

1. Exploration of more avenues for international students' exposure.
2. Provision of info-board to provide regular updates on schedule for students' international trainings/ immersions.
3. Conduct of quarterly echo seminar for students who went for international exposure.
4. Forging linkages with intercultural language for language orientation and training.
5. Include intercultural awareness in annual activities.
6. Conduct of institutional leadership seminar to hone students' leadership skills.
7. Requiring clubs and organizations to undertake annual activities, programs or projects that promote socio-civic involvements and community-based exposures.
8. Link with Intercultural Languages Office to conduct short term course on Foreign Languages and Speech and Oral Training.
9. Forge collaboration with international organizations and universities for more venues for students' exposure

CONCLUSION

The International Exposure is an avenue for students to acquire skills needed for ASEAN integration. These international exposures provide them with opportunities to learn or master the country's language, to gain valuable experience working with a diverse team, and the ability to adjust to culturally-diverse environment and to adapt with strong cross-cultural communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are derived:

The Student Affairs and Services (SAS) Office and Internationalization Office may provide online information to the students on international exposure, funding, grants, and scholarships. Furthermore, these units will forge partnership with international institutions that promote international programs.

The results of the analysis may be presented to the University's top management, to ensure full support for these planned actions.

The formulated action plan may be implemented and assessed to test its impact on students' international exposure.

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