

Promoting Outbound Exchange

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Abstract

In his ministerial statement on internationalisation of education in October 2003, Dr Brendan Nelson stated 'Internationalisation is a two way process...yet less than 1% of Australian students travel abroad for study'. Many Australian Vice-Chancellors have already mandated student mobility targets of 10% or more, but thus far there has been little communication and sharing of strategies of how to reach these targets.

This paper will consider the promotion of outbound programs in relation to some of the main stakeholders. It will review some of the standard promotion and recruitment methods and evaluate other methods and strategies that are integral to the running of a successful outbound mobility program.

Introduction

Increasingly, student exchange programs are being seen as important strategic areas for institutions. Institutions have begun to realise that there are great benefits, both to students and the institution itself, in having significant numbers of students heading overseas for part of their programs.

For students, there are academic, social and cultural benefits that have been widely documented both in Australia and overseas. Institutions have also recognised the marketing advantage they gain by having their own ambassadors in many locations around the world, as well as the prestige it brings to the institution to have graduates who are more globally trained.

However, whilst institutions have been quick to talk about becoming 'international', few have actually committed the resources to be able to properly support the strenuous work that goes into developing and operating these outbound mobility programs. Recent benchmarking studies by several groups around the country have shown a direct correlation between resourcing levels (staffing and provision of scholarships) and the number of students heading overseas to study.

Promotion of Outbound Mobility Programs also remains somewhat of a mystery to many smaller institutions who simply have not had the time, or resources, to develop strategies for recruiting students to go abroad. For this reason, the first part of this paper will consider some of the fundamental marketing and promotional techniques for the recruitment of students.

A workshop session will be held at the ISANA International Education Association Inc. Annual Conference, in Melbourne, November 30th-December 3rd 2004. The purpose of this session will be to workshop key issues in outbound programs promotion in order to get a broad cross section of ideas and opinions on the following issues:

- Students – Opportunities and recruitment
What are some of the more unusual recruitment techniques? Is Outbound Exchange the only program that universities generally promote? If not, what else do they promote and how?
- General staff

How do you create Education Abroad 'champions' and how do you create a positive culture about outbound programs amongst general staff?

- Education Abroad Offices

What are the most important relationships for Education Abroad offices and how do you nurture those relationships?

- Alumni

How do you create an Alumni base and what can one be used for?

- Academic staff

How do you successfully utilise academic links and how do you engage and involve academics?

- Feedback

How do you collect it, from whom and what do you do with it?

The results of this session will be incorporated into a final paper, which will be ready by early 2005.

For the purposes of this paper, the term 'Outbound Programs' will be used. This is because the term 'Outbound Exchange' does not cover the full range of overseas options that students are offered at some institutions (such as study tours, internships, language study etc). Mentions of 'exchange' refer directly to semester and year long exchange programs with partner institutions.

Recruiting Students: Fundamental Recruitment Strategies

Two of the keys to the promotion of Outbound Programs are to be visible and accessible. This means having a designated time and place where students are able to find the information they are after. It also means adopting a strategy of visible and high profile promotion.

Class visits

Class visits are one of the keys to outbound promotion. At Macquarie, a survey of students on the program revealed that 20% of students had first heard about outbound programs at a class presentation. This represents a significant number, suggesting that a good class presentation schedule should have a positive impact on outbound numbers.

Class presentations can be done in two ways: They can be organised in advance with an academic, or they can be done spontaneously by walking into the classroom just before the commencement of the lecture. Some lecturers are fussy about having people present information before their classes, so a courtesy call before showing up is often appreciated.

That said, a good strategy is to take the class timetable and actively plan what classes are best to present to – large classes are often good for maximum exposure, whilst small classes have the benefit of gaining the closer attention of students. Targeted year level?

It is good to be succinct in the presentation of information – 5 minutes or less - identifying the key facts: the range of places students can go, that they can get credit transfer, any funding that is available, and contact person for them to go to if they are interested. Returned exchange students sometimes are the best at making such brief

presentations, as they are the best at enthusiastically conveying the benefits of outbound programs.

Information Seminars

Information seminars are an excellent way of minimising email and telephone questions – it is a session where detailed information is given out about the program, how to apply etc, and where students have the opportunity to ask lots of questions. Some universities make it compulsory for all students to attend such a seminar.

It is important to hold Information Seminars on a regular basis (eg. once every 2 week during semester time), in the same room, preferably at different times so all student groups can attend. Returned students and visiting partners can be invited to present at these seminars.

Topics to be covered in an Information Seminar should include: Where students can go, how credit transfer works, what funding is available, the benefits of going on the program, how the application procedure works and who is eligible to go on the program. There should also be time for Questions and Answers, which will benefit all the students present.

Advertising the Information Seminars is very important – placing posters on noticeboards is effective, as is placing ads in student newspapers and diaries. As mentioned, regularity is a key, as it allows students to refer the session to their friends, who can attend subsequent sessions.

Study fairs/expos

Study fairs and expos are a highly visible and effective mechanism for promoting outbound programs, such as exchange. They can take many forms.

Fairs may involve some or all of the following aspects:

- Presence of international students and partners
- Something to attract students – such as a free BBQ or music
- A banner, flags or booths
- Information handouts
- Guest speakers and information sessions
- Travel agents, working holiday providers and sponsors

Research shows that 17% of students find out about outbound programs through public events such as Study fairs. Whilst fairs represent a considerable amount of work to set up, they help significantly to raise the profile of outbound programs on a campus. Thus they are a valuable tool in mobility promotion.

Fairs should be well promoted beforehand, and generally held once or twice a year. It is also important to hold them in a prominent place, at a time when many students are likely to pass by. A good example would be in front of the student cafeteria at lunchtime, around the middle of the week (given that most students try to avoid having classes on a Monday or Friday).

Other members of International Offices are often happy to assist with such fairs – especially those members who do not have much student contact or who are desk-bound for most of their jobs.

2Articles in student publications

Student magazines, newspapers and other publications are excellent media through which to convey the outbound programs message. Having key events, such as

exchange fairs and info sessions, listed in publications such as student diaries is a good way of broadcasting to a large audience. This may cost some money but is a sound investment.

Student magazines and newspapers are often on the lookout for interesting and different articles to publish. Like many practitioners in outbound programs know, some of the funniest stories are the travel stories from students currently overseas on exchange!

If possible, it is good to try and establish a dialogue with the editors of such publications. They may allow you to have a regular space where outbound students are able to tell their stories to the wider university community.

Talks at enrolment/orientation sessions

Establishing outbound programs as a concept for students early in their degree is an important consideration. Many students are in degrees that are inflexible, so knowing about the program early allows them to plan their overseas period as effectively as possible.

At the beginning of their studies, most students are invited or mandated to attend an orientation or enrolment session. This is the perfect place to have a captive audience to tell about outbound overseas opportunities. Depending on how much time is available, it is possible to discuss several aspects of going on exchange in detail. Getting returned students to present at these sessions also increases the reality of the message – that yes, it is possible, and that it will be the best experience the student has ever had.

Participating in enrolment and orientation sessions usually requires the permission from different areas of the university's administration.

A further good strategy is to try and have a paragraph or leaflet about outbound programs inserted into re-enrolment information continuing students. Permission for this will need to be given by the section of the university responsible for sending re-enrolment information – but it is guaranteed to reach 99% of the university population!

Visits to residences

If there are university residences within close proximity to the campus, it can be a good strategy to go and put leaflets in mailboxes or under doors. It is also possible to run information sessions, or information tables, in residences where there are central eating arrangements.

Distribution of posters and other promotional materials

Distributing posters and promo material is fundamental in the marketing of outbound programs. Often Departments have their own notice boards, and having permission to use these noticeboards can be valuable in promoting specific outbound opportunities and locations to targeted student groups.

As a suggestion, promoting specific exchange events, such as Fairs or Info Sessions, tends to be more effective in generating interest rather than simply saying 'Go on Exchange!' As a rule, poster campaigns should be run in conjunction with other promotional techniques.

Stall at Open day

This is following the concept that it is good to plant the idea of an overseas program in students' minds early. Not only is a strong exchange program a big draw card to attract students to a university, but giving the students the idea of the possibilities before they are even enrolled further allows them to plan their degrees.

If possible, it is good to try and get outbound programs information leaflets onto the tables of the academic departments, thus maximising the number of students who will get the information. This might take some grovelling, but is well worth the effort – academics will find that the exchange program is an additional bait for prospective students.

Stall at Orientation week

Most universities have some form of 'O-week' activity, where clubs and societies have stalls to attract members. Having a presence at O-Week is a good way to show how outbound programs are an integral part of the university experience. Students tend to be shopping for ideas when they wander through the booths at O-Week, so having a brief flyer that is cheap to produce and easy to hand out, coupled with an information session once or twice throughout the week, is a good strategy for generating interest.

Key Questions for Workshopping at ISANA 2004

Students

Spreading the word to students about outgoing international study opportunities is one of the most important areas for any Education Abroad office, it can also be the hardest, and results are often impossible to record. Why is this so?

Please work in your group to answers the questions below to provide a framework of promotional strategies that work.

1. Have you tried any new or unusual methods to promote Education Abroad programs to the student body? If so, what worked?
2. Do you conduct targeted promotion to specialist or traditional non-mobile student groups within the main student body? If so what strategies do you use? If not should you?
3. Do you promote only exchange or other international study opportunities (eg internships, short-term study programs)? If so do you promote these differently from exchange? If yes why, and what ways do you promote them?

General Staff

The relationship between Education Abroad offices and other university general staff (particular course advisors) is absolutely crucial to any outgoing Education Abroad program in terms of the numbers of successful applicants. Often, however, these relationships can be stained, difficult to maintain and fraught with tensions for all parties involved. Why is this? Does it have to be like this?

Please work in your group to answers the questions below to discuss the best practise when working with general staff in other areas of the university.

1. How do you create an “Education Abroad champion” amongst university general staff?
2. How do you create and maintain a positive culture for Education Abroad programs amongst university general staff?
3. Identify the key people amongst university general staff for Education Abroad

Education Abroad Offices

Education Abroad offices are often the meat in the political sandwich when dealing with all other areas of the university. Almost every single section of a university is involved somehow in the administration of outgoing Education Abroad programs, with the Education Abroad offices being the central area for all their questions and complaints. How can any Education Abroad office successfully juggle all these relationships?

Please work in your group to answer the questions below to provide strategies to assist Education Abroad offices to maintain the complex and diverse relationships with other sectors of the university.

1. What are the most important relationships to any Education Abroad office to promote outgoing Education Abroad programs?
2. How can the Education Abroad office maintain these relationships?
3. What strategies could you develop to further these relationships?

Alumni

Exchange Alumni could be considered one of the great untapped resources in outbound programs. The important question is, when a student has returned from their exchange program, how interested are they in putting something back into the system that helped them go overseas in the first place? There is also the question of student reintegration and reverse culture shock as returned students struggle to get back into the swing of things at their home university.

Work in your groups to discuss the following questions:

1. The Welcome Home function: What do you include in a Welcome Home event and how do you encourage participation from students who might consider it a waste of time?
2. What is the best way of creating an Alumni base and how do you use it?
 3. Ongoing Alumni – is there any point? What could they be useful for?

Academic Staff

Academic staff are somewhat of a lynchpin in outbound programs promotion. Departments who actively support the program tend to make things easier for students and thus encourage larger groups of students to travel abroad. The converse is also true, recalcitrant departments tend to have low outbound numbers with little prospect of improving possibilities for students.

In your groups, consider the following questions in order to establish a strategy for engaging academics more vigorously in outbound programs:

1. How do you involve/engage academics – how do you add incentive for them to be involved?
2. How do you find out about and utilise academic links?

3. How do you create an "Education Abroad Champion" amongst academic staff?

Feedback

Feedback is a critical aspect in any working environment, and outbound student programs are certainly no exception. However, with such a multitude of stakeholders to please, where do you start?

Work together in your groups to consider the following questions in order to develop a strategy for feedback:

1. How do you collect it and what do you do with the results?
2. Who do you collect it from: academics, students, partners?
3. How do you use partner visits/meetings to consolidate areas?

4 References

This is a preliminary paper. A full paper, considering the issues outlined in section 3, will be available from the Session coordinators in January 2005.