Influence of a Two Week Faculty Led Short Term Study Aboard Program on Athletic Training and Exercise Science Student's Attitudes Toward Cultural Awareness

Guyer, MS, Matthew, TD: Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts

Context: Current and prospective athletic training and exercise science students often ask if they can take a semester off to study abroad. Unfortunately, pre-professional curriculums seldom allow students the opportunity to study abroad for a semester due to the academic rigor and clinical demands. Objective: The purpose of this study was to evaluate how a two-week faculty lead short term study aboard (FL-STSA) program would influence the students’ perceptions and recollections about their attitudes toward four categories identified as the essential elements of "cultural awareness". Design: Pre-post FL-STSA survey. Setting: A fifteen week on campus course was followed by a two-week aboard program in Ireland. Participants: Participants (N = 27) included Athletic Training (n = 12) and Exercise Science (n = 15) undergraduate students from 2 institutes of higher education in Western Ma. Intervention: The International Awareness and Activities Survey ([IAAS] Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004) was utilized to examine student attitudes after a FL-STSA program. Pre-test data were obtained before the overseas portion of the trip and Post-test data were obtained at the completion of the study abroad experience. Main Outcome Measure: The IAAS is designed to measure student perceptions and recollections about their attitudes toward four categories identified as the essential elements of "cultural awareness": (1) intercultural awareness; degree to which students were conscious of similarities and differences between their culture and host cultures, (2) personal growth and development; mature attitudes and actions and openness to new experiences, (3) functional knowledge; learning or expressing a desire to learn information or skills relevant to travel in general or to a specific host site and (4) global interdependence; students’ awareness of the interconnectedness of national, international and supra-national systems. Scores on the IAAS range from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (Strongly agree). To obtain subscale scores, items were summed and then averaged. Repeated Measures t-tests were used to examine the differences in pre and post test scores for each subscale. Results: Significant (p < .05) mean differences were found for all subscales, intercultural awareness (p < .001), personal growth and development (p < .001), functional knowledge (p < .001) and global interdependence (p =< .001). For all subscales, percent improvement from pre to post test ranged from 18% - 34%. Conclusions: Participants in the FL-STSA significantly improved their attitude toward global awareness. A two week FL-STSA program is a sufficient amount of time to influence student attitudes and beliefs. Word Count: 398