From Electronic Engagement to Cultural Competence: Utilizing Online Emergent Practices to Develop a Hybrid Training Program for USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors Program

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Abstract

This paper discusses the design process, development, and implementation of an online orientation for American students who were chosen to be cultural ambassadors for the United States Pavilion at the World Expo 2015 in Milan, Italy. This was a high-value assignment with multiple moving parts that required coordination with subject matter experts across the country and around the globe. In the past, training for these students has taken place 100% on ground; this was the first time in which students received one month of online training prior to their on ground orientation at the USA Pavilion site in Milan. The paper presents an overview of the structure of the "virtual classroom" and discusses the results of the pre- and post-orientation surveys administered to the student to measure their perceptions of the online training curriculum. The survey instrument included an assessment of three areas: (1) students' motivation, (2) self-efficacy in cultural competence, and (3) digital preferences. The paper also discusses implications for designing online training programs and courses.

Introduction

The USA Pavilion Student Ambassador Program was comprised of approximately 120 student ambassadors who were carefully selected and then trained to represent the United States at the 2015 World Expo in Milan, Italy. The University of Southern California Marshall School of Business was responsible for creating a comprehensive online training program for the student ambassadors in order to teach them the soft skills necessary to greet and interact with visitors to the USA Pavilion as well as the basic knowledge required to staff activities within the USA Pavilion and to conduct themselves in accordance with the rules set forth by the U.S. State Department. The student ambassadors were divided into two cohorts of approximately 60 students each. The first cohort was to report to Milan in April, 2015 and the second was to report in July, 2015. Each group completed a weeklong onsite training regimen prior to beginning their student ambassadorships, which ran for three months.

The online orientation began in March, 2015, and ran for approximately one month, during which time students completed three modules within the CourseSites Learning Management System: (1) Cultural Detective, (2) USA Pavilion and Your Role, and (3) Code of Conduct. A fourth module was created for students to complete at the end of their three-month assignment in Milan as a reflective piece for them to self-assess their own cultural competence. The online orientation was 100 percent asynchronous, which meant that students could complete the readings, discussions, and exercises on their own time and at their own pace. With the exception of the fourth module, all students were to complete the online orientation prior to leaving for Milan in preparation for their onsite training. In order to improve engagement and retention rates and to provide students with an informal support system, a closed Facebook page was created wherein students could post introductions, pictures, questions and answers,

and comments. Joining this page was not a requirement of the program or of the training; however, students were highly encouraged to take part. The Facebook page was open to select faculty and staff in order to protect student privacy and to encourage frank discussions.

USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors Program Design

Due to the time constraints for onsite training, it was suggested that students receive an online pre-training orientation to familiarize them with core knowledge and to introduce them to some of the higher-level skills that would be required of them as USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors. The online orientation was designed to include three critical components: (1) an intercultural training piece in which students would have the opportunity to experience different intercultural communication scenarios, (2) an introduction to the USA Pavilion, wherein students were introduced to the physical layout of the structure, and (3) an overview of the code of conduct to which students would be held accountable, including specific "dos" and "don'ts" in communicating with guests as well as proper attire and comportment.

The online orientation was a web-based, self-paced course, which was housed within CourseSites Learning Management System. CourseSites is a free version of Blackboard and was chosen because of its similarity to Blackboard, which would most likely be a familiar platform for most students, and because it did not require enrollment in any particular program or university for students to access content. In addition to the CourseSites platform, students also had access to one another and to select faculty and staff via a closed Facebook group, which was heavily used to enhance their learning and improve communication. The Facebook group became a community space, where the students felt a sense of belonging and were encouraged to seek each other for support, and a safe place to ask any type of questions.

Course content was prepared and developed by faculty members and instructional designers at USC Marshall working in partnership with subject matter experts within the USA Pavilion team and the U.S. State Department. Subject matter ranged from basic to advanced materials that required students to remember, understand, apply, evaluate, and ultimately create a variety of content and situations. The course was designed in accordance with the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). Learning outcomes were defined in terms of actionable items, activities were designed to enable students to achieve those outcomes, and self-assessments were put into place to allow students and facilitators to gauge their progress and to flag any problems.

The online orientation was comprised of three modules prior to onsite training and one module after students completed their ambassadorship. The online orientation was designed to be completed in approximately 8-10 hours:

1. Module 1 – Cultural Detective (*Approx. 5-6 hours*)
2. Module 2 – USA Pavilion and Your Role (*Approx. 1 hour*)
3. Module 3 – Code of Conduct (*Approx. 1 hour*)
4. Module 4 – Cultural Detective reflection, continued from Module 1 (*Approx. 1 hour*)

Modules 1 through 3 were to be completed asynchronously, at the students' own pace, prior to onsite training. Module 4, which was the final reflective component of the Cultural Detective piece, was closed to students until they completed their ambassadorship but was required prior to receiving their certificate. Students could complete the orientation within one week or take the entire month prior to

onsite training. They were encouraged to set up a consistent schedule that allowed enough time to complete every exercise within each module. Exercises included embedded and assigned readings, written assessments, and multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank questions that allowed them to reflect upon the learning that took place within that exercise. Written assessments required students to upload their written responses as a PDF file into CourseSites. Students' scores were recorded as a measure of completion but not counted as a grade.

By the end of the online course, students were expected to demonstrate the following:

1. A budding awareness of cultural lenses through which individuals from different countries might approach a given situation.
2. An understanding of how to approach different situations that they might encounter in their roles as USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors in a culturally sensitive way.
3. An ability to critically examine creative and culturally sensitive approaches to engaging and interacting with individuals from different countries.
4. An ability to identify key components of the physical layout of the USA Pavilion.
5. An ability to identify their basic job responsibilities within the USA Pavilion.
6. An ability to distinguish appropriate conduct and comportment as a USA Pavilion Student Ambassador.

These course objectives were reinforced and expounded upon in the onsite training prior to students beginning their 3-month ambassadorships. Although all course objectives were considered to be important, the last three were considered more rote in terms of learning. By far the most imperative were those that challenged students to gain soft skills in terms of working with people in general and, more specifically, to develop cultural competence in their interactions with individuals from other countries. The online orientation was, therefore, designed to devote 60 percent of the students' time to the *Cultural Detective* piece, 20 percent to the *USA Pavilion* piece, and 20 percent to the *Code of Conduct* piece.

Cultural Competence

The traditional cultural component in many student business trips or any international experience may include pre-departure readings, sessions, and lectures on business practices and culture of the host country that develop knowledge (Howard, Keller and MacEwan, 2010). The positive impact of study abroad programs and experience has been documented by many studies. They consistently report that overseas experience help students gain self-confidence, improve cross-cultural adaptation skills, flexibility, improve their knowledge of international business and competence (Henthorne, Miller, and Hudson (2001). Overseas experience has been linked to increased global awareness and intercultural sensitivity. It has been documented that the longer the exposure, the more interculturally sensitive students become. However, even short 10 day short-term programs have been linked to increased intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al, 2006).

Although there are many different operational definitions of the learning outcomes of overseas programs, most of them include such key competencies as cross-cultural sensitivity, globalization, interdependence, intercultural sensitivity, global citizenship, multi-culturalism, internationalization, and global competence.

Deardorff's Pyramid of Intercultural Competence (2006, 2009) separates learning outcomes of a business study tour into desired external and internal outcomes. The external outcome includes effective and appropriate global behavior in intercultural situations that can be further subdivided into knowledge and skills. Knowledge includes knowledge of global business and cultural knowledge whereas skills involve the ability to translate information and ideas across cultures. The internal outcome includes a shift of informed frame of reference that translates into personal attributes necessary to success in international assignments: adaptability, flexibility, openness, and tolerance of ambiguity.
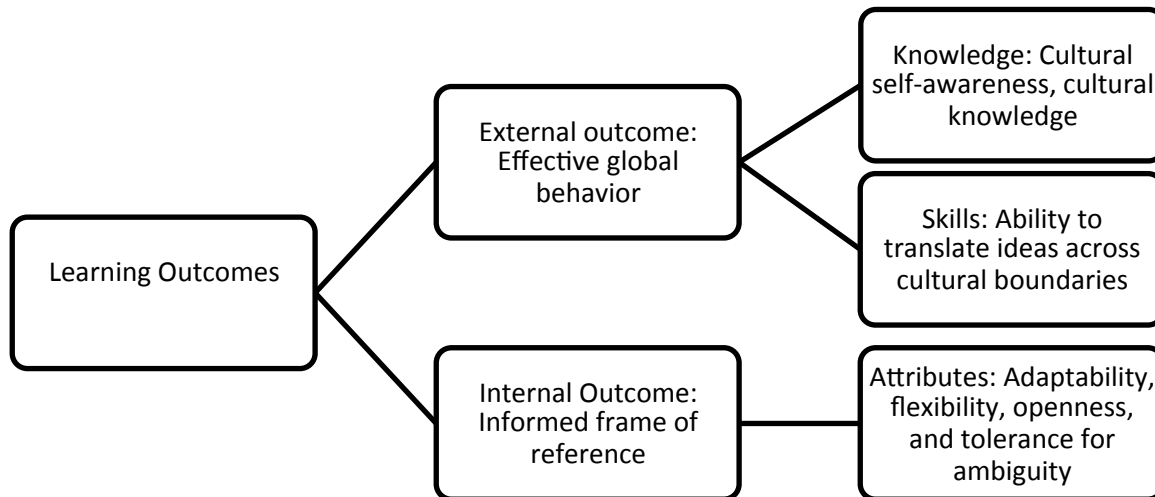

Figure 1. Learning Outcomes (Adapted from Deardorff, 2006, 2009)

The Intercultural Competence Assessment framework developed by the INCA project in Europe (www.incaproject.org) identifies three stages of intercultural communication competence. According to this model, we can identify the learning outcomes by the level of sophistication in the acquired skills in all three components, academic, corporate and cultural. The learning outcomes – knowledge, skills and attributes - then correspond to any of the three levels of performance: Level 1 –basic; Level 2 – intermediate and Level 3 – full. The description of each level is adapted from INCA project and provided below.

Level 1 – Basic
You are already willing to interact successfully with people of other cultures. At this stage you are reasonably tolerant of other values, customs and practices although you may find them odd or surprising and approve or disapprove.

Level 2 – Intermediate
As a result of experience and/or training, you are beginning to view more coherently some of the aspects of intercultural encounters. You have a mental 'map' or 'checklists' of the sort of situations you are likely to need to deal with and are developing your skills to cope with them. You are quicker to see patterns in the various experiences.

Level 3 – Full
Many of the competences you developed consciously at level 2 have become intuitive. You are constantly ready for situations and encounters in which you will exercise your knowledge, judgment and skills and have a large repertoire of strategies for dealing with differences in values, customs and practices among members of the intercultural group.

Our goal was to see students operating at least at the Intermediate level of competence to be prepared for their ambassadorial roles in World Expo Milano 2015.

Module 1: Intercultural training

An intercultural training piece was designed to constitute 60% of the online training program. An interactive experiential platform *Cultural Detective* was chosen to teach intercultural communication skills and to build students' cultural competence in three areas - knowledge, skills, and attributes - in preparation to interact with diverse groups of people visiting the USA Pavilion in World Expo Milan 2015. This was a departure from a traditional memorization of key facts to understanding, developing an appreciation for the underlying values of the host culture and practicing your own behavioral skills in online multicultural situations.

There were three key pieces to the intercultural training piece. The first component had students evaluate their own cultural awareness looking through the U.S. value lens. We chose the American culture as a starting point in students' cultural training to make them more aware of the culture they were chosen to represent and the potential stereotypes that people may hold toward that culture. This module consisted of exploring the U.S. culture through an interactive platform that allowed students to access Culture Description, Proverbs and Sayings associated with the key values of the American culture, Daily Life Example, and Negative Perceptions. As a second step, students had to complete a worksheet that asked them to integrate and reflect on the material they learned by responding to the question "What does this mean to me?" Finally, students were asked to analyze and provide cultural explanations to three consulting episodes that involved an individual from the U.S. culture interacting with people from four other countries that included Brazil, Spain, the Arab Gulf, and Japan. These countries were chosen to familiarize students with other cultures that may be represented by people visiting the USA Pavilion. Students had to complete a worksheet where they had to analyze and provide culture-based explanations for the incidents that involved these cultures in interaction.

The second component introduced students to the Italian culture. It followed similar steps that students had taken to complete the first component. Students evaluated cultural awareness looking through the Italian value lens and completed "What does this mean to me" worksheet to reflect on the information they learned and to analyze their own cultural values in relation to those of the Italian culture. Finally, students completed a worksheet where they analyzed additional four scenarios that featured the Italian culture in interaction with people from the U.S., Russian, German, and Chinese cultures. After students completed this component, they had learned about the U.S. and Italian culture and also had exposure from 7 other cultures representing Asian, European, Russian, and Arab cultures.

Students completed the third component of the cultural training at the end of their on-the-ground experience. Reflection is an important part of developing intercultural competence. Keller and MacEwan (2010) recommend designing a reflective assignment at the assessment stage following the trip to engage students in an activity that makes them reflect on their experiences. In most cases, many programs require students to keep a journal or require a written assignment with specific questions addressing the trip. We chose to create an interactive online experiential activity to replace more a traditional journaling assignment. Students could either complete the final assignment individually or collaborate in groups. They had to use Cultural Detective platform to create their own incident that involved an experience they either were involved in themselves or observed during their ambassadorial experience at the USA pavilion. They created their own story, identified the participants and provided a cultural explanation for the incident that involved people from different cultures. A complete World Expo eLearning Course Mapping Module 1 matrix is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
MODULE 1: "Cultural Detective" (60% of course)

Key Points	Activities	Assessments	Readings
Evaluate your own cultural awareness looking through the U.S. value lens	Introduction to Cultural Detective		Quick start handout
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	What does this mean to me?	Complete Cultural Detective worksheet and upload PDF into CourseSites	Quick start handout
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	Global Differences	Complete 3 exercises and upload PDF into CourseSites: U.S. – Brazil incident U.S. – Spanish incident U.S. – The Arab Gulf U.S. – Japan incident	Quick start handout
Evaluate cultural awareness looking through the Italian value lens	What does this mean to me?	Complete Cultural Detective worksheet and upload PDF into CourseSites	Quick start handout
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	Global Differences	Complete 4 exercises and upload PDF to CourseSites: Italian – U.S. Italian – Russian Italian – German Italian - Chinese	Quick start handout
Based on your experience, create your own incident reports, including gaps in cultural understanding and solutions for closing/narrowing those gaps NOTE: This component was built into a fourth module for easier course navigation and was delivered at the end of the students' ambassadorships.	Cultural Detective Perspectives	Work in groups of 4 to create incident report. Identify gaps in cultural understanding and develop solutions. Upload PDF into CourseSites to share with peers	Quick start handout

Module 2: Introduction to the USA Pavilion

The content in Module 2 required students to remember and understand basic knowledge regarding the physical structure of the USA Pavilion as well as their roles within that structure. This was somewhat problematic in that, at the time of training, the physical structure was in the final stages of construction. Students were therefore shown graphical representations of the USA Pavilion rather than actual pictures.

The first component of this module included a basic overview of the USA Pavilion, including artistic renditions of the physical structure, floor maps, icons, and other graphic materials with minimal text. Self-assessment questions referenced the physical layout of the USA Pavilion as well as exhibit graphics and primary duty locations and were designed to encourage students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

The second component of this module included some background information on the purpose of the USA Pavilion as well as a brief overview of the American Food 2.0 theme for this year's World Expo. An overall floor plan of the physical space was again reviewed and then each of the levels were explored more in depth, including the main exterior area (Vertical Farm) as well as the main interior areas (Boardwalk Station and Great American Foodscape) and the roof. In addition, students were introduced to the Food Truck Nation exhibit, which was located outside of the main building. Self-assessment questions referenced the overall purpose for the USA Pavilion as well as specific questions regarding the Vertical Farm, Welcome Station, Boardwalk Station and Great American Foodscape. As with the first component, these questions were designed to encourage students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

The final component of this module included an overview of student ambassadors' roles and responsibilities, as well as a list of specific tasks and duty locations. Lastly, students were briefly introduced to some of the sponsors of the USA Pavilion. Self-assessment questions referenced the students' main roles, tasks, and responsibilities as well as sponsor locations. All questions were designed to encourage students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

A complete World Expo eLearning Course Mapping Module 2 matrix is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2.
MODULE 2: "USA Pavilion and Your Role" (20% of course)

Key Points	Activities	Assessments	Readings
How to be a human map: • How to be a human map • Don't get lost • Where will YOU be?	Bullet Points & Graphic Materials	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	American Food 2.0: An Orientation to the USA Pavilion for the Student Ambassadors

USA Pavilion:
 	
• Why was the Pavilion built?
• How is the Pavilion put together?
   o Vertical Farm
   o Boardwalk Exhibits (stations
   o Ground Floor (Great American Foodscape)
   o Food Truck Nation
   o Roof
	Bullet Points & Graphic Materials	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	American Food 2.0: An Orientation to the USA Pavilion for the Student Ambassadors

Becoming an Ambassador: • How to become an Ambassador • What is the job? • What about sponsors?	Bullet Points & Graphic Materials	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	American Food 2.0: An Orientation to the USA Pavilion for the Student Ambassadors

Module 3: State Department Protocols

The content in Module 3 required students to remember and understand basic knowledge regarding their personal conduct and appearance as well as some of the protocols required of USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors both in terms of routine procedures as well as possible problem scenarios for their own and others' safety and security.

The first component of this module included some of the basic rules of conduct, and specifically what behaviors were unacceptable and would be subject to reprimand or dismissal from the USA Pavilion Student Ambassador Program. Students were reminded of the high profile nature of their position as well as a brief overview of the public relations implications involved. In addition, important dates, housing and travel information, and both ordinary and extraordinary termination procedures was provided. Self-assessment questions referenced the basic "do's and don'ts" for student ambassadors and were designed to encourage students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

The second component of this module reinforced basic rules of conduct, and specifically what behaviors were considered "good" conduct as well as what behaviors to avoid. Basic grooming standards for the USA Pavilion Student Ambassador Program were presented as well as dress codes. Self-assessment questions general rules of thumb regarding personal conduct grooming and were designed to encourage

students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

The third and final component of this module outlined some specific protocols for student ambassadors to follow with regards to scheduling, safety and security, rest periods and excused absences, the return of USA Pavilion property, and how to handle guest comments. Self-assessment questions referenced the scheduling, how to handle lost guests, solicitations, and what information may be expected of student ambassadors. These questions were designed to encourage students to review the materials presented within the module rather than assess a comprehensive understanding of all topics presented within the entire component.

A complete World Expo eLearning Course Mapping Module 3 matrix is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3.
MODULE 3: "Code of Conduct" (20% of course)

Key Points	Activities	Assessments	Readings
Code of Conduct: • Code of conduct • Student Ambassador Program • Student Ambassador information • USA Pavilion high profile • Termination procedure	Brief readings	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	USA Pavilion Employee Policies and Procedures
Personal conduct • Personal conduct • Appearance & grooming	Brief readings	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	USA Pavilion Employee Policies and Procedures
Protocols • Team schedules • Safety • Rest periods & missing work • Property • Guest comments	Brief readings	Multiple choice mastery check (quiz)	USA Pavilion Employee Policies and Procedures

Participants

Out of a total of 1,000 applications from a targeted national pool of colleges and universities, we selected 114 Student Ambassadors who represented geographic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the applicant pool. All 114 student ambassadors were U.S. citizens (29 males and 85 females) chosen to staff the USA Pavilion from May 1 through October 31, 2015 with 60 recruits within each phase (May 1 – August 1, 2015 and August 1 – October 1, 2015). The applicants were selected by 4 independent assessors who were faculty members at the University of Southern California using strict application criteria. The preference was given to applicants who demonstrated previous leadership experience, fluency in one or more foreign languages, familiarity with the Italian culture, and their passion for the

World Expo theme. Each applicant had to submit an application that included a statement of interest, a resume, a video introduction, and a video clip that demonstrated fluency in another language.

Student Ambassador functions included hosting corporate and government VIP's, USA Pavilion visitors, acting as the primary information resource for visitors, staffing cultural events and policy conferences, delivering short presentations to visitors and guests. Student Ambassador did not earn an academic credit from USC but were given a "Certificate of Completion" endorsed by the State Department, USA Pavilion, American Chamber of Commerce, and USC.

Student Ambassador Program Assessment

Since this was more of an orientation than a formal training course, students were not graded; however, regular self-assessments were taken in all three modules in order for them to reflect upon the knowledge they had received. In addition, staff and faculty conducted a pre-training survey prior to the beginning of the online sequence as well as a post-training survey after the end of the online sequence. Students will be surveyed once again at the end of their 90-day ambassadorship, with a small sample of students selected for in depth phone interviews. The survey instrument included an assessment of the effectiveness of this first of its kind online training in three areas, (1) students' motivation, (2) cultural competence, and (3) digital preferences. The paper discusses the results of the pre- and post-orientation survey and the implications for designing online training programs and courses.

(1) Student motivation

The participants were asked to respond to 4 questions that were designed to measure motivation and confidence in terms of performing the functions of student ambassador. Student motivation and self-efficacy are important factors in achieving positive outcomes (Rueda, 2011).

Question 1 measured student motivation to be a USA Pavilion student ambassador. Question 2 measured student self-efficacy (confidence) in terms of their ability to perform the functions required of them as USA student ambassadors. Students were asked to fill in the blank for each statement with "extremely," "somewhat," or "not at all."

Q1. Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I am _____ motivated to be a USA Pavilion student ambassador."

Q2. Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I am _____ confident about my ability to perform the functions of a USA Pavilion student ambassador."

Table 4.
Differences between Pre- and Post-training responses measuring student motivation

Survey Question	n	Pre-Training # (%) Who Said *Extremely*	M (*SD*)	n	Post-Training # (%) Who Said *Extremely*	M (*SD*)	t	p
Q1. I am _____ motivated to be a USA Pavilion student ambassador.	114	112 (98%)	1.02 (0.13)	104	101 (97%)	1.03 (0.17)	0.48	.63
Q2. I am _____ confident about my ability to perform the functions of a USA Pavilion student ambassador.	113	87 (77%)	1.23 (0.42)	104	92 (88%)	1.12 (0.32)	-2.17	.03*

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01. Scale was the following: 1=extremely, 2 =somewhat, 3=not at all.

While there was no significant change in student motivation, there was significant improvement in the level of student confidence upon completion of the online training. Of the students who responded to the pre-training survey, 77 percent reported that they were "extremely confident" about their abilities to perform the functions of student ambassador and 23 percent reported that they were "somewhat confident." In the post training survey, 88 percent reported that they were "extremely confident" about their abilities to perform the functions of student ambassador and 12 percent reported that they were "somewhat confident." None of the students reported feeling "not at all confident," indicating a relatively high degree of self-efficacy in the students who took the survey, with overall improvement from "somewhat" to "extremely" after training.

Questions 3 measured student excitement (motivation) at the prospect of working as a USA Pavilion student ambassador. Question 4 measured student self-efficacy regarding whether or not they had the knowledge to perform the functions of a USA student ambassador. Students were asked to select a response on a 5 point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Q3.   Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I am excited about the prospect of working as a USA Pavilion student ambassador."

Q4.   Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I have the knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a USA Pavilion student ambassador."

Table 5.

Differences between Pre- and Post-training responses measuring student motivation and self-efficacy

Survey Question	n	Pre-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	n	Post-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	t	p
Q3. I am excited about the prospect of working as a USA Pavilion student ambassador."	114	114 (100%)	1.04 (0.18)	103	103 (100%)	1.12 (0.32)	2.22	.02*
Q4. I have the knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a USA Pavilion student ambassador.	114	82 (72%)	2.03 (0.85)	104	98 (94%)	1.63 (0.62)	-3.97	.00**

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01. Scale was the following: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.

Interestingly, there was drop in the percentage of students who reported that they "strongly agreed" that they were excited about the prospect of working as a student ambassador (from the initial 96% to 88%), with an increase in those who reported that they "agreed" that they were excited (from 4% to 12%). Although it is difficult to determine why students' excitement levels dropped over the course of the online training, there could be a couple of explanations including a natural decline in levels of excitement over time as the reality of the job sank in. Another explanation might include a slight rise in nervousness or even trepidation as the date of departure came closer. The fact that student motivation as reported in Q1 did not match this decline indicates that there may have been other factors involved. Also, the fact that none of the students disagreed or were even undecided about the extent to which they were excited indicates that overall motivation levels were still high.

As in Q2, the level of student confidence reported in Q4 was significantly higher upon completion of the online training. Of the students who responded to the pre-training survey, 30 percent reported they "strongly agreed" they had the knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a student ambassador, 42 percent reported they "agreed," 24 percent reported they were "undecided," and 4 percent "disagreed" they had the knowledge necessary. In the post training survey, 43 percent reported they "strongly agreed" they had the knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a student ambassador, 51 percent reported they "agreed," 5 percent reported they were "undecided," and only 1 percent "disagreed" they had the knowledge necessary. Overall, 72 percent of students reported they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" they had the knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a student ambassador prior to taking the online training compared to 94 percent of students post-training. This mirrors the results found in Q2 and indicates a significant improvement in student self-efficacy.

(2) Cultural competence

The participants were asked to respond to 6 questions that were designed to measure internal and external learning outcomes of the intercultural competence development. The external intercultural competence outcomes are linked to students' cultural knowledge, cultural skills, and internal outcomes are linked to their personal attributes (Deardorff, 2006, 2009). Students were asked three sets of questions related to each area of learning outcomes. They had to select a response on a 5 point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Table 6.

Differences between Pre- and Post-training responses measuring student intercultural competence development

Survey Question	n	Pre-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	n	Post-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	t	p
Q5. I understand the practices and systems of cultures different from my own.	114	113 (99%)	1.46 (0.52)	104	104 (100%)	1.41 (0.49)	-0.72	.46
Q6. I can recognize and analyze global business situations from different cultural perspectives.	114	84 (74%)	2.04 (0.88)	104	102 (98%)	1.55 (0.57)	-4.89	.00**
Q7. I can work with people who have different beliefs and/or values than I do.	114	114 (100%)	1.22 (0.42)	102	102 (100%)	1.22 (0.41)	0.00	1.0
Q8. I have the ability to tolerate uncertainty when communicating with people from different cultures.	114	113 (99%)	1.46 (0.52)	104	103 (99%)	1.4 (0.51)	-0.85	.39
Q9. I appreciate the presence of different viewpoints in the workplace.	114	114 (100%)	1.26 (0.44)	104	104 (100%)	1.3 (0.46)	0.65	.51
Q10.I am accepting of people who are different than I am.	114	114 (100%)	1.25 (0.43)	104	104 (100%)	1.16 (0.37)	-1.65	.1

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01. Scale was the following: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.

The first pair of questions was used to measure their *intercultural knowledge*:

Q5. I understand the practices and systems of cultures different from my own.

Q6. I can recognize and analyze global business situations from different cultural perspectives.

The results of the survey show that overall students were quite confident in their knowledge of different cultures. This comes as no surprise, since this selected cohort had a significant prior international experience. 52% of the students had lived outside the US between 3months to a year, and 25% lived outside the US for more than a year. 75% of the students reported having travelled outside the US more than three times. This explains why 99% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that they have knowledge of other cultures.

While there was no significant change in student responses to the question related to their understanding and familiarity with different cultures, there was a significant increase in student reported ability to recognize and analyze global business situations at the end of the online training module. Q6 aimed to elicit students' perception of their analytical skills needed to analyze different cultural situations, and the results show that at the end of the Cultural Detective training online, 98% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they had the ability to analyze global business situations compared to 74% in pre-training survey.

The second set of questions was used to measure students' *intercultural skills*:

    Q7. "I can work with people who have different beliefs and/or values than I do"
    Q8. "I have the ability to tolerate uncertainty when communicating with people from different cultures"

There was no significant change in students' responses about their ability to work with different people which is not surprising given their extensive prior international experience. However, there was a slight increase in students' ability to tolerate uncertainty working with people from different cultures when student responses in the category "strongly agree" went up from pre-training 55% to post-training 61%

The last set of questions was used to measure students' *personal attributes*, such as adaptability, flexibility, and openness:

    Q9. "I appreciate the presence of different viewpoints in the workplace."
    Q10. "I am accepting of people who are different than I am."

There was no significant change in students' reported appreciation for different viewpoints; however, more students chose the response "strongly agree" rather than "agree" in the post-training survey when responding to the question about being accepting of different people, 84% compared to 75%.

Overall, each set of intercultural skills, knowledge, skills, and attributes, showed either a steady hold or a reported gain in post-survey responses. In response to the question of whether the Cultural Detective prepared students to interact with people from different cultures, 33% of respondents strongly agreed, 58% agreed, 4% were undecided, and 6% disagreed.

(3) Digital preferences

The participants were asked to respond to 4 questions that were designed to measure the degree to which they were comfortable operating in the online space. It is important to understand the demands upon learners' cognitive capacity in order to reduce extraneous processing demands (Mayer, 2011). Participants who are trying to learn new subject matter at the same time they are trying to learn a new mode of instruction via online training, may be subject to cognitive overload; therefore, we felt it was important to gauge the degree to which students were comfortable with and open to learning in the online space and then to compare that to their reported online experiences after their USA Pavilion Student Ambassador online training.

Questions 11 and 12, which were delivered pre-online training, asked students to simply report whether or not they had ever taken an online course and then to report levels of satisfaction with their previous online course or training experience, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Question 13, which was delivered pre-online training, asked students to report whether or not they looked forward to taking the USA Pavilion Student Ambassador orientation/training online, selecting from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Question 14, which was delivered post-online training, asked students to rank their level of satisfaction with the World Expo online from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Tables 7-9 show the results from the pre-training survey responses. Table 10 shows the results from the post-training survey responses.

Table 7.
Participants' familiarity with online training

Q11: "Have you ever taken an online course or training before?"

	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Yes	78 (68%)	n/a
No	36(32%)	n/a
Total	114 (100%)	

Table 8.
Participants' satisfaction with previous online training

Q12: "I have been satisfied with my previous online course/training experiences."

	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Strongly agree	12 (11%)	n/a
Agree	46 (41%)	n/a
Undecided	11 (10%)	n/a
Disagree	9 (8%)	n/a
Strongly disagree	1 (1%)	n/a
Does not apply	34 (30%)	n/a
Total	113 (100%)	

Table 9.
Participants' anticipation of online course/training

Q13: "I look forward to taking the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training online."

	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Strongly agree	53 (46%)	n/a
Agree	50 (44%)	n/a
Undecided	11 (10%)	n/a
Disagree	0 (0%)	n/a
Strongly disagree	0 (0%)	n/a
Total	114 (100%)	

Table 10.
Participants' satisfaction with World Expo online training

Q14: "I am satisfied with the World Expo online course/training experiences."

	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Strongly agree	n/a	31 (30%)
Agree	n/a	62 (60%)
Undecided	n/a	8 (8%)
Disagree	n/a	3 (3%)
Strongly disagree	n/a	0 (0%)
Total		104 (100%)

The majority of participants (68%) reported that they had taken an online course or training before. Fifty-two percent reported that that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I have been satisfied with my previous online course/training experiences." Comparatively, an overwhelming 90 percent reported that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I look forward to taking the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training online." All of which indicates that students felt comfortable in the online space and were open to learning new subject matter via an online platform. Post-online training, 90 percent of the participants reported that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I am satisfied with the World Expo online course/training experiences."

Question 15 measured student preferences for online versus in person training in terms:

> Q15. Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I would rather take the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training in person." (pre-training) and "I would rather have taken the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training in person than online." (post-training)

Question 16 measured student whether or not students perceived online versus in person training to be more effective:

> Q16. Please select one of the following to go with the statement: "I believe the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training will be effective in preparing me to be a student ambassador, regardless of whether it is presented online or in person." (pre-training) and "I believe the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training has been effective in preparing me to be a student ambassador." (post-training)

Table 11.
Participants' preferences for online versus in person course/training

Survey Question	n	Pre-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	n	Post-Training # (%) Who Agreed	M (SD)	t	p
Q15. I would rather take the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training in person	114	48 (42%)	2.55 (0.89)	104	27 (26%)	1.96 (0.65)	-5.59	.00**
Q16. I believe the initial USA Pavilion student ambassador orientation/training will be effective in preparing me to be a student ambassador, regardless of whether it is presented online or in person.	114	93(82%)	1.92 (0.75)	104	90(86%)	1.96 (0.65)	0.41	0.67

Note. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$. Scale was the following: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.

The responses to Q15 yielded significant shift in pre- and post-training preferences ($p<.001$). The results showed that, prior to taking the online training program, 42 percent of the students reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they would rather take the training in person than online; and

46 percent were undecided; and 12 percent "disagreed" that they would rather take the training in person than online. After taking the online training program, 26 percent of the students reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they would rather take the training in person than online; 43 percent were undecided; and 25 percent "disagreed" that they would rather take the training in person than online.

The results to Q16 showed that, prior to taking the online training program, 82 percent of the students reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they believed the training would be effective regardless of whether it was delivered online or in person; 17 percent were undecided; and 2 percent either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed." After taking the online training program, 86 percent of the students reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the training was effective in preparing them to be a student ambassador; 11 percent were undecided; and 3 percent "disagreed."

Although the majority students stated a preference for in person versus online training prior to participating in the online training, that number dropped significantly once students experienced the online program. In addition, the vast majority of students reported that they felt the online program was effective in preparing them to be student ambassadors.

Conclusions

The challenge in any asynchronous learning platform is to engage students in the transfer of knowledge. This was even more of a challenge in the Student Ambassador Program training since so much of the training involved nuanced soft skills in communicating and interacting with individuals from different cultures and traditions. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the program is reflected in how well students are able to perform their job functions onsite; however, students' self-efficacy can reflect their effectiveness in the sense that the more confident they are, the more motivated they are likely to be to engage and persist in completing a task or activity (Rueda, 2011).

In examining the raw data from our initial pre- and post-online orientation, preliminary evidence suggests that students had greater self-efficacy after completing the online training than they did initially. The survey on student motivation reveals that whereas the initial motivation stayed the same and the initial excitement levels dropped as the reality of the task became more delineated through the online orientation process, students reported increased confidence and knowledge necessary to perform the functions of a USA Pavilion student ambassador at the end of the online training.

The survey on cultural competence demonstrates that the Cultural Detective platform that served as the basis for the intercultural training portion of an online orientation was successful in facilitating asynchronous intercultural learning. Students reported gains in all three areas of intercultural competence, knowledge (significant increase in the ability to recognize and analyze global business situations at the end of the online training module), skills (an overall increase in tolerance of uncertainty working with people from different cultures), and attitudes (an overall increase in accepting of people who are different). This finding is particularly important as there is an increasing need to provide intercultural training and the constraints of many global programs in business schools may not always provide for in-class time to facilitate such training face-to-face. Our experience with the online training suggests that intercultural training may be successfully provided in the online environment allowing students to work independently and at their own pace.

We must note that in the debrief session conducted on site with Wave 1 ambassadors at the end of their ambassadorship students expressed a preference to receive feedback at the end of the Cultural Training module. Our module of intercultural training was based on completion only, and students did not receive any personalized feedback on how well or how accurately they interpreted and analyzed information and cultural situations. The feedback for students was limited to checking their responses against "suggested" answers available online. Our recommendation for future online intercultural training programs would be to incorporate a more personalized assessment or a feedback mechanism into the design of asynchronous online intercultural training module. Another option would be to conduct on onsite debrief session shortly after completing an online intercultural training program.

In more general terms, the survey responses indicate that millennials are overall comfortable with online space. It is interesting to note that while 42% of the students reported that they would rather take the training in person than online, this number decreased to 26% once students experienced the online program. In addition, the vast majority of students reported that they felt the online program was effective in preparing them to be student ambassadors.

Although more data will be collected regarding students' on-the-job performance, Facebook participation, and post-ambassadorship interviews, it appears as if students perceived the initial online orientation to be effective in terms of preparing them for their duties as USA Pavilion Student Ambassadors.

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