Study Abroad Promotional Tactics for Students in Critical Language Host Countries

Background
313,415 U.S. tertiary students participated in a study abroad program in 2014/2015. Many students study languages abroad through study abroad program providers. Studying critical languages is increasingly promoted as a way to strengthen U.S. national security (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), yet participation in study abroad programs in critical language-speaking countries is low (IIE, 2016).

Focusing on the critical languages of Arabic, Russian, and Chinese, how do program providers attract participation to their study abroad programs?

Methods
Mixed-methods approach utilized to determine:
• How program providers target potential applicants
• What outreach tactics providers employ to promote participation in critical language-speaking host countries

Data collected between February and April 2017
Potential Sample: 60 programs (20 in each language)

Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis: Student Choice Theory (Salisbury et al, 2009)
College students make decisions based on human & cultural capital considerations. Providers mirror student considerations in their outreach.

Results
Survey Respondents: 18
Website Reviews: 15
Phone Interviews: 5

When Targeting a Student Audience, providers tend to rely on academic achievement and background in critical language. Phone interviews revealed this student type is targeted as students studying critical languages self-select.

For Outreach Tactics, providers tend to utilize distance outreach (phone, email, voice-over-internet) and impersonal outreach (listservs, listings, social media) the most for connecting with potential students. While face-to-face outreach (study abroad fairs, in-person meetings, tabling events) is important, these are often less possible for international organizations and those with small marketing teams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Number of Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Phone Interviewees</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic (only)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese (only)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic, Chinese, &amp; Russian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion
Quantitative and qualitative data falls in three themes:
• Academic and Linguistic Achievement
• Students are Self-Selecting
• Challenges in the Field

Limitations:
• Author previously employed by study abroad provider
• Anonymity of survey respondents, inability to fully correlate data steams

Long term: Determining the student audience most interested in critical language programming and what outreach tactics promote study abroad can help increase the number learning critical languages, a U.S. national security need.

References
Full list of references for thesis available upon request.


Lauren Kardos
The George Washington University
International Education Capstone