



UNIVERSITY
ST. *of* THOMAS

First-Year Experience Study Abroad: Promoting Study Abroad amongst First- Generation Freshmen

We are the University of St. Thomas, the Catholic university in the heart of Houston. We are committed to the Catholic intellectual tradition and the dialogue between faith and reason. By pursuing excellence in teaching, scholarship and service, we embody and instill in our students the core values of our founders, the Basilian Fathers: goodness, discipline and knowledge. We foster engagement in a diverse, collaborative community. As a comprehensive university grounded in the liberal arts, we educate students to think critically, communicate effectively, succeed professionally and lead ethically.



The University of St. Thomas ...

- Small, private Catholic university
- Founded in 1947
- Student population of 3500
- Hispanic Serving institution
- Commuter campus
- Majority of students from the Greater Houston Area

Our freshman class ...

- Average freshman class of 230
- Half identify as first generation students
- About 40% live on campus
- Average retention rate of 85%



UNIVERSITY
ST. *of* THOMAS

Freshman Symposium

- 1 semester program – 1 credit hour
- Required of all first time freshmen
- Average class size 13 students
- Three person mentor team – faculty, staff, student
- Planning team made up of faculty, staff, and students
- Teach the mission of the University



- Liberal Arts Education
- History of the Basilian Fathers
- Catholic Intellectual Tradition
- Faith and Reason
- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Leadership
- Personal and professional success



High Impact Educational Practices

First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Common Intellectual Experiences

Learning Communities

Writing-Intensive Courses

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Undergraduate Research

Diversity/Global Learning

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

Internships

Capstone Courses and Projects



UNIVERSITY
ST. *of* THOMAS

Why Study Abroad for Freshmen?

Increased cultural sensitivity early in the academic career to set the foundation for further diversity and global learning

Provide freshmen with a starting point to pursue more intensive study abroad experiences later

Student retention and persistence

Academic achievement

Time to degree

Campus engagement



FYESA Course Goals and Objectives

Student level:

Students will broaden their understanding of the UST Mission.

Students will increase in their ability to interact and observe cultural differences and consider issues from diverse perspectives.

Institutional level:

Retention rate

Graduation rate

Campus engagement

Academic progress

Future participation in study abroad



Developing FYESA

Student Survey: Factors related to decision to study abroad

Cost and financing the program were cited as the most important factors

Qualitative factors emerged as important predictors of study

Who was going on the trip

Who would be their roommates

Housing accommodations

Safety concerns

Fear of traveling abroad for first time/time away from family and home

Freshman Survey: What would FYESA look like?

Ideal length

Destinations

Timing of travel abroad portion of trip



Features of FYESA

To address concerns related to:

Cost:

Length of study abroad programs deliberately planned to be short

Two programs to offer close and far-away destinations

Number of credit hours earned

Administrative support to offset program costs

Course offered during spring semester with travel abroad portion at two different times

Social/qualitative experience:

FYESA built around Freshman Symposium model

Different housing accommodations offered in the two programs



FYESA: Living the UST Mission in a Global Setting

Living through Knowledge: Rome, Italy

- Travel abroad May 16 – 24
- Focus on the history of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Living through Experience: Costa Rica

- Travel abroad Spring Break
- Focus on service learning and social justice
- Home stays for a portion of the trip



Lessons Learned and Changes for Next Year

Status of two pilot programs

What worked/what didn't? Series of focus groups

Timing of the two trips

Parent outreach

Timing of marketing



Questions?

Jo Anne Meier Marquis, PhD

Chair of Psychology, Associate Professor, Director of FS
meierj@stthom.edu

Ulyses Balderas, PhD

Assistant Chair , Assistant Professor, Center for International Studies
Director of Study Abroad
balderj@stthom.edu

Lindsey McPherson, MA, LPC

Assistant Vice President for Student Success, Dean of Students
guthmanl@stthom.edu



UNIVERSITY
ST. ^{of} THOMAS