



## High Impact Practices in Higher Ed Language Learning. The Global Passport Program: Instilling Global Citizenship and Retention Within the UG Freshman Year

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### Abstract

*While most Higher Education Institutions have traditionally fostered study abroad programs in the Junior year of an undergraduate's four year college experience, few Universities have ventured to offer first year students the opportunity to study abroad. In an effort to instill High Impact Practices from the onset of the undergraduate's University experience, my Institution began its "Global Passport Program" a little over a decade ago. The Program is committed to the validity of experiential education opportunities that offer students direct, sustained engagement with faculty and administrators, in a foreign classroom setting with their peers, with whom they form a bond initially in a local classroom setting. Thus, early on in their tenure at our Institution, the intellectual and social development of the student cohort is enriched, while the ties to the Institution and its program are reinforced. This presentation will share my experience piloting the Global Passport program for Italian language learning at my Institution over the course of the past decade, pointing out challenges and benefits to OTE Programs (Other than English) at the Higher Education level.*

**Keywords:** Study abroad, High Impact Practices

### What is Global Passport?

At my Institution, the Global Passport (GP) Program was created under the direction of the Global Studies office to offer a short term study abroad program (normally 8 days) for students in their freshmen year. The study abroad feature is attached to a given undergraduate core class, occurring usually at the end of the course and upon the successful completion of all course requirements. Students earn an additional credit during their week at the campus abroad. The Rome or Paris component, which includes lessons, excursions and often an academic learning service component must somehow be relevant to the course's content. Almost a decade ago, I began piloting GP, gearing it toward level one students of Italian. This paper is a synopsis of the GP pedagogy, of its advantages and its pitfalls. Ultimately, I will demonstrate the Program's overall contribution to a language program's success and retention capabilities, as well as its unique ability to establish a sense of global citizenry early on in an undergraduate's career.

### How Global Passport differs from "traditional" study abroad modalities, i.e. long term programs

The opportunity to study abroad is not widely offered to first year undergraduate students at most universities in the US. Traditionally, the proverbial "Junior year abroad" had been marketed as a long term program of at least one semester at most institutions, aimed at the end of a student's tenure at a given University. While the opportunity for a semester abroad is what professors teaching languages other than English (OTE) can hope will produce a full-immersion experience for their students and/or perhaps an internship where they can practice the language on site, such deterrents as cost, as well as students' inhibitions especially after the rise of Covid, can make a long term program seem daunting.

My own institution offers scholarships for the Rome program solely for long term programs under the auspices of its Italian Cultural Center, whereby the cost of long term study abroad is defrayed, but roughly only by one third. Thus for many, a long term program abroad can be considered solely a remote possibility. Thus for many of our current students, GP may indeed be the only affordable option for a study abroad experience, given its cost effectiveness. Of course, the goal is to get students excited enough about the short term program, so that they find a way to afford the long term program prior to their graduation.

The University indeed banks on the probability of a student's return for a great study abroad experience later in their tenure at the University, which justifies the investment in this one week study



abroad trial. It should be mentioned that beyond the potential return of students in the long term program, the Program's cost effectiveness is reciprocated both on the University's part and the part of the student cohort. Students profit from the Rome or Paris campuses' "down-time", in between long term programs when the Rome and Paris satellite campuses are under-populated. The University essentially provides room and board for the students free of cost, along with other incentives (ie. food coupons). The students are responsible only for paying their own airfare and for a 600.00 fee covering the one credit earned abroad. Frugal students might require very little spending money beyond what is provided.

Aside from the nominal required fees that make GP within the grasp of a greater student populace than that aspiring toward a longer term program, and despite the fact that Global passport is not a program considered eligible for any scholarship monies due to its low cost, Global Passport has an academic *sine qua non* that determines a student's eligibility to engage in the Rome or Paris component with their cohort or not. Essentially, the GP candidate must be in good standing in a given class very early on, when details such as airline ticketing and other logistics are decided by the Study abroad office. Professors may bar a student from attending the study abroad component. Thus, an academic benefit of the program is its fostering a certain pro-activity on the part of first year undergraduate students, allowing them to focus on their academic success earlier on in the semester than what might normally occur within the semester.

### **Global Passport as High Impact Practice (HIP)**

Given the reality of Higher Education's trend toward online instruction, the value of High Impact Practices (HIP) has been a trending topic. Research supports the fact that engaged students achieve higher outcomes of learning than those who do not actively engage in proactive practices related to their coursework. [1] I believe that the GP experience meets many of the standards and exempla of HIP. I will focus on the most salient of these HIP pillars.

### **Global Passport as exemplum of First Year seminar/Common Intellectual Experiences**

My University, like many other institutions has developed first year seminars to enhance the quality of the freshman year, a short time frame which is so crucial for student retention. The emphasis of which is on a mode of learning that is essentially collaborative and that focuses on practical and intellectual competencies. By its very nature, the Global Passport course is a type of first year seminar or experience. From the onset of the semester in New York, there is a different vibe than in my other classes, given the Rome component. Students are aware that they will be traveling together and there is a certain enthusiasm for the class that is hard to replicate in classes without a travel component. The bonding of the freshman cohort begins in New York through this zeal but also through co-curricular cultural events and orientations that both the Professor and the Office of Global Studies organize. The event that I organize that I consider most effective is a GP reunion involving the previous cohort. The event is designed to engage students and professors from the prior year with the new cohort, in an afternoon of sharing photos, stories, traveling tips, etc. Students usually respond well to this event in particular as it is sort of learning community session.

Further, to enhance a sense of collegiality amongst students, I create a buddy system amongst the GP, whereby the students are paired very early in the semester and begin working in groups on projects together locally at the New York campus. The buddy system creates an accountability system amongst "buddies" and ensures that in Rome no one will be without a friend, as they are grounded in a learning community from the onset.

Recently, I created a leadership role for students in an effort to keep the group cohesive and to promote active engagement in the excursion portion of the Program. I have 2-4 students per day engage in a leadership role, whereby the students assist in some of the logistics, attention and dress code issues etc that are faced during local excursions. Students have responded quite positively to this "quality control" role, whereby they keep their classmates in check, while assisting all involved in our Rome excursions.

### **Global Passport as exemplum of Global Learning/Diversity**

The MLA has stressed the inextricable connection of teaching language with culture throughout. I have always used this as a pillar for my language courses. In fact, all my basic classes begin with what I call "La parola o l'espressione del giorno", the word or expression of the day, which I tie into a brief cultural talk, linking language and culture. What makes GP more exciting is that I can not only prepare students for expressions that they will hear and use when entering a *caffè* or supermarket, but also, I ask them to come up with a "Parola del giorno", a new word or phrase that



they learn each day in their own travels in Rome. The pre-departure orientations and seminars that both I and the administration organize also get students prepared to confront worldviews different from their own. This pre-departure prep can only be enhanced by the experiential learning of living in the city of Rome. Having studied the language even if for only one semester, my students are always well-prepared for many of the cultural differences they will encounter.

Overall, the GP program also offers an extra perk when it comes to language learning at all levels unequalled to the exposure culturally and linguistically in the city of Rome. In fact, my students are the only language class at the Rome campus of all the GP cohorts and are the only ones actively involved in employing the language in many of the activities I design for the course. They display a certain confidence, since by the time of departure, they are somewhat imbued in the culture and a bit of the language. Many have told me stories of having successfully translated or helped students from other cohorts of the University. As a result of such experiences, their confidence and interest in the language invariably grows and Global Passport yields students who not only study abroad long term, but also minor in the language.

### **Global Passport as exemplum of Service Learning**

Of all the aspects of the week's activities in Rome, the one that I feel embraces the Vincentian Mission of my Institution and combines High Impact techniques and focus on the language is the Service Component. My cohort again is the only one who can effectively engage in the service component while using the language, albeit at a very elementary level. Last year's GP cohort practiced their language skills in what is called the Service Learning Panini run, by writing notes in Italian to the homeless, as well as by engaging in supportive conversation *in lingua* as they distributed boxed lunches that we assemble prior as a class. Instead, this year's cohort visited the Nafuma Refugee Center in Rome. Prior to the visit, I asked the students to prepare Italian conversational phrases to engage with the community. They also conducted a collection of donations of essential goods from New York, which were brought to the Center upon our visit. Students wrote reflections about their experience to conclude the service component. Some students even chose the European migration phenomenon as a topic for their cultural paper for the final project.

Essentially, the Service component seals the outcome of giving back to the community and the local culture. It is a preparation for good global citizenry, bringing my students full circle from pre-departure, where I leave them with the words of the late CNN world-traveler, Anthony Bourdain: "Travel changes you. As you move through this life and this world you change things slightly, you leave marks behind, however small. And in return, life — and travel — leaves marks on you." [2]

### **References**

[1] Bonet, Giselle and Walters, Barbara R. "High Impact Practices: Student Engagement and Retention" NY, CUNY Academic Works, 2016, 224.

[2] Bourdain, Anthony. *The Nasty Bits: Collected Varietal Cuts, Usable Trim, Scraps, and Bones*, Bloomsbury, NY, 2007, XI.