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## Practice Area Column   Education Abroad

### How Education Abroad Offices Can Create Global Connections Locally

Though most study abroad programs are suspended due to the pandemic, education abroad professionals can leverage their expertise to develop new opportunities for students closer to home.



Students from Pacific Lutheran University on a hike in Neah Bay, Washington, as part of an off-campus study program in collaboration with the Makah Tribe. Photo: Courtesy PLU

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By [Charlotte West](#) | November 4, 2020

**O**ne of Pacific Lutheran University's (PLU) most popular off-campus study programs is not on the other side of the world. Instead, it is just 4 hours north of PLU's Tacoma, Washington, campus, on the reservation of the Makah Tribe of Neah Bay.

Every January, PLU students spend 12 days on the reservation, which is located on the northwestern tip of the Olympic Peninsula, living with the tribe to learn about its history, culture, and customs.

After an introduction to anthropology, students learn about mythology, religion, and traditional arts, as well as contemporary tribal sovereignty and hunting and fishing rights. Like those who study abroad in other countries, students who participate in the Makah program have to respect local customs and laws. They also learn about a culture that is not often prioritized in U.S. education, says professor Jordan Levy, PhD.

“[Students] don’t need to get on a plane to have this powerful, transformative intercultural experience,” he says.

Now in its third decade, the Makah program at PLU is an example of study away, a term often used to describe an off-campus study program that occurs in a domestic setting. At a time when international travel is grounded, education abroad practitioners are looking closer to home to create intercultural and experiential learning opportunities for their students.

## **Taking Advantage of (Local) Global Opportunities**

Leveraging much of the same expertise they use for study abroad, education abroad offices can help connect the global to the local without requiring students and faculty to travel to another country. Education abroad professionals are adept at making such connections, whether they entail finding the best-fit program abroad for a U.S. student or connecting students with opportunities to deepen their engagement in global aspects of their local community upon their return home from a program abroad.

**“Opportunities for global engagement on the domestic level are substantial and growing. The growing diversity of the United States...guarantees that almost any university will be an international community.” —Mark Dalhouse**

At Elon University in North Carolina, Mark Dalhouse, PhD, and his colleagues have created several such opportunities. His team worked with the local Islamic Masjid, which has more than 40 countries represented in its congregation, on ways to encourage intercultural dialogue. Elon students share meals with families from the congregation, and some have volunteered with the youth group as tutors. Students can also participate in a service-learning program for incoming refugees in the area, and the university is exploring a partnership with North Carolina’s Lumbee Tribe.

“Opportunities for global engagement on the domestic level are substantial and growing,” says Dalhouse, director for global educational initiatives and a founder of NAFSA's Global Learning in a Domestic Setting [Member Interest Group](#). “The growing diversity of the United States, both through immigration and



naturally occurring demography, guarantees that almost any university will be an international community.”

In addition to its collaboration with the Makah tribe, PLU offers several other domestic study away courses, including a social work course focused on immigration patterns in Tacoma, an environmental ethics class at a Lutheran camp only accessible by foot, and a political science course that takes students to Washington, D.C., for the presidential inauguration.



PLU students learn about all aspects of Makah culture during the 10-day program in Neah Bay. Photo: Courtesy PLU

While some programs take students to other parts of their state, or to different states altogether, some courses do not require much travel at all. At the University of Hawai'i-Hilo, director of global education Carolina Lam developed a local program in collaboration with the university's housing office for the few students living on campus during the pandemic. The goal is to help students learn about the island's communities and history of immigration to Hawaii, she says, including Korean immigrants to the islands in the mid-twentieth century.

"This program will benefit the students on campus, help promote our study abroad program [with] international partners in Korea, [and] engage the students in the community," Lam says. Additionally, the program counts toward the university's global engagement certificate requirement.

## **Leveraging Expertise to Provide New Experiences for Students**

Like many institutions, the international office at PLU is drawing on its expertise with risk mitigation, intercultural learning, logistics, and support of faculty members when creating local programs, says Tamara Williams, PhD, executive director of PLU's Wang Center for Global Education. Her office recently assumed responsibilities for the university's experiential learning programs because "we've done experiential learning abroad forever," says Williams. "The idea is just to create a continuum between the local and the global."

The Wang Center put out a call for proposals for faculty who want to develop local programs with community-based research, internships, and study away components. Using the same faculty review process they honed for study abroad programs, Williams's team will create new local programs with "clear guidelines that are aligned with PLU's general learning outcomes that need to be included," she says.

Similarly, the Global Education Office at the Community College of Baltimore County is lending its international program expertise to create more local experiences while study abroad programs are suspended. The office is planning a six-day study away program in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which straddles the Tennessee-North Carolina border, for late May 2021. The program combines environmental science, history, and culture.

"As with our study abroad programs, we aim to give our students a hands-on learning experience outside of their comfort zone," says Melissa Chambers, global education coordinator.

During the Great Smoky Mountains program, students will learn about the environmental impact of some of the region's early inhabitants, including indigenous populations and immigrant groups, as well as the challenges of protecting the natural environment while keeping the park accessible and attractive to visitors, particularly underrepresented groups.

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**traveled internationally. Our hope is that this domestic program will attract some of these students who are traditionally underrepresented in study abroad programs.”**  
**—Melissa Chambers**

Chambers says it has been easy to tweak the college’s existing model for short-term, faculty-led study abroad to create a domestic off-campus program. Her office usually enlists a third-party provider to handle logistics for study abroad experiences. For the Great Smoky Mountains program, the office is arranging transportation and accommodation directly, and doing so allows for greater flexibility to tailor the program to students’ needs. Included in the trip is an overnight visit to a four-year institution, because many students will transfer after earning their associate’s degree.

The Global Education Office designed the program to attract a wider audience of community college students who might not consider a study abroad program, says Chambers. “Cost is also a prohibitive factor for many of our students, as is the ‘intimidation factor’ for students who have never traveled internationally,” she says. “Our hope is that this low-cost, six-day domestic program will attract some of these students who are traditionally underrepresented in study abroad programs, and it may even give them the buy-in to try an international study abroad in the future.”

Dickinson College, a private liberal arts college located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, has several international centers around the world. Although their education abroad programs have been canceled for the fall, international office staff created an [online resource page to help faculty](#) connect to the college’s international sites and integrate global content into their classrooms, says Katie DeGuzman, MEd, director of education abroad.

Faculty members from Brazil, Italy, and Russia are teaching virtual language courses, and the international office has also created a virtual course for returned study abroad students. They have engaged faculty members from the college’s study abroad sites in France, Italy, and Spain for various projects, and study abroad advisers also helped create programs for first-year international students who were unable to travel to the United States this fall.

## **Creating Lasting Effects**

The new experiences and connections made while study abroad programs are on pause can have positive, long-lasting effects. Dalhousie says education abroad offices can leverage their expertise in several key ways to continue supporting domestic programs: (1) understanding liability and travel insurance policies; (2) making sure grades are transferable; (3) leading predeparture training on intercultural development and learning; and (4) creating post-travel assessment and reflection opportunities for returning students.

Chambers, of the Community College of Baltimore County, says that education abroad offices can also lean on many of their existing relationships to develop new domestic programs.

“Many of the same stakeholders who are essential in coordinating international programs are just as enthusiastic about culturally rich domestic programs,” she says. “Our faculty are coming up with some great ideas for closer-to-home programs that they may not have previously considered pursuing now that our focus is solely on [domestic] programs for the near future.” •

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