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## Out of Sight, But Not Out of Mind: Surveying Library Use Among Students Studying Abroad

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### ABSTRACT

Pepperdine University's six international campus libraries are not staffed by librarians. However, the library serves overseas students with small print collections, course specific LibGuides and highly trained student assistants. A goal of the LibGuides and student workers is to make students aware of library resources and services while studying abroad. Students studying overseas were surveyed to determine their use and awareness of library resources. In addition, to determine if the library could have an important role in supporting study abroad programs, students were asked if they had research assignments that required outside resources. While the results of the survey revealed that the majority of students are aware of library resources and services, the library should take additional steps to better serve overseas students.

### Introduction

While training student workers to staff international campus libraries, Pepperdine librarians exhort students that, “You are the eyes and ears of the library.” Like many liberal arts university libraries, staffing overseas libraries with librarians is cost prohibitive. Therefore, the Pepperdine librarians train student workers to staff Pepperdine's international campus libraries for its Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Florence, London, Heidelberg, and Lausanne locations. In addition to representing the library and serving patrons, the librarians also rely on the student assistants to provide insights on library usage patterns. To aid the librarians in better understanding how the campus libraries are being utilized, students working abroad communicate their experiences while working abroad via weekly Skype and Google Hangout sessions. To help the librarians gauge usage patterns in overseas libraries, students record public service transactions with Springshare's LibAnalytics software.

In addition, to staffing the overseas campus libraries with student workers, the Pepperdine Libraries maintain a strong virtual presence by creating LibGuides for all overseas classes. These LibGuides provide electronic resources specific to each course being taught abroad and list contact information for the library liaison in a given subject. To measure usage of the LibGuides for the international campus libraries, librarians consult usage statistics provided by Springshare.

In addition to reports from student assistants, public service statistics and data on LibGuides usage, librarians at Pepperdine wanted more information on the awareness and use of library services among

Pepperdine students studying abroad. Furthermore, while librarians heard anecdotal reports that international programs were more experiential than research focused, they wanted to know how many overseas students were taking courses that required resources beyond textbooks and assigned readings. Librarians have access to a small percentage of the course syllabi for the international programs, and additional information was needed. To better understand library services to the international campus libraries, during spring 2016, Pepperdine librarians surveyed student studying abroad about their usage and awareness of library resources.

There are three crucial benefits to surveying students' library usage and awareness of services while studying abroad. First, the author wanted to know if the library was benefiting from the considerable time staff devoted to training student assistants to work abroad and creating LibGuides for the international programs courses. Second, knowledge about the awareness of services among overseas students could inform librarian efforts in promoting these services. Third, the survey could reveal if students were satisfied with the library support they receive while studying abroad.

### Background

Pepperdine University is a liberal arts institution nestled in the hills of Malibu, California. The Pepperdine Office of Institutional Effectiveness reported an undergraduate FTE of 3533 in fall 2015. The university's International Programs Office estimates that over two-thirds of undergraduates study abroad. Moreover, the [Institute of](#)

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[International Education \(2017\)](#) identified Pepperdine as having the highest percentage of study abroad participation among doctorate granting universities in the United States in 2017.

According to [Salisbury \(2015\)](#), there has been a longstanding discussion about the academic rigor of study abroad programs. However, Pepperdine students take the standard foundational courses while studying abroad, and the overseas curriculum goes beyond faculty led tours and other types of purely experiential learning. While some overseas programs are limited to a few weeks, Pepperdine students typically study abroad for an entire academic year. Many required courses, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, are taught at the overseas campuses. Some students even complete a required American history course while studying abroad. Because of the academic nature of the overseas programs, Pepperdine librarians have an obligation to support students studying abroad.

All of Pepperdine's overseas programs have permanent physical locations operated by the University, and the libraries share the same buildings as the classrooms. The London, Florence, Heidelberg, Lausanne and Shanghai facilities have classrooms, dorm rooms, faculty apartments and libraries under the same roof. Students studying at Buenos Aires live with host families, and Pepperdine's facility contains classrooms and the library. The centralized nature of Pepperdine's international campuses provide ideal settings for physical libraries.

Each of the international campuses has a small library facility with computers and a desk for student workers. The libraries have small collections of monographs that range from 200 to 1700 volumes. In addition to books on local histories, subject specialist librarians selected many core titles for the international campus libraries, primarily in the social sciences and humanities, with tools such as Bowker's Book Analysis System. Previously, books selected for the international campus libraries were cataloged and labeled at Pepperdine's Payson Library in Malibu, and then shipped overseas. However, since 2015, to avoid high shipping costs and tariffs, books are shipped directly to the overseas campuses. Books are cataloged at the Malibu campus and student workers are responsible for affixing barcodes and call number labels. Another source of books for the international campus libraries are textbooks that were left behind by departing students. Student workers scan images of the books' title pages so the library staff in Malibu can catalog these books. In addition, faculty who are teaching abroad often request that the library purchase specific titles both in electronic and print formats. The size of the print collections are limited by the size of the library facilities

Print books at the international campus libraries were supplemented by the library's eBook collection, which totaled 533,698 titles when overseas students were surveyed in spring 2016. In addition, to the library's existing eBook collection, subject liaison librarians often order specific eBook titles to assist students studying abroad with reference questions. Rapid purchases of eBooks to answer reference questions is a crucial service because overseas students can only request individual book chapters through interlibrary loan.

Because Pepperdine's overseas campuses have physical library facilities with study spaces, and students have remote access to many databases and a large eBook collection, the library has not attempted to arrange borrowing privileges for students from local libraries. Also, the Pepperdine campus libraries are convenient for the students to visit because in most cases they share the same building as the students' dorm rooms.

Because librarians are unable to physically staff the international campus libraries, the library is reliant on student workers. Prospective student workers underwent in-depth interviews to determine their maturity to work autonomously and potential to provide outstanding customer service. Each student assistant was given 10 h of in-person training that included pre and post-tests gauging their knowledge of library procedures. Librarians thought that overseas students might not be familiar with all of the library resources and services available while studying abroad, and student workers were instructed to promote

library resources. For example, because librarians were not staffing the overseas campuses, students might not be aware that librarians could assist them with research remotely. Therefore, student assistants were shown how to locate course specific LibGuides with subject specialists' contact information, as well as the Ask-a-Librarian service. Moreover, student workers were encouraged to email librarians if they were unsure of how to assist students or faculty. In a similar vein, students might be unaware of the books that are available to them while studying abroad; student workers received training in searching the catalog and filtering results to print books located at the international campus libraries as well as eBooks. To supplement the library's eBook and online journal collections, student assistants were given training in interlibrary loan procedures, with emphasis on requesting book chapters and articles. Lastly, librarians explained to student workers that the library could expand its collection to meet students' needs by ordering eBooks on demand and explained that student workers played a crucial role in making librarians aware of students' needs for these eBooks.

Student workers were trained the spring prior to staffing the overseas libraries in the upcoming fall semester. To reinforce the training they received in the spring, student assistants completed several training modules created with Articulate Storyline over the summer that cover topics such as customer service, searching the catalog, reading call numbers, and scenarios that tested their judgment in referring complex questions to librarians.

Despite the training investment, and their knowledge of library resources, the majority of the overseas student workers do not continue working in the library upon returning stateside. Many of the positions in the Malibu campus library are reserved for students who worked previous semesters at that library. Also, many students are unable to work in the library because the majority of available shifts are on weekends and evenings.

## Literature review

Literature surveying library support of students studying abroad establishes the importance of overseas library support and helps librarians learn about the scope of services offered by their peers. The most comprehensive study of library support for overseas programs was [Lindell's \(2008\)](#) survey of 123 ARL libraries in 2008 (p. 11). Of the 44 respondents from universities that sponsor overseas study, 26 institutions provided library support. Only four libraries reported possessing a print collection, and the number of monographs ranged from 104 to 8000 (p. 28). Of particular relevance to the current study, only 16% of the home institutions supplied on-site library staff and 74% reported remote assistance from librarians at the home institution (p. 22). In contrast to Lindell's broader survey, [Green \(2013\)](#) conducted a much more specific study that was limited to libraries with physical international branch campus libraries. All 17 of the overseas branch libraries in Green's study were staffed by on-site librarians. Moreover, the international campus libraries had physical collections ranging from 50,000 to 600,000 (p. 15). The current study is more relevant to libraries serving students studying abroad without the benefit of on-site librarians and large physical collections. In addition to staffing and collections, a robust web presence is especially important for libraries supporting overseas programs. [Denda \(2013\)](#) surveyed the websites of ARL libraries to assess virtual support of study abroad programs. While 98% of ARL libraries offer overseas programs, only 3% explicitly mention resources for overseas programs on library websites (p. 159). Even though 41% of the libraries had a webpage specifically created for off-campus users, [Denda \(2013\)](#) concluded that most libraries failed to distinguish between the needs of study abroad students and distance learning communities (p.159).

The majority of articles on library support of students studying abroad are case studies of individual libraries' experiences with supporting overseas programs. These articles help researchers learn about the specific services that libraries provide to study abroad program and

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